

EFFINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

STATEMENTS OF GUIDANCE AND POLICY

13. Website and Electronic Communications Policy

This policy is introduced to provide guidelines as to the use of the website and electronic communications within Effingham Parish Council (EPC), between councillors and employees, and between EPC and the public. Electronic communications may include emails, text messaging on any platform, and social media. The policy complies with all relevant legislation including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation 25 May 2018.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to set out the procedure for administration of the EPC website (www.effinghamparishcouncil.gov.uk) and general electronic communications with members of the public. The Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to communicate with residents and members of the public, and understands that it plays an important role in the democratic process. The website, emails and social media can be useful conduits for promoting the Parish Council and ensuring that residents are aware of Parish Council initiatives. A good working relationship can be highly positive and should be regarded as a desirable outcome of Parish Council communications.

The website, email, messaging and social media platforms are also essential communications tools used to carry out the business of EPC. All councillors and council employees communicating on behalf of EPC must ensure that their use of these tools is appropriate and lawful and will not damage the reputation of the Council or its employees, or otherwise infringe any of the Council's policies.

The Policy applies to parish councillors and its employees. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration. The use of the EPC website, email and social media will not replace existing forms of communication. Notice boards, Chairman's Report and newsletters will continue to be a focus for EPC communications with residents. The website and electronic communication will be used to enhance communication.

PURPOSE OF THE PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE

The EPC website provides essential information about the Parish Council to the public, including:

- General description of the purpose and activities of the Parish Council
- Details of the parish councilors and their registers of interests

- Contact details of the Clerk including address, email and phone number
- Financial information
- Policies and Procedures
- Details of Parish Council Meetings together with agendas and minutes
- Historical minutes of the Parish Council and Annual Parish Meetings if available
- The Effingham Neighbourhood Plan and other information on Planning in Effingham
- Grants available to the Effingham community
- Local facilities
- News and events of interest to Effingham residents

PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTERING THE EPC WEBSITE

All news and information posted on the EPC website is authorised by the Clerk and/or the Chairman. Other parish councillors may be given delegated authority by the Clerk or Chairman to post news or information in their area of knowledge or interest.

The Clerk has primary responsibility for administering the website, and may also authorise parish councillors to carry out website administration on his or her behalf.

Requests from any organisation to publish information on the EPC website are considered on a case-by-case basis. EPC will endeavour to publish news and information which will be helpful to Effingham residents.

USE OF EMAIL AND TEXT MESSAGING

All councillors and employees of the council emailing on behalf of the council must use email and text messaging responsibly. Text messaging includes the use of electronic communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Messenger. The term 'email' is used in the following to include these forms of text messaging as well.

Responsible use of email means:

1. Email correspondence should be undertaken in a professional and responsible manner respecting personal privacy and the requirements of data protection legislation;
2. Those writing or replying to emails should check to see that the email is only being copied to the person or persons intended; and that there is no sensitive information contained in any attached document or any accompanying email 'trail', that is, previous emails attached to the email being sent;

3. Sensitive or confidential parish council information is not sent or copied to people outside the council; if you are unsure consult the Clerk;
4. Where emails are sent which contain personal details the personal details should be limited to that information which is required for the business of the council;
5. If inappropriate material is sent accidentally this must be reported immediately to the Clerk or Chairman, or the Vice Chairman in the absence of the Chairman;
6. Emails must not contain inappropriate or unlawful material, which includes, but is not limited to,: abusive, threatening, sexual, discriminatory, racial, obscene or hate text or images.
7. Parish councillors and employees should make use of the specific council email address ‘...@effinghmparishcouncil.gov.uk’ for all email communication concerning Parish Council business, unless technical difficulties make this impossible

If you are unsure about anything above, please consult the Clerk who can advise on email etiquette.

Emails broadcast to mailing lists on behalf of the Parish Council must be authorized by the Clerk and/or Chairman, who may give delegated authorization to other parish councillors.

DISPOSAL

Emails will be retained for a minimum of three months by EPC. Where an email is of importance, for instance, an important email which could form part of a complaint, project, planning matter, agreement or contract, then the email may be retained for longer than three months subject to EPC’s Retention and Disposal of Records and Documents Policy.

MONITORING

The Clerk will monitor email use by employees, councillors and members of the public emailing EPC, and will report to the Parish Council if email is being used inappropriately. Where the Clerk advises that email is being used inappropriately EPC reserves the right to take disciplinary action or refer the matter to the GBC Monitoring Officer, and in the case of unlawful emails to refer the matter to the police. This includes emails sent by members of the public where such emails transgress the law. Where the Clerk suspects that email or text used has caused, or anticipates it will cause, a serious breach of security or confidentiality he may, after consultation with the Chairman, or the Vice Chairman in the absence of the Chairman, take action to restrict the distribution of sensitive or confidential emails.

If you receive an email or text that contains material contrary to this policy report the matter immediately to the Clerk or Chairman, or the Vice Chairman in the absence of the Chairman. They will investigate and may call in the GBC Monitoring Officer or police if necessary. EPC will use all reasonable efforts to ensure emails and texts used in connection with its

business by councillors, employees and members of the public are within the law. It cannot be held responsible for damages resulting from the misuse of email in a way contrary to this policy.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The aim of this section of the policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors and employees of EPC in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective 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):

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Myspace and other social networking sites
- Blogs and comments on other websites (for example EFFRA or media sites)
- Online chatrooms and forums
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their social media accounts or through interaction with other online sites and forums. When participating in any online communication on a council matter, councillors and employees should:

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
- 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.
- Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative. Councillors should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other councillors and individuals or organisations with whom the Parish Council has dealings (in accordance with the Nolan principles of conduct in public life)
- Language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.

- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- 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.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, employees and residents.
- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations (for example, copyright laws see below)

Councillors and employees should be aware that:

- Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.
- Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.
- Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and will require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

EPC will use all reasonable efforts to ensure that use of social media in connection with its business by councillors, employees and members of the public are within the law. It cannot be held responsible for damages resulting from the misuse of social media in a way contrary to this policy.

MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA USE

The clerk will monitor social media accounts and sites controlled by EPC, however the diverse nature of social media means that it is nearly impossible for one person to continually monitor and review activity by councillors on social media. Councillors are therefore responsible for their own use of the media and will be held accountable where breaches are brought to the attention of EPC. In such instances they will be considered as any other breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors would be.

Adopted by Effingham Parish Council at its meeting on the 28th July 2020.

Minute 235/20