



# Astley Village Parish Council

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Social media is a great way to engage residents. This policy provides guidance on the appropriate use of social media.
- 1.2. The guiding principles are: Engage with social media using common-sense and judgement when deciding what and how to post; adhere to the Council's values and act with respect for others.
- 1.3. Anything posted on social media by an employee or member may become associated with the Council because they are employed by/are a member of the organisation. This is particularly the case if they identify themselves as such when posting on social media. Therefore care should be taken to avoid:
  - Bringing the Council into disrepute
  - Breaching confidentiality
  - Breaching copyright
  - Discriminatory comments
  - Bullying/harassment
  - Libelous, defamatory content (untrue material that has a reputational impact)
  - Illegality
  - Compromising the Council interests
  - The Council being seen to endorse political causes / parties
  - Defamatory comments about other organisations or bodies

### 2. Policy statement

- 2.1. This policy is intended to help employees and members 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, LinkedIn and YouTube.
- 2.2. This policy outlines the standards employees are required to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which their use of social media will be monitored and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 2.3. This policy sets out good practice guidelines for members to observe when using social media.
- 2.4. This policy supplements the Council's Publicity Protocol, Complaints Procedure, Codes of Conduct and employment policies such as Discipline, Grievance and Whistleblowing.

### 3. The scope of the policy

- 3.1. All employees are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.
- 3.2. Breaches of this policy by employees will be dealt with under the Council's Discipline Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct.

**3.3.** The good practice guidelines in the policy are commended to all members. Any issues relating to inappropriate use of social media by members will be dealt with under the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and if necessary referred to the Monitoring Officer at Chorley Council.

#### **4. Responsibility for implementation of the policy**

**4.1.** The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

**4.2.** The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.

**4.3.** All employees and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it.

**4.4.** Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk. Any misuse of social media should be reported to the Clerk or Chairman of the Council.

#### **5. Using social media sites in the Council's name**

**5.1.** Only the Clerk/Chairman/councillors authorised to do so are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on our behalf.

#### **6. Rules for use of social media by employees and good practice guidelines for members**

**6.1.** Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council you must have read and understood this policy and the Council's Publications Protocol. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.

**6.2.** Engagement with social media should normally take place outside employees' working hours.

**6.3.** Refrain from speaking in an official capacity on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so. Comments made even in a personal capacity may be wrongly attributed to the Council if an individual can be linked to the Council in any way or is a known employee of the Council.

**6.4.** Comments on any aspect of Council business, policy or contribution to online discussions on local topics of interest, must make it clear that the views expressed are their own and not those of Astley Village Parish Council. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.

**6.5.** Negative material about the Council or an employee or member posted online has the potential to cause damage to the Council's reputation and/or could be upsetting to an employee/member.

**6.6.** This policy does not prevent employees who are also local residents commenting on issues that affect them as a resident. Any comments made must follow the guiding principles, make it clear that it is their view as a resident and be proportionate. A campaign of objections is unlikely to be viewed as proportionate.

**6.7.** Do not upload, post or forward a link to material that is offensive, abusive, obscene, derogatory, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, racist, sexist or is otherwise unlawful.

**6.8.** Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk or Chairman of the Council.

- 6.9. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent. Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 6.10. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.11. Don't discuss employees/members without their prior approval. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory.
- 6.12. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.
- 6.13. Any employee or member 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 Clerk or Chairman of the Council.

## **7. Monitoring use of social media websites**

- 7.1. Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored. Where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.
- 7.3. In particular a serious case of 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, are likely to amount to gross misconduct:
  - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
  - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
  - c) material which is offensive, obscene
  - d) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees;
  - e) confidential information about the Council or anyone else
  - f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or
  - g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

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

- 7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure/Complaints Procedure/Code of Conduct involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- 7.5. Employees or members who become aware of any misuse of social media should report it to the Clerk or Chairman of the Council.
- 7.6. In the case of any complaint about serious misuse of social media by a member the matter will be referred under the Code of Conduct to the Monitoring Officer of Chorley Council.

**8. Monitoring and review of this policy**

- 8.1.** The Clerk and Personnel Committee of the Council will be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.