

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. This policy has been adopted by the Parish Council to guide employees including all staff whether part-time, fixed-term or casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), Members and volunteers 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 and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires employees, Members and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which use of social media will be monitored and the action the Council will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The Scope of the Policy

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

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 Council.
- 3.3 All employees, Members and volunteers and should ensure that they read and understand the policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or to the Chairman (in the event that the alleged breach involves 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 the Name of the Council

- 4.1 Only Members or employees authorised by the Council are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on the Council's behalf. The persons currently authorised are Councillors Ms L A Gifford and Dr S C Withams.

5. Using Social Media

- 5.1 The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and community. The Council also recognises the importance of its

employees, Members and volunteers joining in and helping shape the 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, an employee, Member or volunteer must:

- (a) have read and understood this policy; and
- (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

6.1 When using social media in accordance with this policy, an employee, Member or volunteer must adhere to the following general rules:

- (a) Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- (b) Any employee, Member or volunteer 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 or the Chairman.
- (c) Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If unsure whether the information falls within one of these categories, the employee, Member or volunteer you should discuss this with the Clerk or the Chairman.
- (d) Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless that third party's consent has been obtained.
- (e) Before including a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit a link to it.
- (f) When making use of any social media platform, read and comply with its terms of use.
- (g) Be honest and open, but mindful of the impact any article or posting might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- (h) An individual is personally responsible for any content he/she publishes on social media tools.
- (i) Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- (j) Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- (k) Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.

- (l) Avoid publishing an individual's 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 Platforms

7.1 Employees, Members and volunteers should be aware that any use of social media platforms (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 Procedure or a Member under the Members Code of Conduct.

7.2 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against an individual and the Council.

7.3 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, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, Members or employees;
- (d) confidential information about the Council or anyone else;
- (e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for the person posting the information or the Council); or
- (f) 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 Procedure and Members Code of Conduct 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 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.

7.5 If any employee, Member or volunteer notices any use of social media by colleagues in breach of this policy, they should report it to the Clerk or the Chairman

8. Monitoring and Review

- 8.1 The Council will review this policy every two years to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.