

West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help Councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites.

The Parish Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:

- providing and exchanging information about services;
 - supporting local democracy;
 - gathering resident insights;
 - promoting events;
 - supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience; and
 - creating internal communications and learning and development.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Parish Council requires Councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Parish Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 1.3. This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Parish Council.
- 1.4. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.
- 1.5. This policy covers all Councillors, the Parish Clerk and all volunteers.

2. Scope of Policy

- 2.1. The Parish Council has a corporate presence on the web, Facebook and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit West & Middle Chinnock. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them.

Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses. When these changes occur this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

- 2.2. All Councillors are always expected to comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Parish Council, its services, partners and community.
- 2.3. Serious breaches of this policy by Councillors may be dealt with under the Members Code of Conduct. The Parish Council may take action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by a Councillor.

Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Parish Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.

It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

3. Rules for using social media

- 3.1. Councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about Councillors, the Parish Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the Parish Council works with and serves.
- 3.2. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- 3.3. If Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a Councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Parish Council. They should not include web links to official Parish Council website or any other social media as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

- 3.4. The Parish Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Parish Council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Parish Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and the Clerk for Council records.
- 3.5. The Parish Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Community Website. The website may be used to:
- post notices and minutes of meetings;
 - provide information about the Council;
 - advertise events and activities;
 - post good news stories;
 - advertise vacancies;
 - 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library, District & County Council, etc.
 - announce new information appropriate to the Parish Council;
 - post other items as the Parish Council see fit; and
 - Facebook and/or Twitter, etc, may be used to support the website and its information as above.
- 3.6. Individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for Parish Council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.
- 3.7. All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.
- 3.8. When participating in online communication Councillors must:
- be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent;
 - always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Parish Council;
 - never make false or misleading statements;
 - not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Parish Council;
 - be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Parish Council;
 - keep the tone of comments respectful and informative;
 - refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks; language that may be deemed as offensive relating 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;
 - do not post comments that you would not be prepared make in writing or face to face;

- never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so;
 - seek the permission of the owner to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used;
 - respect the privacy of other Councillors, residents; and
 - never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright.
- 3.9. Residents and Councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.
- 3.10. If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Parish Council it should be referred to the Chairman.
- 3.11. Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Chairman.

West & Middle Chinnock Parish Council November 2020

To be reviewed: May 2021

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