

Communications and Social Media Policy

Introduction

The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and staff with an overview of the various communications channels that the Parish Council use and to outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

The policy covers all communications channels and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Parish Council Emails
- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social networking sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blog and discussion forums

Purpose of the Policy

Social media, email and the website provide the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information and sharing relevant information from other sources. The Council makes use of these tools to quickly disseminate information but it must carefully control its use.

This policy will help to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted and maintained and that Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of communications channels.

Policy Statement

This policy provides a structured approach to using various communications channels and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks. Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

Guidelines

The following applies equally to Officers and Members. The guidelines will apply to online participation and emails from Parish Council email accounts and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Cobham Parish Council:

- Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online/email activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
- Councillors should not use their own personal social media accounts when posting or commenting on posts with regard to Parish Council business or anything that may be construed as such.

- Councillors using their own social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor. When using social media for **personal** purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions".
- The Parish Council will be responsible for establishing and administrating Parish Council social media accounts. Parish Council posts or comments on posts should only be made using the established Parish Council social media account.
- Councillors wishing to utilise a Parish Council social media account should email the Clerk with the proposed content and posting instructions with a copy to the Chairman and Vice Chairman.
- The Clerk may initiate posts or comments without prior approval for the purpose of circulating or responding with public domain information, public service notices and details from approved Parish Council minutes or on instructions from a full council meeting.
- Councillors and Officers must never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Councillors and Officers must always ensure that they handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act and GDPR.
- Parish Council emails will only be used to distribute information of council business. Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

Responsibilities

Cllr Peterson-Pearce/the Clerk are the Council's "Webmaster" and maintain the Parish Council website. All statutory documentation and public domain information published without specific prior approval. All other statements will be agreed and major changes must be approved by the Council.

The Clerk is also responsible for the creation of Councillor email addresses. When Councillors stand down/leave, it is the Clerk responsibility to immediately close access to the account.

The Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Social Media channels agreed by the Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Council. Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.