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Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy.

Adopted: 18/11/2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.
- 1.2. The Council has a website, Facebook page and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.
- 1.3. The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.
- 1.4. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors and Officers 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.
- 1.5. 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, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members' Code of Conduct and such like.
- 1.6. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.
- 1.7. This policy covers all individuals posting on the Council page as well as all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, the Parish Clerk and all other employees and volunteers (collectively referred to as Officers in this policy).

2. Scope of Policy

- 2.1. All Councillors and Officers are always expected to comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
- 2.2. 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 oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.
- 2.3. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
- 2.4. 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. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply.
- 2.5. 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, informative and accurate.
- 2.6. Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

3. Communications to & from the Council

- 3.1. Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:
 - Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
 - Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
 - Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
 - Not contain any personal information.
 - If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
 - Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

- 3.2. In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:
- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
 - Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
 - Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
 - Stay on topic.
 - Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.
- 3.3. The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.
- 3.4. Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.
- 3.5. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:
- Obscene or racist content
 - Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
 - Potentially libellous statements.
 - Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
 - Private, personal information published without consent
 - Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
 - Commercial promotions or spam
 - Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law
- 3.6. The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available.
- 3.7. The Council will appoint a nominated person(s) as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator(s) will

have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature.

- 3.8. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.
- 3.9. If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it should be referred to the Clerk to present to Full Council. Again the 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the Parish Clerk direct. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

4. Rules for using social media & website

- 4.1. When participating in online communication Officers and Councillors must:
 - be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent. Follow the Nolan Principles;
 - always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council;
 - 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; never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points.
 - refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks; language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site;
 - avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;
 - do not post comments that you would not be prepared make in writing or face to face;
 - never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so;
 - seek the permission of the owner to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used;
 - respect the privacy of other Councillors, Officers and residents; and
 - never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright.

- 4.2. Officers 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 Officers, Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the Council works with and serves.
- 4.3. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.
- 4.4. If Officers or Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as an Officer or 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.
- 4.5. All Officers and Councillors must ensure they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.
- 4.6. Officers 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 Officers and Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.
- 4.7. All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.
- 4.8. The Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Parish Council Website. The website may be used to:
 - post notices and minutes of meetings;
 - provide information about the Council;
 - advertise events and activities;
 - post good news stories;
 - advertise vacancies;
 - 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library, District Council, etc.
 - announce new information appropriate to the Council;
 - post other items as the Council see fit; and
 - Facebook and other mediums, may be used to support the website and its information as above.

5. Parish Council Website.

- 5.1. Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our

Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

- 5.2. The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site.
- 5.3. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website.
- 5.4. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

6. Parish Council email.

- 6.1. The Clerk to the council has their own council email address (clerk@yeovilwithoutparishcouncil.gov.uk) The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.
- 6.2. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new Emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.
- 6.3. Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk.
N.B. any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.
- 6.4. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.
- 6.5. Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

7. SMS (texting).

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

8. Video Conferencing e.g. Skype & Zoom.

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

9. Internal communication and access to information within the Council.

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

10. Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

- 10.1. As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).
- 10.2. Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

11. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.

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