

CHIEVELEY PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Appropriate use of social media allows the Parish Council (the Council) to:

- Provide and exchange information about services
- Support local democracy
- Gather resident insights and manage relationships
- Promote cultural events or tourism for the area
- Support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Improve internal communications, learning and development.

This policy is intended to help Councillors, and Parish Council employees and volunteers make appropriate decisions about the use of social media. Social media includes 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 policy also describes the standards the Council requires its Councillors, employees, and volunteers to observe when using social media, how and when the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action that will be taken if this policy is breached. It applies to all individuals working within the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, the Clerk to the Council and other employees and volunteers. It does not form part of any contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

The policy supplements other [policies and procedures](#) adopted by the Council, including its Data Protection Policy and Members' Code of Conduct.

Scope

The Council aims to use the most effective means of communication and may add to its communication channels to improve and expand the services it delivers. The social media policy will be updated periodically to reflect any new arrangements. Those who contact the Council may be asked for their preferred method of communication.

All Councillors, Council employees and volunteers should comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Councillors are required to follow the [Councillors' Code of Conduct](#) for all written and verbal communication and online activity, and to bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can attract adverse publicity even where the Code does not apply. Remarks made in person can be withdrawn, apologised for, and forgotten; posting on the internet is permanent and public and cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate. Councillors must be aware that their profile as a councillor means that they are more likely to be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. 'Private' group communications can be made public at any time, so content and language must be appropriate.

Employee breaches of this policy will be managed in line with the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. Disciplinary action may be taken if the employee uses unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments.

Breach of this policy by **volunteers** will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, taking appropriate action.

Rules for using social media

Councillors, employees and volunteers must not allow their online communications, including websites or blogs, to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about the Council, other Councillors, employees or the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.

Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

If Councillors or employees blog or tweet personally and not in their Council role, 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 Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Parish Council.

All Councillors and employees must use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as being made in an official capacity. Council facilities must not be used for personal or political blogs.

The Clerk is responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council webpages and for ensuring compliance with the social media policy. A moderator, appointed by the Council, has authority to remove any posts from the Council's social media pages, without notice or comment, if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will be reported to the Hosts (eg Facebook) and, for the Council records, to the Clerk.

Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderator and/or Council as required.

Facebook

The Clerk maintains and updates the Parish Council Facebook page to:

- Post notices and Agendas of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Post good news stories
- Link to appropriate websites or press pages, if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Advertise vacancies
- Retweet or 'share' information from partners (ie. Police, library, district council etc)
- Announce new information appropriate to the Council
- Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
- Post other items as the Council see fit.

Parish Councillors and employees are responsible for what they post and personally responsible for any online activity conducted via a published e-mail address used for Council business. Councillors and employees should have separate Council and personal email addresses.

All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

Participation in online communication

Councillors and employees must:

- Be responsible and respectful (direct, informative, brief and transparent)
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the 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 Council
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and ensure personal opinions are not published as being those of the Council
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud': use sentence-case, not capitals, and do use red font for emphasis
- Avoid posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief is offensive and must not be published on any social media site
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Do not post comments that would not be made in writing or face to face
- Never name an individual third party unless they have provided written permission
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos and from individuals or organisations appearing in the video or photographs before they are uploaded
Parental permission must be obtained before photos of children are used
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, employees and residents
- Never post information or conduct online activity that may violate laws or regulations – for example, those of libel and copyright
- Spell- and grammar-check everything.

Recordings

At any meeting of the Council or its committees where a recording (film, photograph or similar) is to be made, the following should sit in a separate designated area

- Members of the public who do not wish to participate in the meeting and who object to being filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about
- Children and vulnerable adults where the relevant responsible adult has not given consent for them to be filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about.

Responding to social media communication

Residents and Councillors should be aware that not all social media communication requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

If a matter raised via social media needs further consideration by the Council, it should be raised at the open forum or as an agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Any response agreed by the Council must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.