

## **HILLAM PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Social Media Policy**

1. The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice is to provide guidance to Hillam Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as 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
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- Linked In
- Bloggs and discussion forums
- Parish Council Emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and The Clerk to the Council. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing polices which need to be taken into consideration.

No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it. The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication - Hillam News and the Notice Board. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

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. What you write on the web is permanent. 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. Councillors are advised to not use Parish Council Social Media tools to share their personal views on local or national political issues or planning matters.

### **2. Social Media Policy**

2. 1. The Council will appoint the Clerk to moderate rather than a nominated Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature.

Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the clerk.

2.2 The Council will appoint a nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Parish Council Website The social media may be used to

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Re-tweeting 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

Facebook can be used to support the website information above.

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business.

Individual Parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business.

### **3. Code of Practice**

Guidance when using social media, (including email).

All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.

- i) When participating in any online communication;
  - a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
  - b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
  - c. 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.
  - d. 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 emphasis points.
  - e. 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 should not be published on any social media site.
  - f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
  - g. Never use an individual’s name unless you have written permission to do so.

- h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- i. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- j. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.

ii) Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response. There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council. The Clerk will be responsible for all final published responses.

iii) If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at the full council as an agenda item for consideration by the Councillors. Again the 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case. If The Clerk feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Chairman. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Chair directly with the Parish Clerk copied into correspondence. 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.

iv) The Clerk shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libelous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

- a. Spell and grammar check everything.
- b. Correct any errors promptly.

v) Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

#### **4. Additional background information (IDeA) 2010**

##### **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.

##### **Copyright**

Placing images 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.

### **Data Protection**

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

### **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.

### **Obscene material**

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

### **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.

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

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 or political party, 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. If any doubt refer the matter to The Clerk or The Chairman.