Social Media Policy

Thurston Parish Council

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INTRODUCTION

This policy is in place to minimise the risks to our business through use of social media.

This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Wikipedia, Whisper, Instagram, Vine, Tumblr and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs. It applies to use of social media for business purposes as well as personal use that may affect Parish Council business in any way.

SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATED BY THE PARISH COUNCIL

To ensure that all discussions on pages set up by the Parish Council are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the guidelines listed below should be followed:

- Be considerate and respectful of others.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive
- Share freely and be generous, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Parish Council members or staff, will not be permitted

COMMUNICATIONS FROM AND TO THE COUNCIL

Communications from the Parish Council on official council business will:

- 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, other than necessary basic contact details;
- be moderated by either the Chair of the Parish Council or the Clerk to the Parish Council.
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Communications to the Parish Council are expected to:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright;
- not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Councillors and employees should be aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their professional role or the council's image and reputation and should be aware that whilst they might not expressly name the council on social media, this policy will still apply if a connection with the council or their employment can be reasonably made.

As with business use of social media, councillors and staff should not publish anything that is confidential to the council or use social media to comment on potentially sensitive matters, including (but not restricted to):

- Information about residents of the parish/the community
- Information that is politically or commercially sensitive
- Intellectual property

At no time should council email addresses or other official contact details be used for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through such media.

PROHIBITED USE

Councillors and employees must avoid making any social media communications that could damage the parish council's business interests or reputation, even indirectly.

Social media should not be used to defame or disparage the parish council, its staff or any third party; to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against staff or third parties; to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties.

Comments about sensitive business-related topics, such as the Parish Council's performance should not be posted, nor should anything to jeopardise the council's trade secrets, confidential information and intellectual property.

Any contact details of business contacts made during the course of employment with the parish council are its confidential information. On termination of employment, staff will be expected to provide the Proper Officer with a copy of all such information, delete all such information from their personal social networking accounts and destroy any further copies of such information that they may have.

Any misuse of social media should be reported to the Proper Officer.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Councillors and employees should make it clear in social media postings, or in their personal profile, that they are speaking on their own behalf. It is suggested that posts are written in the first person and that a personal e-mail address is used.

All should be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that they are personally responsible for all communications which will be published on the internet for anyone to see.

If councillors and employees disclose their affiliation with the Parish Council on their profile or in any social media postings, they must state that their views do not represent those of the Parish Council (unless you have been authorised to speak on our behalf as set out in the Parish Council's Media Policy). All should also ensure that their profile and any content they post are consistent with the professional image they wish to present to parishioners, members of the public and colleagues.

If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, refrain from posting it until you have discussed it with the Proper Officer and/or Chair of the Parish Council.

If councillors and employees see social media content that disparages or reflects poorly on the Parish Council, they should contact the Proper Officer.

BREACH OF THIS POLICY

Councillors:
All Parish Councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct adopted in 2022.

If it is felt that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct or if it is thought that a councillor has not followed the Code of Conduct a complaint can made direct to the Monitoring Officer at Mid Suffolk District Council. The complainant will need to be clear about how they think the councillor has not followed the Code.

The Monitoring Officer can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a Councillor which are covered by the Council's Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct only applies to a Councillor whilst undertaking his/her functions as a Councillor.

It does not apply to a Councillor acting in their personal capacity.

Staff:
Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action for members of staff up to and including dismissal. Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with the Parish Council's investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.

Members of staff may be required to remove any social media content that is considered to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

LEGISLATION

Within the legal framework, there are a number of existing laws that can be applied to cases of cyber-bullying and on-line harassment which could constitute a criminal offence, including:

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- The Malicious Communications Act 1988
- The Communications Act 2003 (s127)
- The Defamation Act 2013