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NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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1. Introduction

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including social media sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media, and to outline the position of Northchurch Parish Council (NPC) on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using NPC's social media sites.

It includes standards and guidelines for Councillors and Council staff to observe when using social media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Northchurch Parish Council website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro-blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Northchurch Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Over time Northchurch Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements. This policy may be amended at any time.

2. How social media will be used by the Council

Northchurch Parish Council runs its social media pages so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Social media accounts are not checked daily and posts will not necessarily be responded to. NPC's social media accounts are primarily a tool to pass information on.

NPC will use social media to:

- Publicise and promote Council services, decisions and actions
- Distribute information from council notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings
- Provide and exchange information about local services, events and good news stories
- Advertise vacancies
- Share relevant information from partner agencies, local community groups, schools, sports clubs and charities
- Gather insights of local residents
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk for wider dissemination to Councillors if required

Though NPC is keen to hear residents' views, it will not be able to take comments made on its social media accounts as official comments, particularly on planning applications. To manage the messages received, residents will be asked to email the Parish Clerk, contact a Parish Councillor or attend an NPC meeting.

3. Who is covered by this policy

The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors, council staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

All Councillors and staff are expected to comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Individual Parish Councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post, both in a council and personal capacity.

4. Code of Practice

The behaviour required in the Councillors' Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication so Councillors and staff must not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

Councillors may be seen as acting in an official capacity when using social media. When communicating in a 'private' group councillors and staff must ensure that the council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee or working party meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

When using social media, Councillors and staff must:

- Ensure posts are positive, informative, accurate, and balanced
- Respect the privacy of others
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos
- Disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
- Spell and grammar check everything

Councillors and staff must not:

- Give out the personal data of others including home address and telephone numbers
- Use an individual's name or information about an individual without written permission
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Present personal opinions as that of Northchurch Parish Council
- Post content that may bring the Council into disrepute
- Make false or misleading statements
- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Post content contrary to Council decisions
- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, or offensive comments about any person
- Use offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief
- Engage in personal attacks or damage their working relationships with others
- Post any information that may be libellous, obscene, or unlawful

5. Managing social media accounts

The Council will appoint councillors to manage NPC social media accounts and ensure security settings are in place.

The nominated councillors are

- NPC Facebook Page: Michela Capozzi; Mark Somervail and Susan Rees
- NPC Website: Michela Capozzi; Mark Somervail

The Parish Clerk and nominated councillors may

- post content on council website and social media pages
- monitor content to ensure it complies with this policy
- remove any inflammatory, defamatory, or libellous posts
- block access from an account to NPC's social media pages

6. Disciplinary Action

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Parish Clerk.

The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of serious breaches of this policy by councillors or staff.

The council will no longer use the services of a volunteer who breaches this policy.