

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

Item 10 Communications Strategy- Appendix 3

## Communications plan: Social media

Following the February meeting I have investigated the use of dedicated social media channels by the parish council, replacing the reliance on personal posts by members as we do currently

Having taken advice from both WALC and sought opinion from fellow clerks the use of social media is growing more widely within the sector, but it is clear it needs to be carefully managed and moderated.

The most widely used channel is Facebook and my recommendation is that EPC start with this channel in addition to its new website and digital newsletter and monitors its effectiveness and ease of management.

A robust social policy is important to allow successful management and moderation and I have updated the model policy from NALC as attached.

It should be noted that the policy also covers the activity by councillors in their personal use of social media.

A Facebook account can be established for the parish council using the clerk's email address and details as the 'personal account' which would ensure the council retains control. This was the biggest issue for parish councils where the account had been set up by former clerks or councillors attached to their personal Facebook accounts.

I am also recommending that a councillor is given responsibility for council communications in conjunction with the clerk. This would ensure that guidance is available when posts and comments, newsletters and other channels are required to be approved or replied to. In some instances, wider dissemination and council discussion may be required.

## **Recommendation:**

The Parish Council is asked to approve the following:

1. The attached social media policy effective immediately. This replaces all existing policies.
2. The setting up of an Ettington Facebook page ensuring the council retains full ownership and control of the account
3. The parish clerk is appointed to manage and moderate the account.
4. A councillor is appointed to be responsible for the communications strategy in conjunction with the clerk

*Jane Carter  
Clerk and RFO  
March 2024*

# Ettington Parish Council Social Media Policy

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## 1. Introduction

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

This policy is intended to help councillors and staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and to outline Ettington Parish Councils' position on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using EPC's social media sites.

It includes standards and guidelines for councillors and staff to observe when using social media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy

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

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

This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other applicable policies and procedures adopted by Ettington Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

## 2. How social media will be used by the council

Social media may be used to

- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of council-based services, decisions and actions
- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities that EPC has organised or supports as beneficial to the local community
- Sharing news stories relevant to the local area
- Vacancies
- Sharing information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announcing new information
- 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

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

Ettington Parish Council runs its social media pages so it can pass information on to residents quickly and effectively. Social media accounts will not necessarily be checked daily and posts will not necessarily be responded to.

Though Ettington Parish Council is keen to hear residents views it will not be able to take comments made on its social media accounts as official comments, particularly on planning applications. To manage the messages received residents will be asked if necessary to forward their comments to EPC. This can be done by emailing the Clerk, by contacting a parish councillor or attending a monthly meeting.

The opportunity for members of the public to comment on posts is at the discretion of Ettington Parish Council and may not always be made available.

## 3. Who is covered by this policy

The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted parish councillors, council staff and volunteers. (collectively referred to as staff in this policy)

All councillors and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interest of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post both in a council and personal capacity.

The council may take disciplinary action in respect of serious breaches of this policy by employees. Volunteers in breach of the policy will result in the council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

Councillors and staff must remember 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 made in public.

#### **4. Code of Practice**

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

## 5. Managing social media accounts

The parish clerk will be responsible for posting content on council website and social media channels.

The council will appoint a moderator, usually the parish clerk, to moderate parish council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with social media Policy.

The parish clerk or any councillors also acting as a moderator will have authority without notice or comment to remove any posts from council social media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (i.e. Facebook) and to the parish clerk for council records.

The parish clerk or any councillor acting as moderator will have the authority to block or ban access for an individual or company's account to EPC's social media channels.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

**This policy will be reviewed annually.**

**Approved: March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024**