

## **Whitchurch Village Council Social Media & Electronic Communication Policy**

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Whitchurch Village 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):

- Village Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums
- Village Council emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Councillors and Staff of Whitchurch Village Council. It is also intended as guidance for others communicating with the Village Council. It will require designated persons to update and monitor the social media sites. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option. 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.

### Whitchurch Village Council (WVC) Social Media Policy

1. The Council will appoint a nominated Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s). They along with Council Staff will be responsible for posting and monitoring the content, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator(s) will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from WVC social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the clerk.
2. The Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Village Council Website
3. WVC social media may be used to (but not limited to):
  - Post agendas, minutes and dates of meetings
  - Advertise events and activities
  - Post good news stories linked to website or press page
  - Advertise vacancies
  - Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
  - Announce new information
  - Post or Share information from other village related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
  - Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

Facebook will be used to support the website information above. Emails will be used to distribute information of council business.

Individual village 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.

## Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email).

4. a) All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the appropriate security settings are in place.

b) Engagement of new forms of social media shall not be undertaken without the agreement of the Full Council.

5. When participating in any online communication;

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Village Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All 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; 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 red text 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.
- 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.
- 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 Council and all responses will be agreed by the Village Council.
- The Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
- If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. 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 Clerk. The 'poster' will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Clerk directly.
- Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a 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.
- The nominated moderator(s) shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libelous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
- Spell and grammar check to be used on all communication
- Correct any errors promptly
- 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.

The Policy will be reviewed annually.

**Approved at Ordinary Parish Council meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015, minute number 2015/315.**

**Reviewed 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2016, three amendments made, minute number 2016/328.**

**Reviewed 1<sup>st</sup> February 2017, one amendment made, minute no. 2017/143**

**Reviewed 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018, no amendments required, minute no. 2018/133.**

**Reviewed 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019, no amendments required, minute no. 2019/152.**

**It was resolved that Councillors Matt Donovan & Paul O'Leary will be the Social Media moderator(s).**

**Martin Francis is the Webmaster under specific sanction from the Clerk.**

**Reviewed 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020, no amendments required, minute no. 2020/155**

**Reviewed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021, it was resolved to amend the following:-**

**Webmaster is Martin Francis and Whitchurch Village Staff, under specific sanction from the Clerk.**

**Cllrs Paul O'Leary, John Pearce and Whitchurch Village Council staff will be the Social Media moderator(s).**

**Reviewed 2 February 2022 :- it was resolved to amend the following :- John Pearce will be removed and John Fox-Bowen will be added as Social Media moderator(s).**