

Reedham Parish Council

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Introduction

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Parish Council and between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website, a Facebook page, and uses email to communicate. The Parish Council will always try 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. When these changes occur this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The Parish Council Facebook page and website are intended to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

Standards of Conduct

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, other than necessary basic contact details.
- If official council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Parish Council or by the Clerk to the Parish Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Parish Council's Facebook page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Parish Council members or staff, will not be permitted.

- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

The sites are not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we 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 us.

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 these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.

The Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Allegations of a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Parish Council's response to any communications received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Parish Council may post a statement that, '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed*'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

Parish Council Website

Where necessary, the Clerk may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or they may forward their question to one of our Parish Councillors for consideration and response. The Clerk may not be able to respond to every comment we receive.

Parish Council Email

The Clerk to the Council can be contacted at: clerk@reedhamparishcouncil.gov.uk

The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and the Clerk aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as they can. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Individual councillors are also provided with council-owned email addresses and are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk, but must make it very clear that they are not writing on behalf of the Council.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Councillors and staff are reminded that personal information should not be forwarded on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses and email addresses.

Freedom of Information and Records

Councillors are issued with official Parish Council email addresses. Any correspondence sent or received via these accounts which relates to Parish Council business is deemed to be Council information and may be subject to Freedom of Information and data protection legislation, whether or not the Clerk is copied into the correspondence. Councillors are encouraged to copy the Clerk into correspondence where appropriate, to ensure continuity, accurate record-keeping, and efficient administration.

Content created, received, or shared via social media or electronic communication which relates to Parish Council business may constitute a Council record and may be retained in accordance with the Council's records retention policy.

SMS (texting)

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. This policy also applies to such messages.

Instant messaging and group messaging platforms

Councillors and the Clerk may use instant messaging platforms (including, but not limited to, WhatsApp, or Messenger) for informal communication and administrative coordination only. Such platforms must not be used for the transaction of formal Parish Council business, decision-making, or debate. Decisions must be taken at properly convened meetings or through lawful procedures.

Video conferencing, e.g. Zoom

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of videoconferencing.

The Council is not able to hold formal meetings via video conferencing; councillors must be in attendance in the meeting room.

Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed by the Parish Council at least every three years, or sooner to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Adopted: 5th September 2022

Review Period: 3 Yearly

This Review: 12th January 2026

Next Review Date: January 2029

Signed:

Chairman