



CHERRY BURTON PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Document Details

	Date	By
Drafted	25 th May 2020	Edward Sutcliffe
Reviewed	02 nd July 2020	LCAS Advisory Committee
Adopted	13 th October 2020	Full Council
Revision due		

This document applies to members and employees of the council.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Cherry Burton Parish Councillors and staff in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.
- 1.2. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):
 - Parish Council Website
 - Facebook and other social networking sites
 - Twitter and other micro blogging sites
 - YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
 - LinkedIn
 - Blogs and discussion forums
 - Parish Council Emails
- 1.3. The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and Council staff. The policy does not seek to regulate Councillors and staff in their private capacity.
- 1.4. No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it. It will require a volunteer to update and monitor the social media sites.
- 1.5. The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The Cherry Burton Parish Council Facebook Page and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing methods of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.
- 1.6. Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

- 1.7. In the main, Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around Councillors using their online presence for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters; see further notes below.
- 1.8. The Council will appoint a nominated Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s). They, along with the Clerk, will be responsible for approving the content of Social Media post and/or other communications and ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator(s) and Clerk will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties to the council's social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or, libellous nature. Such post will be reported to the Clerk and may also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook).
- 1.9. The nominated moderator(s) will not be responsible for creating such material other than in their capacity as a Councillor; that will be the responsibility of the Parish Council or Councillors..
- 1.10. The Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Parish Council Website, and to post any approved content on the
- 1.11. The social media may be used to
 - Post Agendas, minutes and dates of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Good news stories
 - Vacancies
 - Sharing information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
 - Announcing new information.
 - Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
 - Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors
- 1.12. Facebook will be used to support the website information above. Emails will be used to distribute information of Council business.
- 1.13. Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via any published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.

Code of Practice

2. Guidance when using social media (including email):

2.1. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis by the moderator(s) and ensure that the security settings are in place.

2.2. When participating in any online communication;

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- Parish Councillors and staff 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 personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, and do not write in red or bold to emphasis points.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- Be aware of the possibility that recipients of your emails can easily forward them to others, and beware of forwarding emails containing information or opinions that the sender may consider confidential.

2.3. Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.

2.4. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations; see below regarding libel and copyright.

2.5. Residents, Councillors and staff should note that not all social media or email communication requires a response.

- There will not be immediate responses to communications that need to be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses to such email or social media communications will be agreed by the Parish Council.
- The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
- If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
- If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious

nature this shall be referred to the Parish Clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.

- Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.

2.6. Councillors, staff or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed by members of the public on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

2.7. At no time should information discussed in confidence be used or discussed on Social Media sites.

2.8. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

Nominated Councillor(s) acting as moderator

Nominated Councillor(s) acting as Webmaster

Adopted

Date 9-11-2020

Minute Reference

Signed  Chairman

The Members' Code of Conduct

1. Councillors and staff can have 'blurred identities, you may have a social media account where you comment both as a councillor or an employee and as an individual. Ensure it is clear when you are posting in a private capacity or as a councillor. Such blurred identities might for example have implications where your views are taken as those of the Council, rather than your personal opinion.
2. There is the need to get social media accounts/ profiles clear, to be confident as to what you can and can't say while you are representing the Parish Council.
3. How you use your online identity will also determine how online content will be treated in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. There is a difference between communicating on behalf of the Council, for example blogging as a Councillor or as a private citizen and the former will be held to a higher standard than the latter. The key to whether your online activity is subject to the Code of Conduct is whether you are giving the impression that you are acting as a Councillor; and that stands whether you are in fact acting in an official capacity or simply giving the impression that you are doing so.
4. Members should comply with the general principles of the Code in what they publish and what they allow others to publish.
5. **Avoid the trolls.** A troll is a person who posts inflammatory, extraneous or off-topic messages in an online community with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion.

The first discussion report (The first discussion report)

Advertising or carrying on business and that includes any advertising or carrying on business

Full details of the Code can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk and www.electoralcommission.org.uk/advice-for-councillors-and-staff

The Council's legal position

Material published by a councillor in an official capacity is for official purposes and is not subject to the same rules as material published by a councillor in a private capacity.

Material published by a councillor in a private capacity is not subject to the same rules as material published by a councillor in an official capacity.

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Additional background information

Libel

If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

Copyright

Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

Data Protection

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

Bias and pre-determination

If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

Obscene material

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

Electoral periods

The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature and that includes web advertising. And there are additional requirements, such as imprint standards for materials which can be downloaded from a website.

Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/those-we-regulate/ candidates-and-agents

The Council's legal position

Material published by a local authority as an organisation is, for obvious reasons, restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material and, in relation to other material, should not persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the council assist in the publication of any material that does any of the above.