



## **SARRATT PARISH COUNCIL**

### **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES: SOCIAL NETWORKING**

#### **1. Introduction**

Sarratt Parish Council understands that use of social networking sites is now a common practice and members of staff accessing and using such sites particularly in their own time is not normally a matter for the Council.

However, there are situations where inappropriate use of social networking sites by a member of staff can harm the Council, Councillors, work colleagues, members of the public and/or third-party organisations or individuals with which the Council works. The implementation of this Policy is intended therefore to prevent:-

- social networking sites being used in such a way by members of staff that will affect and harm the Council's image or relationships with other organisations;
- the Council, Councillors or members of staff being implicated in potential legal action; and
- Council time being spent by members of staff on social network sites on non work-related matters.

Sarratt Parish Council will therefore monitor social networking sites when considered appropriate and investigate their use in any of the above alleged circumstances reported to the Council. The extent to which the Council may use surveillance, such as CCTV installed in an office, in such investigations will comply with The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and other relevant legislation covering surveillance and/or monitoring of the use of social networking sites and email by members of staff.

The Council may also consider on occasions an individual's information on social networks to form opinions about people who are applying for jobs with the Council. However this will be done with great care and the information obtained will not be used as the sole reason for selecting an applicant for appointment.

#### **2. Definitions**

For the purposes of this policy Sarratt Parish Council regard social networking as a purely personal activity unless given specific authority to use it on the Council's behalf and defines "social networking sites" as meaning any such site and is not limited to the commonly known current sites such as Facebook or Twitter. This Policy applies to social networking when using the Internet, email, smart phones or any other similar device and investigating networking websites.

### **3. Terms of the Policy**

The Council's general rules and the terms of this Social Networking Policy apply to all members of staff and Councillors. Everyone is therefore required to observe the following rules when using social networking sites and must:

- not divulge, comment on or make subjective or offensive comments about the Council, Councillors, work colleagues or third party organisations working with the Council;
- not divulge any confidential Council information for other than authorised or statutory reasons;
- not identify themselves as a representative of the Council without the approval of the Chair or Vice Chair;
- act responsibly when representing the Council in a professional manner if allowed to advertise their association with the Council;
- ensure that any personal social networking entries and blogs contain disclaimers that make it clear that the opinions expressed are solely theirs and do not represent the views of the Council;
- not make any recommendations or referrals for friends or associates;
- not reference any Councillor, work colleagues or third party organisations without obtaining their express permission to do so;
- be clear about any other relevant Council policies that cover the dissemination of its confidential information and/or trade secrets and for the prevention of harassment, discrimination and bullying;
- not to refer or discuss proprietary information on such sites for example the Council's financial information, intellectual property, records, information about other individuals or organisations and so forth;
- not criticise the Council or its' management, operation or organisation over any issue particularly and, if relevant, where internal procedures have not been used to seek internal redress in respect of any alleged grievance;
- not use social networking or similar sites to make offensive, discriminatory or humiliating comments about the Council, Councillors, work colleagues or other specific people or situations and/or which could be regarded as harassment, online "cyber" bullying or defamation, data protection and public interest disclosure;
- ensure that they comply with the law and any Council policies with respect to copyright, plagiarism, libel and defamation of character;
- not divulge any information, images or photographs which could weaken security or any of the Council's health and safety provision;
- ensure that social networking activities do not interfere with their primary job responsibilities; and
- only undertake social networking in their own time and/or any authorised work break unless in a genuine emergency or if given prior authority to do so.

### **4. Third Parties**

If Sarratt Parish Council is the subject of adverse content on social networking sites from third parties (i.e. not staff) and on investigation it is found that the third party is acting on behalf of a member of staff then enforcement action, as detailed below, will be taken.

## **5. Enforcement**

If any employee or, Councillor says anything when using a social networking site that harms the reputation of the Council or contravenes any of the above Policy and rules, it will be dealt with as serious or even gross misconduct depending on the circumstances of the case, which in the case of employees could lead to dismissal.

In particular if social networking sites are used to harass or victimise one or more colleagues then it must be understood that those who are the "victims" may take legal action (including possible police action) against the instigator (be this a member of staff, Councillor, or a third party). The Council may also take relevant legal action and/or report the matter to the police if it feels the comments made by a member of staff, Councillor or third party may be a libel, slander or defamation or contravene any other statutory law or regulation.

## **6. Policy Review**

This Social Networking Policy will be reviewed periodically and/or as appropriate to assess its effectiveness or if required by law. Any appropriate changes may then be implemented following appropriate consultation.

Such steps as may be appropriate to ensure that this Policy remains effective will be taken by the Council and the Disciplinary Procedure used in respect of any breaches of the Policy.

**Reviewed and adopted: 8 April 2025**