

RINGLAND PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help employees including clerks, RFO's, Executive Officers, part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires employees and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which it will monitor your use of social media and the action it will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

- 2.1. All employees, volunteers and members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Policy and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

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.
- 3.3. All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or in the case of the Clerk, the Chair.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Parish Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in our name

- 4.1. Only the Clerk is permitted to post material on a social media website in the council's name and on its behalf.

5. Using social media

- 5.1. The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the council and community. It also recognises the importance of its employees, volunteers and members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
- 5.2. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must:
 - a) have read and understood this policy.
 - b) employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Clerk.

6. Rules for use of social media

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

- 6.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

- 6.2. Any employee, volunteer or member 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 Clerk.
- 6.3. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information.
- 6.4. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless that third party has given their consent.
- 6.5. Before including a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit this.
- 6.6. When making use of any social media platform, its terms of use must be read and complied with. Be mindful of the impact that the contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- 6.7. Each individual is personally responsible for content they publish into social media tools.
- 6.8. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.9. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- 6.10. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 6.11. Avoid publishing contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people not intended to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

7. Monitoring use of social media websites

- 7.1. 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 the Council's Disciplinary Policy.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Council and individuals.
- 7.3. 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, members, 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 Council's Disciplinary Policy and for employees may result in summary dismissal.
- 7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy, 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.
- 7.5. If there is any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy this should be reported to the Clerk or Chair of the Council.

8. Monitoring and review of this policy

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

Approved 17.4.2023