



Theydon Bois Parish Council

Media and Communications Policy

Adopted: 28th November 2019

(Revised and amended 19th April 2023)

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to the Parish Councillors in the use of electronic media and online communications, including social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This Policy covers all forms of communication, including social media and social networking sites, including (but not limited to):

- The Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter, and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube, and other video clips and podcast sites.
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council Emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and to the Clerk and staff to the Parish Council. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The Policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The use of social media is not intended to replace existing forms of communication. The 'Village News Magazine' will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council along with the Parish Council Website. Other forms of social media will only be used to enhance communication; therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Parish Council Media and Communications Policy

The Parish Council will appoint the Parish Clerk as the moderator of the Parish Council's website. The moderator will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content of news items only ensuring that anything posted complies with the Media and Communications Policy.

Any content for posting / publishing which is relevant to the activities and decisions of the Parish Council may be sent to the Parish Clerk (moderator) by the following:

- Committee Chairs, and the Chairman of the Parish Council, are encouraged to supply brief user-friendly summaries of recent meetings for posting or placing on the website. This can be delegated to another member of the Committee or staff if preferred. Councillors with responsibilities that will have information relevant to the public, such as highways matters, may also submit details through the Parish Clerk.
- Any Councillor; provided that any information pertaining to a Committee or specific area of responsibility is first agreed with the Chairman of the Parish Council, relevant Committee Chair or Councillor with specific responsibility.
- Office Staff; in connection with their assigned responsibility within the Office team. Again, content should first be agreed by the Chairman of the Parish Council, the relevant Committee Chair, or Councillor if applicable.
- The Parish Clerk as moderator should refuse to post or publish content that does not conform to these guidelines. Any disputes will be referred to the relevant Committee or the Full Council.

The Parish Council Website and social media may be used to:

- Post dates of Meetings, Agendas, and Minutes
- Advertise events and activities
- Post relevant news stories, linked websites or press pages
- Advertise Vacancies
- Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. police, library and health etc.
- Announce new information
- Refer resident queries to the Parish Clerk.

Parish Council Facebook site

A Parish Council Facebook site may be used to support the website information above. The Facebook site will initially, as agreed by Councillors, be set up as an online noticeboard only and therefore no comments will be able to be made by members of the public. Should anyone wish to contact the Parish Clerk then they will be asked to do so in the normal manner by letter, email or by telephone.

Councillors and Social Media

Individual Parish Councillors and Staff shall not speak for the Parish Council to the Press or on Social Media unless explicitly authorised by the Chairman of the Parish Council or the relevant Committee Chairman. Councillors may speak as individuals, but care must be taken to ensure that a reasonable person could not assume that they are speaking on behalf of the Parish Council and that their personal Social Media publications are clearly different from any similar official Parish Council Social Media.

Guidance when using electronic communication and Social Media (including email)

All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place. When participating in any online communication Councillors and Staff must:

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
- All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or beliefs should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from any copy right holder before being uploaded.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, including libel and copyright.

Procedure

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.

The Clerk deals with all correspondence.

No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, subcommittee or working party. Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper, making it clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Parish Council.

Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.

Parish Council responses to emails and online communication

If the Parish Clerk feels unable to answer an email, or post on social media, for example of a contentious nature, this shall be referred to the Parish Council, or if an urgent response is required, the Parish Clerk will confer with the Chairman, or Vice Chairman, of the Parish Council before responding. The resident, or party making the enquiry, will be informed of this fact using the appropriate method.

Some communications from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available Agenda. Any response will then be included in the Minutes of the meeting.

The moderator (Parish Clerk) will remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

Councillors or residents who have any concerns regarding content placed on the Parish Council's Website, or Facebook site, or on Social Media sites controlled by the Parish Council, should report them to the Parish Clerk. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

This Policy will be reviewed annually.