Social Media Policy

1. Policy Statement

1.1 The aim of this policy is to set out how Scarning Parish Council uses social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with residents, local businesses and visitors.

1.2 Social media provides alternative channels for the Parish Council to disseminate information about its activities and where applicable, to respond to questions and queries raised by residents and by people who work in and visit Scarning. This policy refers to the Parish Council's Facebook and Next Door pages. It does not relate to the Parish Council's website and its use of email.

2. Use of Social Media

2.1 The Parish Council's social media may be used to:-

- post details of meetings,
- advertise Council events and activities
- announce news stories connected to the Council or highlight actions taken by the Council
- advertise Council vacancies
- post or share information from other parish related community groups such as the school, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- refer enquiries to the Parish Clerk.

2.2 The Council will not conduct business or deal with complaints via social media. These should be emailed to the Clerk at clerk@scarning-pc.gov.uk

3. Social Media Officer

3.1 The Parish Council has appointed a Social Media Officer. The Social Media Officer acts as a moderator of Parish Council Social Media output and is the only person permitted to post content on the Council's Social Media pages, other than the Parish Clerk.

3.2 All social media should only be used to present factual information about the Parish Council or its decisions, where the person posting the information is identified as being associated with the Council.

3.3 All postings should only reflect content which it would be acceptable to publish to the general public in other Parish Council communications.

3.4 The Social Media Officer (if necessary in consultation with the Chair and the Clerk) has the authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the Council's social media pages which are deemed to be defamatory; false or misleading; insulting, threatening or abusive; obscene or of a sexual nature; offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against religious or other groups; promoting illegal activity; or intended to deceive.

3.5 The Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all relevant facts.

4. Parish Clerk

4.1 The Council has authorised the Parish Clerk to post the following on the Council's Next Door and Facebook pages:-

- details of meetings
- advertisement for Council vacancies
- advertisements for events and activities
- announcements of news stories connected to the Council or actions taken by the Council

5. Guidance

5.1 When participating in any online communication the Social Media Officer and the Parish Clerk must not;

- Hide their identity by using false names or pseudonyms
- Present their personal opinions as those of the Parish Council, or that are contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct, or any other Council policies
- Present themselves in a way that may cause embarrassment to the Council, or bring the Council into disrepute
- Disclose any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the Council's business
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Use language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights or hostile communications
- Publish photographs or videos that infringes the copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, or which constitutes a criminal offence

5.2 Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages.

5.3 This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

6. Facebook and Next Door

6.1 The Parish Council's Facebook and Next Door pages will be used as a noticeboard with commenting denied unless the Council requires it, and it is agreed.

6.2 The Council reserves the right to ask users to remove comments or content that includes:-

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language

- Potentially libelous statements
- Plagiarised material, any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions

6.3 Sending a message/post via the Council's Facebook and/or Next Door pages will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes. We will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels.

6.4 The Council's response to any communication received in such a manner will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy, or send a brief response as applicable. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received and given our limited available resources. If the post alleges a breach of a Council policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council using its Complaints Procedure, or to report the matter to the Police.

6.5 The sites are not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the Council. No personal/private information should be included in any social media posts.

7. Personal Use of Social Media

7.1 Councillors should be aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their role as a councillor or the Council's image and reputation. Councillors should be aware that whilst they might not expressly name the Council on social media this policy will still apply if a connection with the Council or their role as councillors can be reasonably made.

7.2 Councillors should not publish anything that is confidential to the Council, or use social media to comment on potentially sensitive matters, including but not restricted to:-

- Information about residents of the parish
- Information that is commercially sensitive
- Intellectual property

7.3 At no time should Parish Council email addresses or other official contact details be used for setting up personal social media accounts or communicating through such media.

8. Guidelines for Responsible Use of Social Media

8.1 Councillors should make it clear in social media postings or in their personal profile that they are speaking on their own behalf. It is suggested that posts are written in the first person and that a personal email address is used.

8.2 If councillors disclose their affiliation to the Parish Council on their profile, or in any social media postings, they must state that their views do not represent those of the Parish Council, unless they have been authorised to speak on behalf of the Parish Council.

8.3 If a councillor is uncertain, or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or postings, please refrain from posting it until you have discussed it with the Council Chair or the Clerk.

9 Policy Breaches

9.1 All councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct adopted by the Parish Council. If it is felt that a councillor has breached the Code of Conduct, or if is considered that a councillor has not followed the Code of Conduct, a complaint can be made to the Monitoring Officer at Breckland Council, or to the Parish Council using its Complaints Procedure.

9.2 The Monitoring Officer can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a councillor which are covered by the Council's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct only applies to a councillor whilst undertaking his/her role as a councillor. It does not apply to a councillor acting in their personal capacity. The Council's Code of Conduct and its Complaints Procedure can be found on the Council's website (scarningpc.info) or from the Parish Clerk (scarningclerk@btinternet.com).

9.3 A breach of this policy by a member of staff may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Reviewed without amendment: January 2026.
Next Review: January 2028.