

ELLINGHAM, HARBRIDGE & IBSLEY PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Aims:

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Councillors 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.

The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Parish Council Emails
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council's website and noticeboards will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council. Other forms of social media can be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

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. 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 using the websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters, see further notes below.

Guidelines

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

The Parish Clerk will be responsible for establishing and administrating Parish Council social media accounts if they are put in place. 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 Parish Clerk with the proposed content and posting instructions with a copy to the Chairman and Vice Chairman. Note where possible posts should cross reference to the Parish Council website and provide the appropriate link. Once approved by either the Chairman or Vice Chairman, the Parish Clerk will make the post or comment as instructed. The Parish 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.

The Parish Clerk is appointed 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the Parish Council Website. This form of social media may be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies for both Councillors and Staff
- Sharing information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information.
- Post or share information from other Parish related community groups e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business. Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online 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.

Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email).

1. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
2. When participating in any online communication:
 - As a Parish Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image
 - 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 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, or write in red to emphasis points. Spell and grammar check everything. Correct any errors promptly.
- 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.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
- Social media and meetings: The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of parish issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official Council meetings. Below are some extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:
 - Handheld devices and laptops are permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings - not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
 - Councillors' tweets / blogs during Council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting – tweeting / blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting
 - Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business, not witness petty arguments.
 - Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.

- There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by either the full Parish Council or if not contentious by the appropriate committee or working party.
- The Parish Clerk will be responsible for all final published responses having referred to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman where necessary
- If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised as a full agenda item for discussion at the next appropriate meeting. Again the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
- If the Clerk feels unable to answer a post e.g. one of a contentious nature, this shall be referred to the Chairman or Vice-Chairman. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with them directly.
- Some communications 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.
- Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed 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.