



# Churchill Parish Council

## Online Publication & Social Media Policy

1. Policy statement
  - 1.1. Churchill Parish Council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the parish. The Council will always aim 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.
  - 1.2 This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions when using method of online publishing such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards and the like.
  - 1.3 The council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:
    - providing and exchanging information about services;
    - supporting local democracy;
    - seeking parishioners' views and managing relationships;
    - promoting cultural events or tourism for the area;
    - supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience; and
    - internal communications, learning and development.
  - 1.4 This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with, all relevant legislation and other policies and procedures adopted by the council, including copyright, data protection, freedom of information and safeguarding legislation. The Council's Equal Opportunities Policy must also be adhered to.
  - 1.5 This policy will be reviewed annually or when tested by a complaint.
  - 1.6 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.
2. Who is covered by this policy
  - 2.1 All individuals working at all levels with Churchill Parish council are covered by this policy and are referred to as council representatives. This includes

elected and co-opted members, council employees, contractors and volunteers (collectively referred to as 'staff' in this policy).

3. Terms of use for online publication and social media
- 3.1. All council representatives are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.
- 3.2 The Council may take action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, racially offensive comments by a council representative. Any communication or content published by staff that causes damage to the Council, any of its employees or any third party's reputation may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct to which the Council's Disciplinary Policy applies.
- 3.3 Breach of this policy by volunteers will result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
- 3.4 Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code does not apply. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and factual. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means it is more likely that they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.
- 3.5 National rules do not prevent councillors from tweeting or blogging during public meetings, therefore they are able to do so provided it is not disruptive and does not detract from the proper conduct of the meeting. Councillors are requested not to tweet or blog a discussion while it is in progress, that is, before a decision is reached. Councillors must not blog or tweet matters discussed in confidential session.
- 3.6 It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent, public and uncontained. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.
- 3.7 Council representatives must not allow their interaction through social media to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves.
- 3.8 Posts must not contain another person's personal information, other than necessary basic and already publically available contact details.
- 3.9 The use of social networking applications has implications for the Council's duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults. It is

imperative that appropriate permissions are in place before photos of children are used.

- 3.10 If staff or councillors use social media in a personal capacity outside their official role they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council. Councillors and staff must avoid publishing any information that they could only have accessed from their corporate position.
- 3.11 Freedom of speech within the law should be exercised with personal and social responsibility, showing respect and tolerance towards the views of others.
- 3.12 All Council representatives must ensure they use Council facilities appropriately. If using an official Council website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.
- 3.13 The Clerk is responsible for publishing official posts and for monitoring the content on the Council's online pages, ensuring it complies with this Social Media Policy. The Clerk will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's online pages if the comments are deemed to be offensive, inflammatory or of a defamatory nature.
- 3.14 The Clerk may use the Council's official online sites to:
- Post notices and minutes of meetings
  - Advertise events and activities
  - Post news stories appropriate to the Council
  - Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
  - Advertise vacancies
  - Retweet or 'share' information from partners i. e. police, library, District Council, etc.
  - Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
  - Post other items as the Council see fit.
  - Facebook and/or Twitter, etc., may be used to support the website and its information as above.
- 3.15 The Clerk may use the Council's emblem and other branding where appropriate to indicate the Council's support for a publication. The logo should not be used on social networking applications which are unrelated to or are not representative of the Council's official position.
- 3.16 Council representatives are responsible for the content they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-

mail address, which is used for all council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

3.17 All online and social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.

3.18 When participating in official online communication council representatives must;

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the council.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment; they must protect the good reputation of the council.
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or “loud.” Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in any protected characteristic, such as race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, marital status, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Do not post comments that you would not be prepared make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents.
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as defamation and copyright.
- Spell and grammar check everything.

3.19 Council representatives should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

3.20 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the council it can be raised either during the public participation session prior to a meeting or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. Any response agreed by the council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

3.21 Any complaints or concerns regarding content placed on online and social media sites should be reported to the Clerk and/or full council as required.

Churchill Parish Council  
Adopted by Churchill Parish Council 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021

End of policy.