

## **Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy**

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council has a website, and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the 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 Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

### **Communications from the Council via any medium will meet the following criteria:**

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information.
- Will not contain any political advertising.

### **Social media**

In order to ensure that all discussions via social media are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the following guidelines will be observed:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using social media site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.
- Discussions on any social medium controlled by the Council will be moderated by the Chairman, Vice Chairman or the Clerk.

Social media channels will not be monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, it will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities.

Sending a message/post via social media will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, residents will be encouraged to make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.

The Council will retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous 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 or spam
- Allegation of a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available. Any information posted via social media not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked. The Council may post a statement that '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed*'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

### **Parish Council Website.**

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's rules and expectations for the web site. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

### **Parish Council email**

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address (clerks email address). The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday; the Clerk aims to acknowledge emails as soon as practicable, if necessary indicating when a substantive reply may be expected. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new emails requiring data to be passed on will be followed up with a Data Consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views but if the matter relates to parish council business, a copy should be sent to the Clerk. NB any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept. Personal information including names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers should not be passed on to other people or groups outside of the Council unless the individual concerned has given consent.

### **SMS (texting)**

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

### **Video Conferencing e.g. Skype**

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

### **Community engagement**

The Council recognises that the use of social media and electronic communications is an effective way of ensuring that residents are aware of what the parish council can do for them and is committed to developing these channels when its resources permit.

### **Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council**

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also be careful only to copy essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option **if at all possible**, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that unnecessary email trails have been removed.

Adopted by the Council 4<sup>th</sup> June 2018