

Kelvedon Parish Council

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Approved: March 2021
Review due: March 2023

Kelvedon Parish Council

Communication and Social Media Policy

This policy covers all individuals within the Parish Council (hereinafter referred to as the 'Council'), including all elected and co-opted Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and all other employees 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 interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments by the employee.

Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

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.

Communication

The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed or forwarded to. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk, or the Clerk's Assistant, as delegated. A Parish Councillor may be authorised to communicate directly with outside parties or the public, either by the Clerk, the Parish Council Chair, or by resolution of the Parish Council or its Committees.

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community, as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on the Parish Council. Enquiries may be made in person, by telephone, letter, email or via social media.

At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them, other than to investigate the matter, unless they have been specifically authorised to do so. All manner of issues may be raised, some of which may not be relevant to the Parish Council. Depending on the issue raised, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- Refer the matter to the Clerk to progress the enquiry.
- Request the Clerk to place an item on a relevant agenda.
- Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Clerk, for future referral to the Parish Council.

All communication must be responded to and the correspondent kept apprised of progress. The Parish Clerk must be copied in to all communication. The procedure for doing so is as follows:

1. Having received an enquiry, the Councillor should acknowledge receipt (if in writing) and advise the enquirer what action is intended to be taken.
2. Advise when that action has been taken and what to expect next (e.g. a response is now awaited from (a third party)).

3. Report back on the outcome of the enquiry or ensure that either the third party or the Parish Clerk will/has report(ed) back on the matter.

Councillors must ensure that all communication with the public on Parish Council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of the Parish Council, regardless of the Councillor's own views on any subject.

Complaints

If a Councillor receives a complaint about the Parish Council, another Councillor or a member of staff, this must be forwarded immediately to the Parish Clerk who will invoke the correct Complaints Procedure. Any complaints about the Parish Clerk must be forwarded immediately to the Chair of the Parish Council.

Press Communications

Unless a Councillor has been specifically authorised to speak to the press on a particular issue, any and all enquires by the media should be referred immediately to the Parish Clerk or the Chair of the Parish Council (or Vice-Chair in their absence). Press reports or comments will be cleared by the Clerk with the Chair of the Parish Council or the Chair of the relevant Committee, as appropriate.

If a Councillor speaks to the press in an individual capacity, it must be made explicitly clear that they are expressing a personal view and request that this is stated in the report.

Any articles for publication on behalf of the Parish Council and/or in a Councillor's official role, must be cleared by the Clerk, the Chair or the Vice-Chair, to ensure that the Parish Council's views are being correctly reported and all factual and procedural information being given is correct.

Social Media

The Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:

- Promoting the Parish Council's activities
- Informing and keeping parishioners up to date with projects or other issues within the parish.
- Providing and exchanging information about services
- Supporting local democracy
- Gathering residents' insights and managing relationships
- Promoting cultural events or tourism for the area
- Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience

This policy outlines the standards which the Council requires Councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code of Conduct does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate.

Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity and as such, all personal views must be explicitly stated as such. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public.

The Use of Social Media

Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires either a response or an immediate response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate. When the policy of the Parish Council is questioned, or its opinion requested, the administrator of the platform (either a delegated Councillor, or a contracted PR consultant) should contact the Parish Clerk to agree the most appropriate response, which should then be posted.

Where further investigation is required, or it is more appropriate to take the query or statement 'offline', the poster should be invited to email or phone the Clerk for an individual response, or the Clerk will directly message them.

The Parish Clerk will decide how best to deal with the query and will call on Councillors, or other relevant persons to assist, if needed.

If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council, it may be raised by a member of the public during the public discussion section on the agenda, or as a full agenda item for consideration at the appropriate Parish Council or Committee meeting and minuted accordingly. The 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and be invited to contact the Clerk directly.

Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk, or the moderator/administrator, to be dealt with as appropriate.

If a Councillor or member of staff wishes to blog, post, tweet or participate in a social media discussion as an individual, rather than in an official KPC capacity, this must be explicitly stated at the very start of participation. Wording such as 'I am commenting as an individual, not as a Parish Councillor - opinions expressed are my own and may not reflect those of Kelvedon Parish Council', must be used to ensure that there are no misconceptions.

When participating in online communication, staff and Councillors must:-

- Be responsible and respectful; not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sex, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment or bring the Council into disrepute.
- 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 political, controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so and ensure that posts do not contain anyone's personal information unless they have expressly given permission in writing.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or video from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental or guardian permission before photos or videos of children, or vulnerable adults, are used and pass evidence to the Clerk that this has been given.
- Not post or re-post CCTV footage regarding alleged crime or criminal behaviour.
- 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 libel and copyright.
- Spell and grammar check everything.
- Ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as being made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political posts.

The Council's website, Facebook page and Twitter may be used to:-

- Post notices and minutes of meetings.
- Advertise events and activities.
- Share information from government, Essex County Council, Braintree District Council or other local authority/government sources.
- Post good news stories.
- 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.
- Announce new information appropriate to the Council.
- 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.

Staff and individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their Parish Council email address which is solely used for Council business. Both staff and councillors are required to have separate Council and personal email addresses.

Moderation of Parish Council Social Media

The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator, who will be responsible for monitoring the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Policy. There will be three administrators on the Parish Council's Facebook page, one being the PR consultant and the other two either staff or members of the Council, as delegated.

The moderator will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Clerk for Council records.

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All social media sites in use will be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

Review

The Policy will be reviewed every two years, or when deemed necessary by the Parish Council.

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