



# COGGESHALL PARISH COUNCIL

## Press and Social Media Policy

Coggeshall Parish Council's interaction with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying needs and measuring satisfaction. Effective information, news and media relations are an essential factor.

This policy does not set out to be comprehensive, but is to guide Parish Council Members and anyone employed by the Council in their relations with the news media.

1. The term media encompasses many different means of communicating information to a wide audience and includes the following: Radio, Television, Internet, Facebook, Twitter, Newspapers, Magazines, Leaflets and Posters.
2. If a Councillor receives an approach or enquiry from the media about any matter relating to the Parish Council this will be referred as speedily as practicable to the Chair and the Clerk. Remember that the data protection act and the Freedom of information act all allow at least three weeks for a reply, so never be tempted to make up an answer on the spot. It is always better to consult before speaking.
  - a. Where this is a matter where no council policy has yet been made the matter should be considered by the full council at the next scheduled meeting or, if of sufficient importance, at an additional meeting before a formal reply is given.
  - b. Where personal views expressed differ from council policy this must be made clear. Care must be taken not to misrepresent and/or bring the Parish Council into disrepute or undermine any decision made and must take account of the role and responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct.
  - c. Nothing in these guidelines seeks to prevent any individual from expressing a personal opinion, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on the internet, but always remember that no councillor can act independently. Therefore, make it clear in what capacity you are speaking. As an individual, you can have whatever opinion you choose; but, as a councillor, you are there to promote the decisions of the council. You have an obligation to respect council policy once made. If you disagreed with the policy, your time to say so was in the council meeting.
3. If in doubt, it is better to refer the enquirer to the Clerk, Chair or Vice Chair or (if no appropriate policy exists) after discussion with the full council.
4. All correspondence goes through the clerk. No other employee or councillor should contact the media on any matter related to the Parish Council unless specifically authorised by a council minute. Wherever possible the Clerk will prepare all written Press Releases or Statements and copies will be retained.

5. The disclosure and sharing of information should normally be restricted to matters that have been discussed as an Agenda Item by the Parish Council with the exception of requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, in which case, the Clerk will manage the response to ensure that the Council complies fully with the requirements of the Act.
6. No information of a confidential nature may be disclosed.
7. No matter relating to the conduct or capability of a Councillor at a Meeting can be disclosed.
8. When attending a public meeting as a representative of the Parish Council, an individual will ensure that any comments they make are accurate and reflect the views of the council as a whole or, if not, that this is made known.

### Social Media – Facebook, Twitter

The Clerk and appointed Councillors will act as moderators for the Council Facebook Page. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the clerk.

The Clerk will be the appointed “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Parish Council Website.

The social media may be used to;

- Advertise events and activities
- Publish links to agendas and minutes of meetings
- Give details of public consultations
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Retweeting or ‘share’ information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other Parish related communities groups/clubs/associations/ bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

Individual Parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses, and adhere to The Members’ Code of Conduct, see Guidance for Councillors at the end of this document.

### **Guidance for Councillors using the Council's Social Media Presence**

1. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.

2. When participating in any online communication; Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
3. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
8. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
9. 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.
10. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
11. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
12. 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.
13. The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
  - a. Spell and grammar check everything.
  - b. Correct any errors promptly.

14. 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.

This Policy will be reviewed annually