

### **Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy**

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Parish Council and between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website, a Facebook page and an X (formerly Twitter) account, and uses email to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time, the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

All official Parish Council social media posts must be made or approved by the Council's Communications Officer. In the absence of the Communications Officer, this responsibility will fall to the Clerk or Assistant Clerk. No other individuals, including Councillors or third parties, are permitted to post content or updates on behalf of the Parish Council on any official Council social media channels.

Furthermore, no social media pages, groups or accounts may be affiliated with or claim to represent the Parish Council unless they are directly controlled and managed by the Council's officers as specified above. This includes, but is not limited to, community pages or event pages such as "Party in the Park" that are not under direct Council officer control. The Parish Council will not be responsible for content posted on unaffiliated or unofficial pages.

The Parish Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

Communications from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful 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 we do not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- If official Council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Parish Council or the Chairman/Vice Chairman of the Parish Council
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Parish Council group are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Parish Council members or staff, will not be permitted
- Share freely and be generous, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due

- Stay on topic
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook group/page for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products

The sites are not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via Facebook *will not be considered* as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the Council by emailing.

We 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
- Allegations of a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Parish Council's response to any communications 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, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook group not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook group. The Parish Council may post a statement that, '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media 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.

#### **Hatfield Peverel Community Hub Facebook Group**

Parish Councillors are not permitted to respond to posts/comments on the Community Hub in relation to Parish Council matters. Any posts made by the Clerk on behalf of the Parish Council on the Hub will be factual and informative, with the commenting function turned off.

Any obscene or defamatory comments, personal attacks or insults made on the Hub (or via Facebook Messenger or other social media outlets) about Parish Councillors as individuals, the Parish Council as a body or Parish Council employees will be reported to the Hub Administrator(s) in the first instance. The Parish Council reserves the right to report the incident to the relevant authorities/bodies (for example, the Police) should the Administrator(s)' actions be deemed inadequate or inappropriate, or if the incident is in breach of the following:

- Protection from Harassment Act 1997

- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Communications Act 2003
- Defamation Act 2013

#### **Parish Council website**

Where necessary, the Clerk may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information or may forward the question to one of our Parish Councillors for consideration and response. The Clerk may not be able to respond to every comment we receive. The Parish 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 Parish Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site. The Parish Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Parish 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 Parish Council.

#### **Parish Council email**

The Clerk to the council's email account is monitored during the advertised office opening hours, and the Clerk aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as possible. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copied to the Clerk, but must make it very clear that they are not writing on behalf of the Council. NB any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

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

#### **SMS (texting)**

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. This policy also applies to such messages.

#### **Video conferencing e.g. Skype/Teams/Zoom.**

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of videoconferencing.

The Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy from time to time to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Signed: .....  
Chairman

Date: 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Reviewed: 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025