

# **FRAMFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

## **FRAMFIELD PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY**

**A policy for Councillor's and staff when using Social Media and other  
electronic communication methods.**

**ADOPTED January 2017**

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Framfield Parish Councillors in the use of online communications including social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The Policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish council website and emails
- Facebook, Instagram and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites.
- LinkedIn
- Blogs' and discussion forums

## 2. Information & Guidance for Councillors and staff

- 2.1 The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and to any staff. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.
- 2.2 No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it. It will require a volunteer to update and monitor the social media sites.
- 2.3 The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council website will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council. Social media will only be used to enhance communication. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.
- 2.4 Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
- 2.5 Any online written commentary or reporting should be considered as a permanent record.
- 2.6 In the main, councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters and will be described further in this policy.
- 2.7 If the Parish Council choose to participate in online social media a nominated Councillor or Councillors will be appointed as an administrator(s) or moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of any content ensuring that it complies with the social media policy and all other Parish Council policies. The Moderator will have authority to remove (or ask to be removed) any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosting website (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk. Further action will be taken if necessary.
- 2.8 The Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Parish Council website.
- 2.9 All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.
- 2.10 Any Councillor, member of staff that use Social Media are subject to the site's own terms and conditions of use.
- 2.11

### 3. Effective Communication

- 3.1 Social media may be used to:
- Post information and dates of meetings
  - Advertise events and activities
  - Good news stories
  - Vacancies
  - Retweeting or 'share' information from partners i.e. police, library and Health etc.
  - Announcing new information.
  - Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups / clubs / associations / bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
  - Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors
- 3.2 Email may be used to distribute information on Council business.
- 3.3 Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post on Social Media websites.
- 3.4 Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

### 4. Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email) when participating in any online communication:

- 4.1 Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- 4.2 Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- 4.3 Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute, or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other policies.
- 4.4 Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud". Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasise points.
- 4.5 Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief's should not be published on any social media site.
- 4.6 Avoid personal attacks, online fights, bullying and hostile communications.
- 4.7 Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- 4.8 Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the person or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- 4.9 Respect the privacy of other Councillors and parishioners.

- 4.10 Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
- 4.11 Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response.
- 4.12 There may not be an immediate response to communications as it may need to be discussed by the Parish Council e.g. a decision is required.
- 4.13 The Clerk and the administrator(s)/moderator(s) will be responsible for all final published responses.
- 4.14 If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors at a council meeting. The person seeking a response shall be informed via the page, or a direct message that this is the case.
- 4.15 If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example – it is of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Clerk. The ‘poster’ (OP) will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Clerk directly.
- 4.16 Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.
- 4.17 The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libel or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
- 4.18 The nominated moderator or moderators shall correct any errors promptly.
- 4.19 Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

## **5. Additional background information (Improvement and Development Agency) 2010**

### **5.1 Libel**

If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

### **5.2 Copyright**

Placing images, music, video or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

### **5.3 Data Protection**

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission. Personal data is protected under the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### **5.4 Bias and pre-determination**

If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

#### **5.5 Obscene Material**

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence. Any breach of law may be investigated by the Police or other official body.

### **6. The Council's Legal Position**

Material published by a local authority as an organisation is, for obvious reasons, restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material and, in relation to other material, should not persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the Council assist in the publication of any material that does any of the above.

### **7. The Members' Code of Conduct**

- 7.1 Councillors can have 'blurred identities', you may have a social media account where you comment both as a councillor and as an individual. Ensure it is clear when you are posting in a private capacity or as a councillor. Such blurred identities might for example have implications where your views are taken as those of your organisation, rather than your personal opinion. There is the need to get social media accounts / profiles clear, to be confident as to what you can and can't say while you are representing the Parish Council.
- 7.2 How you use your online identity will also determine how online content will be treated in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillors are expected to communicate politically. There is a difference between communicating on behalf of the Council, for example blogging as a councillor or as a private citizen and the former will be held to a higher standard than the latter.
- 7.3 The key to whether your online activity is subject to the Code of Conduct is whether you are giving the impression that you are acting as a councillor. That stands whether you are in fact acting in an official capacity or simply giving the impression that you are doing so;
  - 7.3.1 This may be less than clear if you have a private blog or a Facebook profile. There are a number of factors which will come into play which are more a question of judgement than a hard and fast line. For example, a Standards Committee may take into account how well known or high profile you are as a Councillor, the privacy settings on your blog or social networking site, the content of the site itself and what you say on it. Most councillors are using their online profile to communicate with citizens about representing their local area so engaging the code, if necessary, it should be a relatively straight forward decision.
- 7.4 Members should comply with the general principles of the Code in what they publish and what they allow others to publish.
- 7.5 Some of the terminology in social media, like 'following' or 'friending' can imply an intimacy that's not really there. Both terms just mean you have linked your account to someone else so you can share information. Savvy internet users are used to this, but some people can feel a frisson of unease when their Council, local police service or councillor begins following them on Twitter before establishing some sort of online relationship. Some councillors wait to be followed themselves first.

- 7.6 Do make use of other communication functions that social media allows you. Twitter's 'list' function, for example, can help you to follow local people in a less direct way. And bloggers are almost invariably happy for you to link to them, so you don't need to ask first in this instance.
- 7.7 Social media is transparent. The best bloggers admit mistakes rather than try to cover them up. Amending your text and acknowledging your mistake; perhaps by putting a line through the offending words and inserting a correction or providing an update section at the bottom of a blog post – shows you are not pretending it never happened, and is much better than just deleting it when dealing with online misfires.

## 8. Contact details

Post: Mrs. Ann Newton, Parish Clerk for Framfield Parish Council, Highlands, Blackboys, East Sussex, TN22 5LR.

Telephone: 01825 890182

Email: [framfieldpc@gmail.com](mailto:framfieldpc@gmail.com)

## 9. Policy Adoption

This policy was adopted by Framfield Parish Council at its meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2017

Subsequent minor text amendments can be made under authority delegated to the Clerk.

## 10. Document Revision History

Date	Version	Revision
30/10/2016	Draft	Final draft
31/01/2017	1.0	Final adopted version, minute reference <b>XXXXX</b> .

End