

Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council

Policy and Protocol for Blogging, Social Media and Personal Websites for Parish Councillors and Parish Council Personnel.

The Parish Council has a Corporate presence on the web and the use of e-mail and will always try to use the most effective channel of communication with people who live in, work in or visit the Parish. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure transparency and consistency across all online Social Media, Personal Blogs and/or Websites.

All Members/Staff are expected to abide by this Policy and any serious breaches of this policy will be dealt with by the Employee Disciplinary Procedure or Members Code of Conduct. Any breach could bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

In respect of the Official Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council Facebook page the Clerk to the Council is the only authorised personnel who can post items on behalf of the Council. Councillors may comment on posts submitted but are not authorised to upload posts on behalf of the Council.

Confidential information obtained through their position as a Councillor must never be disclosed and councillors/Staff must abide by the General Data Protection Regulations.

General

- This policy includes, but is not limited to Facebook, Twitter, blogs, You Tube, Myspace, LinkedIn and all other present and future Social Network, Blogs and Media Websites.
- All Councillors are required to act in accordance with the Member Code of Conduct whilst acting in their official capacity. It is strongly advised that Councillors have a separate Personal and Councillor Address and unless specifically authorised Councillors are communicating on a personal basis only.
- Blogging and Social Networking are effective and fast methods for Councillors to engage and interact with the community and Parishioners. Used wisely you are able to engage with Parishioners who would not normally have access to contacting you.
- Councillors must think about what they say and how this could be perceived, just as you would when making statements when writing a letter. Although you may be writing in a Personal capacity, there is a fine line between people distinguishing your views as a Councillor or you as an individual, which could lead to views being misinterpreted and or misconstrued. Think before you publish – even if a post is deleted hastily it will probably have been read several times and may have been indexed and duplicated online beyond reach.
- Beware of irony – it is difficult to communicate sarcasm or irony through short online messages. Your intention may be clear, however the message may be misconstrued.

- Do not be drawn into an online argument with someone who clearly is trying to provoke you. Simply do not respond. If the content may be classed as defamatory or illegal you must report the post to the Social Media Site Administrator (Clerk to the Parish Council/Neil McGuinness/Cllr.K.Pegram).
- Be mindful if publishing regarding a forthcoming or on-going matter/hearing yet to be determined, for example a planning or licensing matter. Any indication of bias or pre-determination could result in the decision becoming void.
- Be careful about “liking” or reposting/retweeting someone else’s post/blog. This may be interpreted as you agreeing or supporting its content.
- Councillors need to be aware that by stating that the views expressed in the post are not your own will not necessarily exonerate you from potential disciplinary action or legal implications.
- Councillors are to be aware of their online presence around election periods. Councillors should note that legislation relating to electoral periods (e.g. the Representation of the People Act 1983) will also apply to any of the online publication of electoral material and or statements relating to the election.
- Councillors need to be aware that they may be held personally liable for copyright and trade mark breaches, defamation, contempt of court and privacy infringements on their personal blogs/posts. This may be the case even if a Councillor does not produce the offending content.
- Councillors need to have particular regard to Section 3 of the Member Code (General Obligations) and ensure that they abide by this at all times. Even when online Councillors must treat others with respect and conduct themselves in a manner that will not bring the Parish Council into disrepute.
- If a matter is raised by any form of Social Media which requires further consideration by the Parish Council it may be raised in the open forum or the Parish Clerk needs to be informed to put the matter on the Agenda.

Private

- Councillors need to bear in mind that if they have a Private Blog, Website or Social Media pages and you refer to the Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council on them, they will be viewed as acting in your official capacity as a Councillor.
- Councillors are solely responsible for their own blogs and the Parish Council has no responsibility for the Councillor’s personal blog/post content or maintenance.
- A Councillor with a personal blog will have a legal duty to take reasonable care when dealing with the personal blog/post content. Councillors should also actively monitor personal blogs/posts to ensure that any breach or infringement is dealt with quickly and expediently.

- Where a Councillor is responsible for a Personal Blog which stores or holds personal information (e.g. email addresses), they should be aware that they need to comply with General Data Protection Regulations
- Councillors should consider posting a short statement on their Social Media account/Blog/Website disclosing their identity as a Councillor and the political party they represent.

To ensure you comply with the code of conduct, Councillors are requested to observe and note the following:

- Ensure the privacy settings for any blog or social media site are set appropriately
- If you post information/statements via Blogs, Social Media or your own Website that includes information that you could only have accessed as a Councillor this will be seen acting in your official capacity.

Please refrain from the following:

- Blogging/posting in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make face to face and or in writing.
- **The code may apply if any of the following are evident:**
- Bullying
- Breach or disclosure of confidentiality
- Disrespect
- All forms of dispute/conflict to the Council
- Misuse of Council resources.
- Common sense and an ethical code is a must when using online social media, blogs and your own websites and the above is not limited to the conduct but is a guideline as to how conduct is expected of Councillors. Integrity, accountability, openness and honesty is to be followed.

Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council Facebook Page

Will be used for linking our Parish Website where **ALL** Parish Council documents can be found. Updating residents of community events/good news etc, sharing information with partners (Police/Library/School etc) and promoting bodies of the community – Community Groups/Youth Club/Scouts/Guides etc.

Inappropriate Activity

Any concerns regarding content placed on social Media should be reported to the Clerk of the Council for referral to the Monitoring Officer.

This policy will be reviewed annually but could be updated at any given time.

Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council Social Media Policy **supporting notes**

What is Social Media?

Social Media is the term commonly given to websites and online tools allowing users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers and numerous mobile devices such as phones, tablets, Cameras etc.

Council Use of Social Media Principles:

To publish information about the work of the Parish Council to a wider audience without entering into online debates on the work of the Parish Council.

Social Media must not be used in the recruitment process for employees or Councillors as this could lead to breaches of privacy, potential discrimination claims and data protection issues. Advertising a vacancy advertisement are permitted.

The only approved Social Media for Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council is the Official Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council Facebook Page.

Users of the Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council Facebook page:

The Clerk to the Council is the only person authorised to post on the Herongate & Ingrave Parish Council Facebook page on behalf of the Council. Councillors are permitted to comment on posts only and must not issue public statements on the Parish council's behalf.

Definitions:

“Social Media” – Social Media includes but is not limited to websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, GooglePlus, Yammer and Pinterest as well as all online public blogs.

“Personal Blog” – A Personal Blog includes any blog that is the sole or joint responsibility of a Councillor. For example it is owned, managed or maintained by a Councillor. This also includes a Councillor's blog that is hosted by a third party website, e.g. Wordpress.

“Media Devices” - This includes, but is not limited to, mobile phones, tablets, cameras and any other device that is capable of recording sound and image.