

# **Cottingham Parish Council Social Media & Communication Policy**

## **Introduction and Purpose of Policy**

Cottingham Parish Council (The Parish Council) recognises the need to continually and innovatively review, enhance and improve its communication and engagement with the residents of Cottingham, including all businesses and partner organisations, by the use of online methods of communication. This policy provides guidance and reassurance as to how this can be achieved and how the Parish Council retains authority and control over such means of communication. In addition, the policy provides guidance to Parish Councillors and its Officers in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media, a term used to describe methods of publishing and communicating via the internet.

The policy covers all communication via the Parish Council website, e-mails and social networking sites Twitter and Facebook etc. The website will remain the main source of information about the Parish Council and its activities, 'networking' platforms will largely be used to speedily enhance/direct users to the website or other sources of information.

Anyone accessing the Parish Council's social media site will be expected to have installed, on their own devices, a robust, regularly updated, industry standard virus checker and firewall.

## **Management of Social Media used by the Parish Council**

Whilst the senior Clerk will remain the key contact and administrator for social media activity, particularly in terms of the website management, support will be required from councillors, who as nominated Moderators, will monitor the social networking sites and may also respond (in consultation with the Chairman) to and initiate social media messages.

The principles of this policy apply to Parish Councillors and Clerks and is also intended for general guidance for others who are communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing Council policies e.g., Code of Conduct and Standing Orders, which should be taken into consideration.

Information on Social media applications

The website may be used to:

- Post minutes and agendas, dates of meetings
- Provide contact details for the Parish Council (Clerk and Cllrs)
- Advertise projects, events and activities being carried out by the Parish Council.
- Good news stories linked website or press page.
- Councillor and staff vacancies
- Announcing new information.
- Post or share information, at the discretion of the Parish Council, from ERYC and Parish related community groups, clubs, associations, bodies e.g., Schools, sports clubs etc.

Recognising the popularity of Facebook/Twitter etc., these will be used to support the website information above and provide a more informal platform for the Parish Council to

provide information and updates regarding activities within Cottingham and promote positive thoughts and comments from residents.

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.
- if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by the Parish Council Clerk (the Moderator).
- not to be used for the dissemination of any political advertising or communication.
- not to be used for any commercial advertising or promotion.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Parish Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Parish Council's aims and objectives, all staff and Councillors are requested to be mindful of the following criteria: -

- Be considerate and respectful of others – vulgarity, threats and/or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including staff or Councillors, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Parish Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- stay on topic.

The Parish Council social media sites (and emails) are not monitored 24/7 and the Parish Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, the Parish Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people/authority.

### **General guidance for councillors when using social media**

Whilst it is mainly the senior Parish Clerk who is responsible for inputs into social media platforms, Councillors are expected to ensure the following principles are observed as matters of good practice and to take responsibility as 'moderators' for all final published content.

- Any social media content (even informal) needs to be clearly attributed to the Parish Council and content should not be presented in a way that might cause embarrassment or bring the Parish Council into disrepute - therefore all social media should, where practical, be authorised by the Parish Council Chairman or a Moderator prior to publication. With this in mind the Parish Council is aware that not all communications require an immediate response, or even a response at all, however, responses to

contentious communications may require a discussion by the Parish Councillors prior to posting, and must be agreed by the Parish Council Chairman and/or the Moderator.

- All content posted on any social media site must not be an expression of individual opinion (that of individual Councillors or the Clerks) and must not bring the Parish Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- Councillors must use their discretion and common sense when engaging on their own personal social media sites. Councillors should also be aware that any content posted on their own site may not be private and may be distributed beyond the intended recipients.
- With regard to Facebook / Twitter etc., even though style may be less formal than the website, the tone of comments must remain respectful, informative and not contain remarks that could be perceived as being inflammatory.
- Permission to publish photographs or videos on any social media site should be sought from the subjects before being uploaded or distributed. Checks should be made regarding copyright.
- Avoid any content which may violate laws or regulations, in particular relating to data protection laws - for instance as a general rule, an individual's name or personal details should not be published on Parish Council social media unless written permission is provided.
- Any negative posts placed on the Parish Council social media platforms which may contain personal and inflammatory racist, sexist or homophobic remarks or defamatory information will be removed by the Parish Clerks and/or Moderator without further comment or notification. In addition, the Parish Council reserve the right to remove comments or content that includes:
  - Obscene content
  - Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
  - Potentially libellous statements
  - Plagiarized material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
  - Private, personal information published without consent
  - Information or links unrelated to the Parish Council / Cottingham village.
- The Parish Council reserve the right to report any user, who is thought to have broken any law, to the appropriate authority.
- Councillors or residents who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them in the first instance to the Clerk of the Council via the Parish Council e.mail address [clerk@cottinghamcouncil.org](mailto:clerk@cottinghamcouncil.org) or by telephone 01482 875489

## **General guidance for councillors when attending Remote Meetings**

- Councillors and Clerks are expected to dress as for a face-to-face public meeting.
- Remove any distraction, switch off any televisions, radios or any other distracting equipment, close any doors if there is noisy activity on the premises.
- Remain on 'Mute' during the meeting unless speaking, to ensure high quality audio.
- If disturbed during the meeting switch off the camera/video function to ensure privacy. This is also less distraction for the other meeting participants.
- Do not swear or use profane language and show respect to the other participants.
- To indicate you wish to speak raise your virtual hand, in exceptional circumstances if this facility is not available, raise your physical hand. Please inform the chairman, at the start of the meeting, which option you are using.
- Do not interrupt a speaker, wait to be invited to speak by the chairman.
- If you have to leave the virtual meeting early, please inform the chairman at the start of the meeting.

### **General principles of Communication and legal waivers**

- 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 the Facebook channel. Instead, please contact the Clerk.
- The Parish Council will never publish your personal details or pass them onto a third party without your express permission and you should not include personal/private information in your Facebook posts/messages to us. The Parish Council will not take responsibility for any consequences resulting from a person or persons publishing personal details on their social media platforms but will make every effort to remove them where requested.
- Opinions expressed by the public on the Parish Councils social media forums do not necessarily represent those of the Parish Council.
- All comments, once posted, become the property of the Parish Council and the Parish Council reserves the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display, or edit.
- The Parish Council is not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook or any other social media site and any linked websites. The use of Facebook etc. and any linked websites is at your own risk.

- The Parish Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.
- The Parish Council website may be occasionally taken off the internet for maintenance purposes – every effort will be made to communicate this fact to the public. The Parish Council also accepts no responsibility for the lack of service if Facebook is occasionally unavailable.
- The Parish Council is strictly non-political, and will not engage in or with, and will remove any posts or comments on issues of a political nature.
- By choosing to comment and/or utilise any of the Parish Council’s social media sites, users are deemed to agree to this policy.
- The chairman, at the start of every Council meeting, shall read out the following:

*“All mobile phones and other electronics devices should be switch to mute and only used to facilitate this meeting. The public are welcome to attend but are only permitted to speak with the chairman’s permission. Parish Council Meetings are meetings held in public, not public meetings”*

Parish Council Working Party meetings are not open to the public and are by invitation only, mobile phone etiquette should still be adhered to.

- All Cottingham Parish Councillors and employees of Cottingham Parish Council will be required to sign this policy and adhere to the standards set herein.
- The Policy will be reviewed bi-annually.

Revised xx/9/2021