

GREAT OAKLEY PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Adopted: August 2023

Next Review Date: August 2025

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 councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media.
- 1.2 This policy outline the standards we require employees, volunteers and councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 1.3 This policy supplements our Standing Orders and Disciplinary Policy.

2. The Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 All employees, volunteers and councillors are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of our council.
- 2.2 Breach of this policy by employees, volunteers or councillors may be dealt with under our Standing Orders and 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 to our work.
- 3.3 All employees, volunteers and councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Chair. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the clerk.

4. Using Social Media Platforms in our Name

- 4.1 Only the clerk and nominated councillors are permitted to post material on a social media platform in the Council's name and on our behalf.

5. Using Social Media

- 5.1 We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and councillors 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; and
 - (b) Employees, volunteers and councillors must have sought and gained prior approval to do so from the clerk.

6. Rules for use of Social Media

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you 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 councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media platform should inform the Chair or Vice Chair.
- 6.3 Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the clerk.
- 6.4 Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have the third party's consent.
- 6.5 Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 6.6 When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 6.7 Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- 6.8 You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- 6.9 Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.10 Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- 6.11 Always consider other's privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 6.12 Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

7. Monitoring Use of Social Media Platforms

- 7.1 Employees, volunteers and councillors should be aware that any use of social media (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against an individual under our Standing Orders.
- 7.2 Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.
- 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 platform, 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 or obscene;
- (d) Criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, Councillors 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 Standing Orders and Disciplinary Policy and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

7.4 Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any other person or organisation involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

7.5 If you notice any use of social media by other employees, volunteers or councillors in breach of this policy, it must be reported to the Chair or Vice Chair.

8. Pre-election Period Restrictions on Social Media

8.1 All social media platforms operated by employees, volunteers and councillors are subject to the rules of the pre-election period (previously known as ‘purdah’).

8.2 For guidance on pre-election restrictions, tips and rules go to www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/pre-election-period/pre-election-period-social-media

9. Monitoring and Review of this Policy

9.1 The council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy biennially to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.