



# Eccleshall

## Parish Council

### SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

#### **Aim of the policy**

The purpose of this document is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Eccleshall Parish Councillors, Parish Council staff and others who engage with the Parish Council using social media.

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

In the main, Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

#### **What is Social Media?**

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

- Facebook, LinkedIn and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clip and podcast sites
- Blogs and discussion forums

Social media does not replace existing forms of communication. The current Code of Conduct applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Parish Council capacity.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute Parish Council agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities
- Announce new information from the Parish Council
- Promote links to news stories on the Parish website
- Advertise Parish Council vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Post or share information from other Parish Council-related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other Parish Councillors

#### **Parish Council use of Online and Social Media - Code of Practice**

When using social media Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish 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.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media that denigrates Parish Councillors, Parish Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Parish Council.

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 Parish Council
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish 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 the email address of any other Parish Councillor without their written permission
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that infringes the copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Parish 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
- Publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation as doing so is libellous and can result in a court action and a fine for damages
- Post copyrighted images or text on social media as it is an offence to do so. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- Publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.
- Publish obscene material as it is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

It is understood that social media platforms operate 24/7, however it is not expected that they will be monitored continuously and not all messages or comments will be individually responded to.

Sending a message via the website or social media will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes. However, if communication is deemed relevant then it may be referred to in official meetings for the benefit of updating the council on issues of potential importance.

Views expressed by others that remain present on the website or a social media platform are not necessarily endorsed by the parish council and the Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted online.

The Clerk will have authority to remove from council social media pages any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Date of policy – 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2017.