



## MEDSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

### SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL COMMUNICATION POLICY

#### 1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Medstead Parish Councillors, Parish Council staff and others who engage with the Parish Council using social media along with other means of electronic communication.

#### 2. Social Media

In the main, Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Facebook, LinkedIn and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- You Tube and other video clip and podcast sites
- Blogs and discussion forums

Social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

This Policy applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk are responsible for what they post in a Parish Council capacity.

Social media may be used to

- Distribute Parish Council agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings;
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities;
- Announce new information from the Parish Council;
- Promote links to news stories on the Medstead website;
- Advertise Parish Council vacancies;
- Advertise Parish Council contract opportunities
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as EHDC, Police, etc.;
- Post or share information from other Parish Council-related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities;
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk.

When using social media, Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media that denigrates Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk or residents should report this concern to the Clerk of the Parish Council. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms;
- present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council;
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council;
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council;
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks;
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so;
- publish the email address of any other Parish Councillor without their written permission;
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission;
- post any information that infringes the copyright of others;
- post any information that may be deemed libellous;
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment;
- bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity;
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief;
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence;
- publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation as doing so is libellous and can result in a court action and a fine for damages;
- post copyrighted images or text on social media as it is an offence to do so. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you;
- publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence;
- publish obscene material as it is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

### 3. E-Mail

This Council has agreed that all councillors, employees, volunteers and any other person who are directly connected with the Council, will use the adopted official email addresses for **ALL** Parish Council email communications and personal email addresses when communicating on Council business, **MUST** not be used in any circumstance.

Medstead Parish Council acknowledges the Information Commissioners Office Guidance on use of emails and personal emails in "*Bring Your Own Devices*" and has opted to exceed the standards suggest by adopting a unified email address system.

This has been agreed as under the Freedom of Information Act, the Data Protection Acts and the General Data Protection Regulations ALL email accounts that contain council emails may be inspected by a competent authority. This will ensure full compliance with the need to not compromise personal information.

#### **4. Version control**

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date adopted</b>	<b>Minute ref.</b>
Communications and Social Media Policy 2023	8 <sup>th</sup> February 2023	23.022(i)
Social Media and Email Communication Policy 2025	9 <sup>th</sup> April 2025	25.017(a)

This policy will be reviewed every two years by F&GP and submitted to Full Council for readoption. It will be reviewed sooner if there are any relevant changes in the law or other guidance issued to Parish Councils or relevant changes in technology or working practices of the Council.