

Lessingham Parish Council Social Media Policy

Why? The Parish Council recognises the need to enhance and improve its communication and engagement with the residents of Lessingham, businesses and partner organisations by the use of online methods of communication. This policy provides guidance and reassurance as to how this can be achieved whilst the Parish Council retains authority and control over such communication.

What? This policy provides guidance to Lessingham Parish Councillors and those working for and with the council in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media, a term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers all communication via the Parish Council website, emails and the social networking sites Twitter and Facebook.

The website will remain the main source of information about the Parish Council and its activities and the networking posts will largely be used to enhance/direct users to the website or other sources of information/advice.

Control? A Councillor will be nominated as the key contact and administrator for social media activity, particularly in terms of the website management. Support can be received from councillors as nominated 'moderators' who will monitor the social networking sites, respond and post messages. As an employee of the Council, the Clerk shall retain the choice of whether to engage on the Council's social media forums, and shall not be required to engage through that medium.

Who? The principles of this policy apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk to the Council and is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing Council policies e.g. Code of Conduct and Standing Orders, which should be taken into consideration.

Social media applications

The website may be used to

1. Post minutes and dates of meetings
2. Advertise events and activities
3. Good news stories linked website or press page
4. Vacancies
5. Retweeting or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
6. Announcing new information.
7. Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups, clubs, associations, bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
8. Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors
9. Provide information about the community (historical context)

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business and will remain the primary method of communication with the Council. Any complaints and enquiries raised through social media should be directed to the Council's official channels, through the Clerk to the Council.

Facebook/Twitter will be used to support the website information above and provide information and updates regarding activities within Lessingham and promote positive thoughts and comments from residents.

General guidance for councillors when using social media

1. When participating in any online communication;
 - a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasis points.
 - e. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
 - f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
 - g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
 - h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
2. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
3. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
4. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.
 - a. There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council.
 - b. The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
 - c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
 - d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Parish clerk. The poster will informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.
 - e. Some communication 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.

5. The nominated moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libelous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
 - a) Spell and grammar check everything.
 - b) Correct any errors promptly
6. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
7. The Policy will be reviewed periodically.

Guidance to Facebook users

1. In order to ensure that all discussions on the Lessingham Parish Council page are productive, respectful, energized and consistent with the Council's mission and goals, 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 Lessingham 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 Facebook page for commercial purposes or to market products.
2. 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.
3. 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 the Facebook channel. Instead, please contact the Clerk directly. Please do not include personal/private information in your Facebook posts/messages to us.
4. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:
 - Obscene or racist content
 - Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
 - Potentially libellous statements
 - Plagiarized 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

Non-compliance will not be tolerated and can result in a ban

5. Lessingham Parish Council are not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber in any forum; opinions expressed in comments on Lessingham Parish Councils social media forums do not necessarily represent those of Lessingham Parish Council.
6. All comments, once posted, become the property of Lessingham Parish Council and we reserve the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display or edit. Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content, and used for any purpose, in any form and on any other media.
7. Lessingham Parish Council are not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook or any linked websites. Your use of Facebook and any linked websites is at your own risk.
8. Lessingham Parish Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.
10. Facebook may occasionally be unavailable and we accept no responsibility for this lack of service.
11. The presence of any advertisement on Facebook is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and Lessingham Parish Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.
12. We will not engage in/with, and we discourage posts or comments on, issues of a political nature.
13. Comments should not advertise commercial products or services.
14. This comment policy may be revised at any time.
15. By choosing to comment and/or utilise any Lessingham Parish Council Social Media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

Adopted: May 2023

Next Review: May 2025