

# **Pickmere Parish Council**

**DRAFT for consideration by Council on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

## **Media, Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy**

Version: Draft 1.0; 13 Jun 23  
Agreed at full council meeting on:  
Next review: Jun 24

## **1. Introduction**

The use of digital and electronic communications enables Pickmere Parish Council (PPC) to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The objective of this policy is to provide councillors, staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy) an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition it includes Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

## **2. Definition of Social Media and Digital Communications**

Social Media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. PPC has a website and Facebook site and uses e-mail and text (WhatsApp) to communicate. Over time PPC may add to the channels of communication it uses.

## **3. How Social Media and Digital Communications will be used by the Council**

- To distribute agendas, post approved minutes and dates of meetings and all documents required by the Transparency Code which will among other things include all meeting papers
- To share information specifically agreed to be communicated via social media at Council meetings
- To advertise events and activities the Council has organised or supports as being beneficial to the community
- To publish 'good news' stories relevant to the local area
- To announce new information relevant to people living in and around the Pickmere area.
- To provide and exchange information about local services and events
- To gather local residents insights
- To advertise vacancies
- To share relevant information from partner agencies such as Cheshire East Council, Police etc.
- To share relevant information from local community groups
- To digitally publish Pickmere Press

## **4. Code of Practice**

Communications from the council will meet the following criteria:

- Only be through the official PPC communication options listed in section 2.
- Be civil, tasteful and relevant
- Be objective, balanced, informative and accurate

- 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 the Council do not own the copyright. Permission will be sought to publish original photos or videos. Accidental posting of material, including photos, for which express permission has not be obtained will be deleted as soon as the error is discovered and a noted added to explain the deletion.
- Not contain any personal information
- Not contain political advertising
- Not be used for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products either directly or indirectly
- Not be anonymised, deidentified or using a false name
- Be spell and grammar checked

## **5. Responsibilities**

### **Clerk**

The Clerk, or Chair in their absence, is responsible for posting content on the Council website and social media pages. The Clerk may initiate posts or comments without prior approval for the purpose of circulating or responding with public domain information, public service notices and details from approved Parish Council minutes. All other posts must be on instruction from the Council. Requests for something to be posted on the Parish Councils Facebook page should be directed to the Parish Clerk.

The Clerk and/or the Chair is responsible for moderating PPC social media and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media and Digital Communications policy. Individual council members who observe inappropriate material should report it to the Chair and or Clerk immediately. The Parish Council Facebook page is reactively moderated. The Council cannot accept any responsibility for the content of any comment but needs to action any inappropriate posts..

The Clerk, or Chair in their absence, has the authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the Council social media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory or libellous nature. Repeat offenders, twice or more, will be blocked from PPC social media sites.

New social media accounts in the Councils name must not be created unless authorised by the Council. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Clerk, or Chair in their absence.

The Clerk, or Chair in their absence, is responsible for dealing with all email received and passing on any relevant mail to members and external agencies for information and /or action. All communications on behalf of the council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise be copied to the Clerk.

### **Councillors**

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

Councillors must ensure that all communications with the public on council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of PPC, regardless of the councillors individual views on any subject. PPC will agree its statements for release to the press and social media.

At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. The matter can be dealt with in the following ways: refer it to the Parish Clerk, or Chair in their absence, request an item on the relevant agenda, investigate the matter personally and report to Council or send a link to the relevant information on the website.

Councillors are at liberty to set up their own social media groups but should clearly identify that they are personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Councils views. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature especially in relation to the councils status as an employer. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language. Councillors should be respectful of the Council, its Councillors, volunteers and employees.

All Councillors should use their Council email addresses when conducting Council business. The Council email addresses should be used solely for Council business. Always copy in the Clerk and the Chair. This ensures that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

When writing communications always assume that they may have to be disclosed. Deleted emails can be retrieved and may be disclosable to a court, the Information Commissioner or to the public via a Freedom of Information request.

This policy also applies to the Council WhatsApp group.

## **6. Information for our residents**

The Facebook site is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages and comments received. However the Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal / private information in your social media posts to the Council.

Sending a message / post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and council will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests via these channels. Instead please make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the Council by emailing.

The Clerks email address is  
[clerk@pickmereparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@pickmereparishcouncil.gov.uk)

The email account is not monitored 24/7. The Clerk works part-time. All emails will be acknowledged and questions will be answered as soon as possible.

## **7. Media Enquiries**

The Parish Clerk, or the Chair in their absence co-ordinates all media enquiries to the Parish Council. Where reasonably practicable, Parish Council staff and Councillors should refer all media enquiries to the Parish Clerk in the first instance. The Parish Clerk co-ordinates all media enquiries to the Parish Council. Councillors and Parish Council staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Councillors are in any doubt, they should consult the Parish Clerk, politely explaining to the enquirer, that they are unable to speak for the Parish Council at this time.

The Parish Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Councillors. The phrase “no comment” should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry

## **8. TC, Radio and online Interviews.**

Any member of staff or elected member who is contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a representative of the Parish Council should refer the matter to the Parish Clerk or the Chair in their absence. The person put forward for interview by Pickmere Parish Council will depend on the situation and the information required by the journalist. The individual(s) selected should never give their opinion on specific Parish Council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of the Parish Council’s approved and agreed policies.

Members can give interviews to the Press without approval of the council in certain circumstances. However, the member must make it clear that they are speaking as an individual and not as a member, employee or officer of Pickmere Parish Council.

Interviews with Press should be recorded in order to maintain a record of the conversation to avoid issues relating to journalistic licence. The requirements of this policy apply in all cases including interviews given by Members, Officers, Volunteers & Employees as a private citizen.

## **9. Purdah**

In the six weeks in the run up to an election (local or general) councils must not do or say anything that could be viewed in any way to support any party or candidate. This period is known as purdah. The Council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but may have to remove responses that are overtly political. Councillors operating their own social media groups must also be aware and comply with this.

## **10. Breach of this policy**

- Failure to comply with this policy by Councillors may be deemed as a breach of the Members Code of Conduct and could be reported to the Monitoring Officer.
- Other violations, such as breaching the Data Protection Act and employment law could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual/s involved and/or the council.
- The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by employees and Councillors deemed inappropriate, or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.
- Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Councillor or the Council.
- Employees should be aware that where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under the Disciplinary Procedure.