

Shepherdswell *with* Coldred Parish Council

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

Shepherdswell with Coldred Parish Council recognises that the Internet provides a unique opportunity to participate in interactive discussions and share information using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, X (Twitter), blogs, and other platforms. Employees and councillors may use social media in a private capacity outside of work, and may also be required to use it in a business capacity as part of their role with the Parish Council.

Use of social media in both personal and business contexts can present risks to confidential information, the Council's reputation, and compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks, all users are expected to adhere to this policy.

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance about acceptable behaviour on social media both at work and outside of work.

2. Purpose of Council Social Media

The Parish Council uses social media to:

- Provide timely information to residents about council meetings, decisions, and community events
- Promote transparency and openness in council activities
- Encourage engagement with the local community and support participation in village life

Social media is intended to complement, not replace, existing communication channels such as the council website, noticeboards, newsletters, and statutory notices.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees and councillors of the Parish Council.

It applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during office hours or otherwise, and whether accessed using Council IT facilities or personal equipment.

4. Definitions

Social media refers to interactive online platforms that allow parties to communicate instantly or share data publicly. Examples include:

- Social forums such as Facebook, X, LinkedIn, internet newsgroups and chat rooms
- Blogs and video/image sharing sites such as Instagram, YouTube and Flickr

This list is not exhaustive. The policy applies to existing platforms and any new social media developed in the future.

5. Management of Official Accounts

- The Clerk will oversee the administration of official Parish Council social media accounts.
- Posts will be made by agreed councillors, with Clerk oversight as necessary.
- Comments and messages will be monitored, and inappropriate or offensive material will be removed.
- Direct messages sent via social media are not considered formal correspondence. Residents should direct official communication to the Clerk via email or in writing.

6. Using Social Media on Behalf of the Council

- All posts made on behalf of the Parish Council must be made via agreed councillors, seeking advice from the Clerk as necessary.
- Councillors' authority to post will be withdrawn during the defined pre-election period ("purdah") to comply with legislation.
- Councillors should note that the Electoral Commission requires candidates to declare expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature, including web advertising on personal social media accounts. Guidance is available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

7. Personal Safety and Privacy

Employees and councillors should be aware that:

- Information posted on personal profiles can make them identifiable to residents and service users.
- Even with maximum privacy settings, details may be visible in the public domain.
- Privacy can be compromised by "friends" or contacts who have weaker security settings.

8. Key Principles

Employees and councillors must not:

- Use the title "Cllr" or "Councillor" on personal social media accounts
- Present personal opinions as those of the Parish Council
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute or cause embarrassment through personal posts
- Post content contrary to democratic decisions of the Parish Council
- Disclose commercially sensitive, personal, or confidential information without Clerk approval
- Post comments about employees or councillors without their prior consent
- Upload or share third-party content without permission (including names, photos, or videos of minors without parental consent)
- Infringe copyright or link to third-party websites without checking permissions
- Post or link to inflammatory remarks, personal attacks, or hostile communications (which may constitute bullying or harassment)
- Engage in any online activity that is unlawful, libellous, or constitutes a criminal offence

Examples of good practice:

- Be honest and open, but mindful of how contributions may affect perceptions of the Council
- Avoid escalating heated discussions; be conciliatory, respectful, and factual
- Respect privacy and avoid inflammatory topics such as politics or religion
- Provide routes for resolving concerns and complaints (e.g. directing to Dover District Council or other statutory bodies)

Councillors must avoid posting views in advance of Council or Committee debates that may constitute predetermination or bias. Under the Localism Act 2011, councillors must not have "had or appeared to have had a closed mind (to any extent) when making the decision."

9. Addressing Allegations of Misuse

- Any employee or councillor who feels harassed, bullied, or offended by material posted by a staff member or councillor should inform the Clerk or Chair of the Parish Council.
 - Complaints concerning councillors will be dealt with under the Council's Complaints Policy, with conduct matters referred to the Dover District Council Monitoring Officer.
 - Complaints concerning employees will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
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Adopted Date:

Reviewed:

Next Review Due: