

# Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council

## Social Media Policy

### Purpose

Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council acknowledges that social media is an ever-changing communication channel that may be used externally to promote engagement with the council and to help promote local initiatives. It is also aware that posts may be altered, shared, and misquoted, deliberately or inadvertently. Furthermore, in the eyes of the general public, there is little or no distinction between for example a councillor acting as an individual and that same councillor acting as a member of the parish council. This policy seeks to acknowledge that difference and provide guidelines on what does or does not constitute acceptable behaviour when a councillor or member of staff posts or responds to a post online.

### Scope

This policy applies to all members of staff (including contractors) and councillors when using any electronic form of social networking facility, where information and opinions are shared in a publicly viewable environment. It applies to use of social media on behalf of Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council (civic purposes) as well as personal use that may affect the council in any way. It will help staff and councillors to differentiate between their private and civic usage of social media, to maintain appropriate standards, and to comply with the laws on discrimination, defamation, and data protection.

This policy includes but is not limited to social media sites such as Facebook, TikTok, X (previously Twitter), WhatsApp, Messenger, LinkedIn, Wikipedia, Instagram and YouTube, and similar sites that may be created in the future.

### Personal use of social media

When using social media in a personal capacity employees and councillors must be aware that, should they make ill-judged comments or post insensitive material whilst being identified as an employee or councillor, they run the risk of damaging the reputation of the council.

Employees and councillors using social media sites for personal purposes are reminded that they should do so in a responsible manner and that they are liable for their own content and conduct. In particular they should:

- Omit any reference to the council from their own personal online profile name.
- Be mindful of who can view their profile and act accordingly.
- Ensure that appropriate privacy or other settings (if relevant) have been applied.
- Understand that even content uploaded anonymously can often be traced back to them.
- Be aware that posts can be shared outside of their network.
- Realise that any information disclosed may contribute to identity fraud.

- Note that personal opinions expressed in relation to civic issues may be identified as relating to or coming from the council.
- Not use social media as a forum to air any dissatisfaction with the council. Any such issues should be taken up in accordance with the Grievance Procedure.

## Civic use of social media

The council acknowledged that from time-to-time employees and councillors may legitimately use social media for civic purposes, such as to promote a forthcoming community event. Employees are allowed to make reasonable and appropriate use of council-supplied IT equipment and work time for this purpose, provided that this does not interfere with their primary job responsibilities or other duties. The council requires that all such social networking is respectful of the council, its employees, contractors, councillors and the general community of the village and parish. Furthermore, it should not bring the council into disrepute, breach confidentiality, do anything that could be considered discriminatory, offensive or derogatory.

However, unless an employee or councillor is social networking for civic purposes, identification with the council should not be made. Employees should neither claim nor imply that they are posting on the council's behalf unless the subject is clearly a relevant civic matter. Similarly, they should not post or comment on behalf of the council without prior permission from the Chair. There must always be a clear distinction between civic and private use of social media.

One way for an employee or councillor to achieve this distinction is to create a second or subsequent social media account for the sole purpose of posting or responding in their civic role. This account should have an online profile name which makes it clear they are acting on behalf of the council, such as 'Pat Brown, Parish Councillor'. In this case, they should:

- Avoid posts which could be viewed as derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, offensive, or relating to any protected characteristic or which could breach GDPR regulations.
- Avoid posts which could damage the council's interests or reputation, directly or indirectly.
- Be clear that their post or response reflects their view as an employee or councillor and not necessarily the views of the council itself, especially if relating to a controversial issue.
- Where necessary or appropriate, include a statement such as 'The views in this post are mine and may not reflect the views of the Parish Council'.

## Breaches of this policy

Any employee or councillor who becomes aware of inappropriate use of social media as set out in this policy should immediately contact the Chair of the HR Committee or if unavailable the Council Chair, providing screenshots of the relevant post or response where possible.

- Employees may be required to remove internet postings which are in breach of this policy.
- Use of the council's Disciplinary Policy may be considered.

This is a non-contractual policy and procedure which will be reviewed from time to time.

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