SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to village councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

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

- Village Council Website
- Facebook, Myspace, Twitter/X, Instagram and other social networking sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to village councillors, council staff and to others communicating with the Village Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing polices which need to be taken into consideration. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual village councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to

- Publish information about the work of Great Coates Village Council to a wider audience.
- Advertise dates of meetings, events and activities
- Good news stories linked to website or press pages
- Job Vacancies limited to advertisements only
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc
- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other village related community groups such as hall users, schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

When using social media (including email) village councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

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Review Date: March 2027

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Village councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the 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 photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender re-assignment, age, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

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

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

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

The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of village council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. This policy will be reviewed annually.

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