**Watchfield Parish Council**

**Social Media Policy 2017**

**Adopted ……………………………………**

1. **What is Social Media?**

‘Social media’ is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way; by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and tablets.

Examples of social media websites include: Social networking – (e.g. www.facebook.com) Video sharing – (eg. www.youtube.com) Blogs and Micro-blogging (eg. www.twitter.com) Message boards (eg. www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbsn/home) Wikis (eg. www.wikipedia.org) Social bookmarking.

1. **Council Use of Social Media**

The Council has a corporate presence on the web and the use of email.

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 Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements that 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.

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.

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 orientated or racially offensive comments by the 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 Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained.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, informed 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.

1. **Principles**

* To publish information about the work of Watchfield Parish Council to a wider audience.
* To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council’s work.
* Social Media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors - other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements - as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues.
* Social Media shall be used as a platform for information regarding the council and not to be used as grounds for debates and personal views
* The clerk shall update, monitor and check social media accounts on a weekly basis. Responses to comments/ questions left on social media accounts shall be made by the clerk within a 2 week time frame of the comment/ question being published. All responses shall be made through the councils’ email address; [clerk@watchfield.org](mailto:clerk@watchfield.org) and not through the social media account.

1. **Approved Council Social Media**

* Parish Council website
* Facebook

1. **Users of Council Social Media**

The Clerk is the Council’s nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other member of staff has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council. The website and Social Media Officer will liaise with the clerk in updating social media accounts and website information.

**3. Guidance for Council Officers on the use of Council Social Media**

* Officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – eg. Facebook - and adhere to these always.
* No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain – ie. available on the Council’s website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, etc.
* Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
* Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
* Copyright laws must be respected.
* Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
* Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
* Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
* Employees must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

**4. Third party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage**

Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Watchfield Parish Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If you use Social Media in your official capacity as a councillor, you should always be mindful of the Code.

**Do:**

1. Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site.
2. Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such vies
3. Be aware that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network
4. Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriate – if using a Council provided blog site or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity
5. Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a councillor
6. Be careful if making ‘political’ points, and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.

**Don’t:**

1. Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face to-face contact.
2. Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes

**5. Facebook Strategy**

Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial, and not purposely designed for Parish Council use. They include sites like Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, and Xanga. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Council the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the Parish.

Facebook, for example, offers a rich platform allowing you to share unlimited content, including images and videos.

Example activity:

• Share articles / blog posts / expertise

• Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction

• Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors

• Upload images and videos

• Generic news – what’s happening in the area

One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. Care should be exercised when accepting invitations to friend others within personal social networking sites. Friends will gain access to the Council’s network of contacts on the site.

1. Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:

• As a Parish Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.

• Remember that people classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your information with others.

• Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.

• Set your profile’s security and privacy settings carefully. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to “only friends”. “Friends of friends” and “Networks and Friends” open the content to a large group of unknown people.

• All activity on the Council facebook page must follow the Council’s agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.

• Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.

• Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.

• Only add statements approved by either Full Council or the Parish Clerk.

• Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations.

• To reduce security risks, do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.

• Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.

• Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.

• If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.

**6. Other Social Media**

At this stage Watchfield Parish Council does not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use. However this could be open to review in the future.

Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy at all times when so doing.