

## **Aldbury Parish Council**

### **Social Media and Communications Policy**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Council has a website and Facebook page and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the 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 Council's Facebook page intends to provide information, news and updates regarding activities and opportunities and promote our community positively. 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 Council and between the Council and the people, businesses, and agencies it works with and serves. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with members of the community who are not reached by existing forms of communication.

The use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue.

#### **AIMS**

The aim of this policy is to guide members of Aldbury Parish Council in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Parish Council Emails
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- "X" formerly known as Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That Council information, external correspondence and personal data remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and enhanced rather than adversely affected
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate and useful

## **Internal communication and access to information within the Council.**

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 in all their communication on behalf of the Council whether using an email or Council's Facebook page.

As more and more information become available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

## **ALDBURY PARISH COUNCIL FACEBOOK PAGE:**

- The page will be set up using the Clerk's email address only and is not linked to the Clerk's private Facebook account.
- Only the Clerk and nominated Councillor are responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the Council's Facebook page. On occasion requests for information may be forwarded to a Chair for consideration which will then be directed back via the Clerk.
- The Clerk may initiate Facebook 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 or on instructions from a full council meeting.
- Facebook posts will be shared by the Clerk or nominated Councillor to local community Facebook pages, i.e. Everything Aldbury, Tring Station Community Group and added in the Aldbury Outlook.
- The Facebook page is designed to foster community engagement, interaction, and information sharing.
- The Clerk (or nominated Councillors) reserve the right to remove any information considered in breach of the CODE OF PRACTICE (set below).
- No politically motivated posts will be shared on Facebook page.
- Those 'liking' our Facebook page will not be able to post content directly on the page but will be permitted to comment on the majority of posts created by the Council.

The Facebook page is 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 requests for information through this channel. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk by emailing [parishclerk@aldburyparish.org.uk](mailto:parishclerk@aldburyparish.org.uk)

## **PERSONAL AND COUNCILLOR SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS**

### **PERSONAL**

Councillors should not use their own personal social media accounts when posting or commenting on posts with regard to Parish Council business or anything that may be construed as such.

Councillors using their own personal social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor.

## COUNCILLOR

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

Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own Councillor social media accounts to communicate and engage with their community with regard to Parish Council business. Communication should be limited to issuing information or encouraging feedback to information already in the public domain, i.e. published agendas, minutes, local news / events etc.

Councillor's views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or Committee Meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address that is used for Council business.

## OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

At this stage it is not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use by Aldbury Parish Council. However, this could be open to review in the future.

Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy at all times when so doing.

## PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

Councillors and The Council shall ensure the restrictions on communication activity during pre-election periods are observed. Further guidance can be found at <https://local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/pre-election-period>.

## CODE OF PRACTICE

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief

- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages
- this also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you
- post copyright images or text on social media sites. This is an offence and breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you
- publish personal data of individuals without permission. Breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

### COMMITMENT

This policy is supported by Members of the council. The Policy will be reviewed every two years to ensure it remains commensurate with the law and best practice.

Dated: Adopted by Council March 2021

Review: December 2023