

HALE PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY ADOPTED 18 NOVEMBER 2019

Policy statement

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

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, Anti-Harassment 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.

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).

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.

Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee 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. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken. 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Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means it is more likely they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public.

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.

Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

If staff or 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.

Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

When participating in online communication, staff and councillors must:

Be responsible and respectful

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 and use sentence case format, not capital letters or write in red to emphasise points

Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site

Avoid personal attacks and hostile communications

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 and 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, discriminatory legislation, data protection or breach any other legislative restrictions.

Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk in the first instance and be referred to the Council if appropriate.