

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, and other relevant social media websites.

The Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:-

- Providing and exchanging information about services
- Supporting local democracy
- Gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships
- Promoting cultural events or tourism for the area
- Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Creating internal communications, learning and development

This policy outlines the standards the Council requires councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct and such like.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

Who is covered by this policy? This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all other employees and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

THE SCOPE of this POLICY

1. The Council has a corporate presence on the web and the use of email
2. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.
3. That the Council uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the Parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.
4. All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
5. Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments by the employee.

6. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
7. Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained.
8. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.
9. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

RULES for using SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.
2. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.
3. If staff and councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
4. All staff and councillors must ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be moderated by a nominated person appointed by the Council.
5. The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator - who will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk for Council records.
6. In addition the Council may appoint a nominated 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the Parish Council website. The website may include the following:-

The Parish Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant. The website may include the following items but not limited to:

- The agendas of all meetings held by the Parish Council.
- Minutes of all meetings held by the Parish Council.
- Parish Council Financial Information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended)
- Parish Council Policies and Procedures

- Parish Council members information

Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website should be emailed to the Clerk to the Council at methwoldpc@methwold.net. The following will NOT be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation
 - Commercial advertisements
 - Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event
7. All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.
 8. When participating in online communication, staff and councillors must:-
 - Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent
 - Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
 - Never make false or misleading statements
 - Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council
 - Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
 - Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points
 - Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks, nor use language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.
 - Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
 - Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
 - Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so
 - Seek permission to publish original photographs or video from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used
 - Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
 - Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright
 - Spell and grammar check everything
 9. If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either the open forum or as full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. Again the 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the Clerk direct. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
 10. Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderator and/or Council as required.
 11. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

Communication of Policy

A copy of this policy statement will be issued to each new employee.

Employees and Members have a responsibility to ensure that the Parish Council complies; not only with the legal requirements, but with the achievement of the policy, and their active involvement is encouraged.

Signed..... Date.....