

Social Media Policy

The Social Media Policy was adopted by the Parish Council on 5 October 2020.

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. The Parish Council recognises the importance of social media in providing an opportunity to communicate with a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to the Parish Council's activities.
- 1.2. This policy is intended to help employees, volunteers and councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media to ensure that such use is effective, lawful and does not compromise Parish Council information.
- 1.3. Social media must be used sensibly and responsibly, ensuring that its use does not adversely affect the Parish Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Parish Council's reputation and credibility.
- 1.4. Social media is to be used to enhance communication by providing another option and does not replace existing forms of communication.
- 1.5. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):
 - Parish Council Website
 - Facebook and other social networking sites
 - Twitter and other micro blogging sites
 - Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
 - LinkedIn
 - Bloggs and discussion forums
- 1.6. This policy outlines the standards employees, volunteers and councillors are required to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which their use of social media will be monitored and the action that may be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

- 2.1. All employees, volunteers and councillors are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Parish Council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3. Breach of this policy by councillors may be dealt with under the current code of conduct in the same way as other written or verbal communication.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 3.1. The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the work of the Parish Council.

- 3.3. All employees, volunteers and councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the clerk.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the clerk.

4. Using social media sites in our name

- 4.1. An official account on any social media website may only be set up by the clerk with consent from the Parish Council.
- 4.2. Only the clerk is permitted to post material on a social media website in the council's name and on its behalf. All material must always reflect the Parish Council's position or decision and in no circumstances may it be used to express personal opinion.
- 4.3. The clerk and two councillors, who will be appointed by the Parish Council, will be moderators of the Parish Council's social media pages. They will be responsible for monitoring the content on the pages to ensure it complies with this policy. The moderators will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the pages if they:
 - Contain abusive, obscene, indecent or offensive language or link to obscene or offensive material.
 - Contain swear words or other sorts of profanity
 - Are completely removed from the topic of the conversation or are not relevant to the item posted on the wall
 - Contain abusive language and/or inappropriate comments directed towards an individual involved in the thread, other organisations or the page administrator
 - Constitute spam or promote or advertise products, except where it is for an event, publication or similar item that has direct relevance to the subject of discussion. Information about locating and sharing knowledge and expertise is welcome but within the specific discussion
 - Are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrator or other users.
- 4.4. For serious and/or persistent breaches, the Parish council reserves the right to prevent users from posting further comments.
- 4.5. Any requests, questions, criticisms etc. that are posted on a media website that concern the Parish Council and are brought to the attention of a councillor should be dealt with in the same way as other written or verbal communications that are received:
 - If a councillor is able to answer the enquiry/post they may do so, however only the Parish Clerk does so on behalf on the Parish Council.
 - If in doubt the Councillor should refer the resident to the Parish Clerk (Phone: 01753 648497 Email: clerk@farnhamroyal-pc.gov.uk) or take details of the resident and pass these on to the Clerk.
 - The Clerk may discuss the matter with the Chairman or a moderator before responding. Any response from the Parish Council on social media should be communicated to all Councillors.
 - If the response requires a Parish Council decision this may be discussed by email but any action should not take place until ratified at the next Parish Council meeting except in exceptional circumstances.

5. Rules for use of social media

Whenever permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- 5.1. Do not present personal opinions as those of the Parish Council.
- 5.2. Do not publish photographs or videos of children without parental permission.
- 5.3. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- 5.4. Any employee, volunteer or councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Chairman of the Parish Council.
- 5.5. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the clerk.
- 5.6. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 5.7. Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 5.8. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 5.9. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- 5.10. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- 5.11. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 5.12. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- 5.13. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 5.14. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

6. Monitoring use of social media websites

- 6.1. Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 6.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.
- 6.3. In particular a serious case of uploading, posting, forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
 - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
 - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - c) material which is offensive, obscene
 - d) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, councillors, or our employees;
 - e) confidential information about the council or anyone else
 - f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or
 - g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

- 6.4. Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- 6.5. If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy please report it to the clerk.

7. Monitoring and review of this policy

- 7.1. The Parish Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.