



# Chelveston-cum-Caldecott Parish Council

## Northamptonshire

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### Social Media Policy (Ver. 3)

#### 1 Introduction

1.1 Social media is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This policy and guidelines cover social media issues over the internet and by e-mail, smart phones, social networking sites, blogging, and tweeting.

1.2 Social media increases the accessibility of our communication (especially, but not exclusively, to the younger residents). It enables us to be more active in our relationships with the public, partners and stakeholders and encourages people to be involved in local decision making, enabling better engagement and feedback. In turn this helps to improve the services we provide.

1.3 For the purposes of this policy, the term "Social Media" covers sites and applications including (but not limited to) Facebook, X (Twitter), MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums, wikis and any sites which may emerge after the creation of this policy where Chelveston-cum-Caldecott Parish Council could be represented via online participation.

1.4 At the time this policy was adopted, the Council's only official social media account was a X (Twitter) account ([@ChelvestonPC](#)), but the policy will apply equally to any new official accounts that may be created in the future.

1.5 The Council acknowledges social media as a useful tool, however, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media sites to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks, reputational damage or breach the *Data Protection Act 2018* and successor legislation.

1.6. Social media can be used by the Council to:-

- Help promote the Council
- Direct more traffic to our website ([www.chelveston-pc.gov.uk](http://www.chelveston-pc.gov.uk))
- Encourage consultation and discussion
- Provide a news feed and emergency information
- Promote events and publicising key dates

1.7. The Data Controller is the Clerk to the Parish Council.

1.8. The Data Protection Officer (DPO) is the Northants County Association of Local Councils.

#### 2 Purpose

2.1 This policy gives guidelines on how to use social media, sets out how we can effectively manage social media usage and indicates how any risks or pitfalls can be minimised or mitigated. The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Virus or other malware from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the Council's reputation.
- Social engineering attacks (phishing).
- Bullying or witch-hunting.
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
- Breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors through inappropriate use.



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2.2 In light of these risks, the use of social media sites should be regulated to ensure that such use does not damage the Council, its employees, Councillors, partners and the people it serves. As such this policy aims to ensure:

- A consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- Users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- The Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

### 3 Policy statement

3.1 This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems / networks.

3.2 Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly. They must ensure that their use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

### 4 Guidance for Councillors

4.1 Councillors are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action.

4.2 Councillors using social media in a personal capacity must ensure that this use is strictly personal. Nevertheless the public may recognise individual Councillors as part of the Council and it is important that Councillors ensure that their personal use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the Council.

4.3 Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure you are confident of the nature of the information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.

4.4 Make use of stringent privacy settings if you don't want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms and conditions of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality / privacy settings.

4.5 Do not disclose personal details such as people's home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the *Data Protection Act 2018* (and successor legislation).

4.6 Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business, so if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report these -

- For children and young people, contact NNC Children's Services.
- For any concerns relating to adults, contact NNC Adult Social Care.

4.7 Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or are confidential reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the *Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960*).

4.8 Copyright laws still apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.

4.9 Do not send or post inappropriate, abusive, bullying, racist or defamatory messages to members of the public, other Councillors or officers either in or outside the work environment.



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4.10 In any biography, the account should state the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the Council.

4.11 Do not use the Council's logo, or any other Council related material on a personal account or website.

4.12 Social media must not be used for actions that would put Councillors in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors. For example, don't publish on social media something you wouldn't say face to face, or at a public meeting.

4.13 Be aware of your own safety when placing information on the internet, and do not publish information which could leave you vulnerable.

4.14 Anyone receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the site administrator or the police as appropriate.

### 5 Guidance for officers

5.1 Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in this policy.

5.2 Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media on behalf of the Council.

5.3 Never give out personal details such as people's home address and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the *Data Protection Act 2018* (and successor legislation).

5.4 Respect copyright, fair-use and financial disclosure laws.

5.5 Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident about the nature of the information you publish. Permission must be sought if you wish to publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the Council. Do not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.

5.6 Do not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. Show consideration for others privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory such as politics or religion.

5.7 Do not download any software, shareware or freeware from any social media site, unless this has been approved and authorised by the Clerk.

5.8 Use of the Council's official X (Twitter) account (and any future accounts) must always reflect the Council's position / decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion.

5.9 Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the Council, the Council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer. Council e-mail addresses will be used. The use will not be aligned to any party, group or individual.

5.10 Officers using social media in a personal capacity must ensure that this use is strictly personal, and not professional or political. As the public may nevertheless recognise officers as employees of the Council it is important that officers ensure that their personal use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the Council.

5.11 If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from a Councillor or the public through their use of social media, then they must report such incidents to the Clerk.

5.12 Failure to comply with the guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken.

### 6 Guidance to officers on capturing social media posts

6.1 Posts made using third party sites such as X (Twitter) are not held or within the control of the Council - posts can be deleted by site administrators without knowledge or consent of the Council. In exceptional circumstances, copies of posts may be made and retained by the Council, (e.g. as



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evidence of inappropriate posts) in line with relevant Council procedures, (depending on the nature of the allegation). These copies will be held for a period dependent on the type of investigation to which they are subject, (e.g. disciplinary, audit, criminal, etc.), after which they would be disposed of as confidential waste.

6.2 Where inappropriate use is suspected, you may wish to pro-actively attempt to capture any inappropriate posts (before they might be deleted). Copies should be made (press, 'alt+Prt Scrn,' and copy into MS Word) and reported to the Clerk or other authority such as NNC (e.g. for safeguarding children or adults), or the police, as well as following the social media site's own reporting procedures where appropriate.

### 7 General principles for using social media

7.1 Councillors and officers are encouraged to always follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

#### Be respectful

Set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Make sure that you respect peoples confidentiality do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.

#### Be credible and consistent

Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.

#### Be honest about who you are

It is important that any accounts or profiles that you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.

#### Be responsive

Make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you cannot. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner. Make sure you manage user expectations for the type of social media that you are using.

#### Be confident

Do not be afraid of participating. Follow these rules and seek further guidance if you need it. If you are about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, it is probably best to pause to think about it. Feel confident in what you say before you say it and say it as clearly as you can.

Version 3 of this Policy was adopted by the Council on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024 under resolution 24-82

Signed: **Hardcopy original signed**

Chair of the Parish Council

Signed: **Hardcopy original signed**

Clerk to the Parish Council

Date:

Date:

This policy will be reviewed annually in September, unless changes in legislation require it to be reviewed sooner.