

# Chesham Bois Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communication Policy

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, Council employees and others who engage with the Council using online communication collectively referred to as social media.

This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

### 2. Definition of Social Media

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

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

### 3. Council Use of Social Media

Chesham Bois Parish Council has a website, Facebook pages, Twitter account and Instagram page and uses email to communicate. Over time the Council may change or add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers.

Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wider audience instantaneously on a range of subjects. It improves and expands the ways in which the Council communicates with local residents, local businesses and various government agencies.

The use of social media will not replace all other forms of communication.

Chesham Bois Parish Council is politically neutral and will not promote a particular political view. The Council's social media platforms will not follow or promote political parties or groups, individual councillors or Members of Parliament.

#### **Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:**

- Content will be civil, respectful and relevant.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere for which the Council either does not own the copyright or has not reasonably established the copyright owner's permission. Content originally generated outside the Council should be appropriately credited. Where content derives from a press notice or a shareable social media post, the copyright owner's permission is assumed to have been given.
- Not contain any personal information.
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.
- If the content is official Council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Council.

## 4. Responsibilities & Accountabilities

The Clerk is the designated 'Council' moderator of the Council's approved social media channels.

The Council's Communications Working Group has been appointed by the Council to assist the Clerk in the dissemination of information and to ensure that information on social media networks is accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

No account details may be changed without the permission of the Clerk.

New social media accounts in the Council's name must not be created unless authorised by the Council.

Councillors are at liberty to set up their own social media accounts, but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

Councillors should ensure that they comply with the Council's Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act 2018 whenever they act or appear to act in an official capacity on social media.

Whilst independent communications with parishioners are important in order to engage and be approachable, the overarching rules are that Councillors should not make commitments on behalf of the Council nor bring the Council into disrepute and always respect confidentiality.

Councillors or residents who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk.

## 5. Website

The Council's website aims to communicate with residents, local clubs, societies and organisations as well as external bodies including Buckinghamshire Council and local and/or central government organisations. The website may be used to:

- Post agendas, minutes and dates of meetings.
- Advertise parish events and activities.
- Announce new information from the Council.
- Advertise staff and councillor vacancies and provide contact details for officers and councillors.
- Share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Health etc.
- Post or share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities.
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the website. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

## 6. Facebook

Facebook offers a platform allowing the Council to share content, including images and videos and may be used to:

- Share articles / blog posts / expertise.
- Advertise events and activities.
- Share information e.g. from principal authorities/community groups.
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction.
- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors.
- Upload product images and videos.
- Competitions.

- Generic news – what’s happening in the area.

The profile page will state that Chesham Bois Parish Council is politically neutral and will not promote a particular political view. Individual councillors, Members of Parliament, political parties and political groups will not be followed.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received but will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities.

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council **is** not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, direct contact should be made to the Council’s Clerk by emailing [clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk](mailto:clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk).

One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. ‘Friends’ will gain access to the Council’s network of contacts on the site. Accepting invitations to friend others within the Council’s social networking sites should only be authorised by the Clerk or delegated councillor. ‘

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council are:

- The Council has a professional image to uphold and how it communicates electronically impacts this image.
- Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to a website or blog and then realising that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise the Council’s policies or personnel.
- Ensure the parent Facebook page’s profile’s security and privacy settings are set carefully.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.
- Only add “official” Council statements after they have been approved by either the Council or the Clerk.
- Acknowledge queries posted to the Council on the Facebook site publicly but respond privately in message form.
- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, profane, proprietary or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- Whether a particular posting might put the operational effectiveness or reputation of the Council at risk.
- To reduce security risks, do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines, then you must report it as required by law.

The Council retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content.
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright.
- Private, personal information published without consent.
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.

- Commercial promotions or spam.
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law.

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible.

Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.

The Council may post a statement that 'a post breaching the Council's Social Media & Electronic Communication Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

## 7. Twitter & Instagram

Twitter is a 'microblogging' platform which allows users to post short messages and converse with other users and Instagram is a social network for sharing photographs and videos. Unlike email or text messaging, these posts take place in the open and engage audiences in discussions about services, products and issues— connecting a vast amount of likeminded people in an often targeted and purposeful way. It may be used for:

- Updates on the Council's activities.
- Announcements about matters of importance to residents and those who may be visiting or moving to the parish.
- Requests for information and assistance including invitations to tender for Council services.
- News about the Council's online facilities.
- Re-tweets from organisations that the Council are following which meet the Council's Social Media & Electronic Communication Policy.

The profile page will state that Chesham Bois Parish Council is politically neutral and will not promote a particular political view.

Individual councillors, Members of Parliament, political parties and political groups will not be followed.

Being followed on Twitter/Instagram does not imply endorsement of any kind.

These sites are not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received but will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities.

Sending a message/post via Twitter or Instagram will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council are not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, direct contact should be made to the Council's Clerk by emailing [clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk](mailto:clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk).

## 8. Emails

Chesham Bois Parish Council maintains one email address [clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk](mailto:clerk@cheshamboispc.org.uk) which is monitored during office hours. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

Emails will be used to distribute information on the Council's business, but they will not entirely replace traditional methods of notifying residents.

Councillors and employees must be mindful in all communications of those residents who do not have internet access.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action.

Where communication from residents and other third parties is required to be discussed at a Council meeting, the item will be placed on the next available agenda, and a common response agreed by the Council. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting and placed on the appropriate website or social media platform. The original communicant shall be informed of the Council's response directly.

All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data Consent Form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. Note that any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

Do not forward personal information onto other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone.

Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also be careful only to copy essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

## 9. Other Media

**SMS (texting) & WhatsApp:** Councillors and the Clerk may use SMS and WhatsApp as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

**Video Conferencing e.g. Zoom, Skype:** If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

## 10. Breach of this Policy

Failure to comply with this policy by Councillors will be deemed as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be reported to the Monitoring Officer.

Employees should be aware that where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

Other violations, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 2018 could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved.

The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by employees and councillors deemed inappropriate, or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.

Policy adopted by Chesham Bois Parish Council on: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020

This Policy is to be reviewed annually.

Last Reviewed: 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023