Lympstone Parish Council Digital & Social Media Policy

The following policy was adopted and agreed by Lympstone Parish Council on **7th November 2022.**

The following policy was reviewed and agreed by Lympstone Parish Council on **3rd February 2025.**

LYMPSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Digital & Social Media Policy

1. **Policy statement**

1.1. This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as X (Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, Nextdoor and other relevant digital and social media websites.

The council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:

- providing and exchanging information about services;
- supporting local democracy;
- gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships;
- promoting cultural events for the area;
- supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience; and
- creating internal communications and learning and development.

1.2. This policy outlines the standards the council requires councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

1.3. This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Communications Policy, Members Code of Conduct and such like.

1.4. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2. Who is covered by this policy?

2.1. This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the council, including all elected and co-opted councillors, the clerk to the council and all other employees and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

3. The scope of this policy

3.1. The council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the parish. The council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them.

Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Digital & Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

3.2 All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.

3.3. Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.

Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.

It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

4. Rules for using social media.

4.1 Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves.

4.2 Posts must not to contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

4.3 If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the council. They should not include web links to official council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the council.

4.4 All staff and councillors must ensure they use council facilities appropriately. If using a council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use council facilities for personal or political blogs.

4.5 The Council will appoint the Clerk as its moderator. They will be responsible for liaising with the posting and monitoring of the content on council pages, ensuring it complies with the Digital & Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the council's digital and social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also recorded for council records.

4.6 The Council will appoint the Clerk to liaise with its "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Parish Council Website. The website may be used to:

- Post notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertise Council events and activities
- Post good news stories
- Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the council's expectations of conduct
- Advertise vacancies
- Share information from partners i. e. Police, Library, District Council, etc.
- Announce new information appropriate to the council.
- Post Council policies, financial statements and budget and any Action Plans or surveys relating to the Council.
- Post other items as the council see fit.
- Post newsletters, Annual Reports and other relevant Council material

4.7 Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for council business. Both staff and councillors will have separate council and personal email addresses. The Council will provide professional support for new Councillors to set up their email accounts.

4.8 All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place. (Webmaster in conjunction with Bespoke Web Designs to implement.)

4.9 When participating in online communication staff and councillors must;

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the council.
- Never make false or misleading statements.

- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the council.
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or “loud.” Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points.
- 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.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents.
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright.
- Spell and grammar check everything.

4.10 Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through digital and social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

4.11 If a matter raised in any form of digital and social media needs further consideration by the council it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again the ‘poster’ shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the clerk direct. Any response agreed by the council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

4.12 Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk and then to the council as required.

5. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

Lucy Tyrrell, Clerk and RFO to Lympstone Parish Council

Date of next review: February 2026