

Little Horkesley Parish Council

Social Media & Electronic Communication Policy

Introduction

The aim of this policy is to provide Councillors and staff with an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use.

The use of social media and electronic communications 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. Improving communications is part of our Action Plan, including ensuring accessibility to our website.

The Council has a website, a Facebook page, 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.

Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites.

Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; PCs, phones and tablets
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications
- Allows communication to take place in real time or intermittently

Examples of popular social media tools includes: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Wikipedia, YouTube, Pinterest.

Code of Practice: Parish Council use of online and social media.

Online and social media should be used primarily for the following purposes:

- To share information relating to the official business of the Parish Council, eg posting dates of meetings, minutes and agendas
- To advertise events and activities of potential interest to those who live in, work in or visit the parish
- To promote newsworthy stories of potential interest
- To alert the public to vacancies on the Council

- To support local individuals or community groups by sharing information that may be of benefit or interest
- To announce new information that may be of relevance in relation to the work of the Council
- To function as an alternative platform for residents to express their views or queries to the Clerk or other Councillors, although this will not be treated as being in an official capacity

Guidance: for both Councillors and residents

1. When participating in any online communication:

- a) Be responsible, respectful, as well as direct, informative, brief and transparent
- b) Never make false or misleading statements
- c) Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure that personal opinions are not published as being those of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute, especially by contravening the Council's other policies
- d) Parish Councillors should refrain from posting controversial or inflammatory remarks
- e) Parish Councillors should not present political views
- f) Avoid personal attacks, online fights or hostile arguments
- g) Permission to publish photographs or videos should be sought from the persons or organisations before being uploaded. It will be assumed that these permissions have already been obtained if these are shared from third party sources

2. Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents

3. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communications require a response or will be responded to. If a matter is intended to be brought officially to the Council's attention, then it may be raised at a Council meeting. The response will then be communicated via the minutes of the meeting

4. The nominated moderator has the authority to remove any posts which may contain personal or inflammatory remarks, or which may be deemed inappropriate.

5. Councillors or residents who have any concerns regarding content placed online / social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council

Responsibilities and Monitoring

The Council should appoint a nominated person (the Clerk) to be responsible for social media platforms. This person will be responsible for posting and monitoring content, ensuring that it complies with the Social Media Policy.

They will also act as moderator, overseeing comments made by the public, with the authority to remove any posts which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libellous nature, or inappropriate in content. Such posts will be reported to the hosts (eg Facebook etc.)

It is understood that social media platforms operate 24/7, however it is not expected that they will be monitored continuously and not all messages or comments will be individually responded to. Sending a message via the website or social media will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes, however if communication is deemed relevant then it may be referred to in official meetings for the benefit of updating the Council on issues of potential importance.

Views expressed by others that remain present on the website or social media platform are not necessarily endorsed by the Parish Council and the Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted online.

Final Note

The over-riding purpose of any online or social media communication is to provide those with an interest in the work of Little Horkesley Parish Council with an additional source of information.

It is not designed to replace other official channels of communication, rather to enable more members of the parish to understand the work of the Council and to promote greater knowledge of the Council's processes, actions and decisions.

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

Date of Policy: July 2021

Review Due: July 2023