

# **TOLLESBURY PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMAIL POLICY V2.0**

## **1. Policy statement**

- 1.1 This policy is intended to help employees including the Clerk/ RFO and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), Councillors and volunteers make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and emails.
- 1.2 This policy outlines the standards required by employees, Councillors and volunteers to observe when using social media and emails, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

## **2. The scope of the policy**

- 2.1 All employees, Councillors and volunteers are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.
- 2.2 Breach of this policy by employees and Councillors may be dealt with under the adopted Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal in the case of employees.

## **3. Human Rights and Equality Duties**

- 3.1 Tollesbury Parish Council is committed to upholding the principles of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 in all forms of digital communication.
- 3.2 All employees, Councillors and volunteers must ensure that their use of social media and email respects individuals' rights to privacy, dignity, freedom of expression and protection from discrimination.
- 3.3 Communications made on behalf of the Council must be fair, lawful and respectful, and must not infringe upon the rights of any person or group.
- 3.4 Content that could reasonably be considered discriminatory, harassing, degrading or otherwise incompatible with these statutory rights is strictly prohibited and may result in action under the Council's Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure.

## **4. Personal Use of Social Media by Councillors**

- 4.1 Councillors have the right to express personal views on social media in their private capacity. Tollesbury Parish Council does not seek to restrict lawful personal expression, political opinion, or commentary that is clearly made as an individual.

- 4.2 When posting personally, Councillors should take reasonable steps to ensure that their views are not interpreted as official Council positions unless authorised to speak on the Council's behalf.
- 4.3 Councillors are reminded that the Code of Conduct applies when they identify themselves as a Councillor or when their comments could reasonably be perceived as relating to their role. In such circumstances, posts must remain respectful, lawful and consistent with the Nolan Principles of Public Life. Attention is drawn to public perception at all times.
- 4.4 Nothing in this policy prevents Councillors from engaging in political debate, expressing personal beliefs, or participating in community discussion in a personal capacity, provided such activity does not breach the Code of Conduct or the statutory rights of others.

## 5. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 5.1 The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 5.2 The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.
- 5.3 All employees, Councillors and volunteers should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of it should be reported to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council.
- 5.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

## Social Media Policy

### 6. Using social media sites in the name of the Parish Council

- 6.1 Only the Clerk in consultation with the Councillors is permitted to post material on the Council website and social media (See 1.1 above) in the Council's name and on behalf of the Council.

### 7. Using social media

- 7.1 The importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and community is recognised, as is the importance of employees, Councillors and volunteers joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
- 7.2 Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council, ensure that:
  - a) All employees and Councillors have read and understood this policy
  - b) All employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Full Council.

## 8. Rules for use of social media

Whenever permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, the following general rules must be adhered to:

- 8.1 Do not upload post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
  - 8.2 Any employee, Councillor or volunteer who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Chair/Clerk.
  - 8.3 Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If unsure whether information to be shared falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed beforehand with the Chair/Clerk.
  - 8.4 Before including a link to a third-party website, confirm that the third party's consent has been given and check that any terms and conditions of that website permit the link to it.
  - 8.5 When making use of any social media platform, its terms of use must be read and complied with.
  - 8.6 Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact a contribution may make on the public's perceptions of the council.
  - 8.7 Employees, Councillors and volunteers are personally responsible for any content they publish on social media tools.
  - 8.8 Do not escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
  - 8.9 Do not discuss employees without their prior approval.
  - 8.10 Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
  - 8.11 Do not publish personal contact details where they can be accessed and used widely, and never publish anyone else's personal contact details.
- ## 9. Monitoring use of social media websites
- 9.1 Employees and Councillors should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored, and where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees and Councillors under the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure.
  - 9.2 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Council and its employees.

- 9.3 In particular, a serious case of emailing, uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
- a) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights or which invades the privacy of any person.
  - b) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
  - c) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
  - d) material which is offensive, obscene
  - e) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, members, or employees;
  - f) confidential information about the Council or anyone else
  - g) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for employees or the Council);

Any such action will be addressed under the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure and, for employees, may result in summary dismissal.

- 9.4 Where evidence of misuse is found, a more detailed investigation may be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- 9.5 Any breach of the policy should be reported to the Clerk and Chair of the Council.

## Email Policy

### 10. Rules for use of emails

- 10.1 Emails are the primary method to promote effective communication on matters relating to Council business and, therefore, should be used for that purpose only. If necessary, consider speaking to the recipient(s) first by telephone or in person, then follow up with an email.
- 10.2 Emails should not be used for spreading gossip, or for personal gain, or in breach of any of the Council's Codes of Conduct relating to bullying, intimidation, sexual or racial harassment.
- 10.3 Messages sent by email are to be written in accordance with the standards of any other form of written communication, and the content and language used in the message must be consistent with Council best practice. Messages should be clear and concise and directed to those individuals with a "need to know", such as members of a Working Group. However, when responding to a large group of recipients, the "reply to all" facility should be used to ensure all parties receive the same information you wish to impart.
- 10.4 Confidential information should not be sent externally without the approval of the Chair or Clerk.

- 10.5 Erroneous email messages can give rise to legal action against the Council or individual Councillors. Claims for defamation, harassment, breach of confidentiality or contract could result. It is, therefore, vital for email messages to be treated like any other form of correspondence, and, where necessary, hard copies or copies saved to file should be retained. Messages are also disclosable in any legal action commenced against the Council or Councillors relevant to the issues set out in the email.
- 10.6. External emails received by a Councillor are to be forwarded to the Clerk—and the Chair if appropriate—who will, in turn, forward them to other Councillors.
- 10.7 Misuse of emails in the following categories can lead to a breach of the Codes of Conduct Policy, leading to a Complaint and Disciplinary Procedures:
  - a) Defamation of character
  - b) Inappropriate, offensive, or obscene content
  - c) Untrue or malicious content
  - d) Discriminatory on grounds of race, sex, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, religion or religious beliefs and philosophical beliefs
  - e) Breach of Council confidential information

#### 11. Monitoring and review of this policy

- 11.1 The Parish Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Policy Adopted – November 2017

Last Review – April 2026

Next Review – April 2027

## Policy Review History

Version	Details of Changes	Date	Approver
V1.0	Adopted Policy	21/11/2017	TPC
V1.0	Reviewed – no changes	04/05/2021	TPC
V1.0	Reviewed – no changes	03/05/2022	TPC
V1.0	Reviewed – no changes	16/05/2023	TPC
V1.0	Reviewed – no changes	07/05/2024	TPC
V1.0	Reviewed – no changes	06/05/2025	TPC
V2.0	Reviewed and amended by the Finance and Policy Committee	20/04/2026	F&P
V2.0	Changes approved and adopted by the Full Council	05/05/2026	TPC
	<b>NEXT REVIEW – APRIL 2027</b>		