

SENELEY GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Policy on Social Media and Use of IT

AIMS

These matters are covered in one policy to ensure clarity as there is overlap between the two. This policy applies to all staff, volunteers and parish councillors.

***Section 1** of this policy sets out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, parish council staff, volunteers and others who engage with the parish council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.*

***Section 2** sets out the correct use of the parish council's IT equipment, and the internet and email systems. It demonstrates how the organisation will comply with the Computer Misuse Act 1990 and how it will protect its systems and the data on them.*

SECTION 1 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is used here as a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include, but are not limited to:

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Online forums (such as comments sections on online version of newspapers and group pages on Facebook etc.)
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums

Social media may be used to

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Publish good news stories linked website or press pages
- Advertise vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors

It should be noted:

- The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

- The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors, volunteers and parish council staff and also to others communicating with the Parish Council.
- The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.
- The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
- Individual parish councillors, volunteers and parish council staff are responsible for what they post in a parish council and personal capacity.
- In the main, councillors, volunteers and parish council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Code of Practice

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

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors, volunteers and parish council staff must not:

1. hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
2. present personal opinions as those of the parish council
3. present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the parish council
4. post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the parish council
5. post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
6. engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
7. use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
8. publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
9. post any information that infringes the copyright of others
10. post any information that may be deemed libel
11. post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
12. bring the parish council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
13. post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
14. conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

It should be noted:

- Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and a 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.
- Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and 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 parish council at a parish council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition,

Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at parish council meetings

- Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, volunteers, parish council staff or residents should report them to the Chairman of the Parish council in the first instance.
- Misuse of social media content by councillors, employees or volunteers that is contrary to this and other policies, could result in action being taken by the Parish council.
- The Clerk (in consultation with Members of the Social Media Working Party) will have the authority to remove from parish council social media pages any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be inappropriate/defamatory or libellous in nature.

SECTION 2 ACCEPTABLE USE OF IT EQUIPMENT & INTERNET USAGE

The parish council's IT equipment systems are important to its operation and the parish council therefore wishes to clarify how they should be used. We also wish to protect our staff and volunteers from the possible consequences of misuse. Having such a policy in place helps to protect both the parish council and the staff; the staff will be aware that browsing certain sites or downloading files is prohibited and that the policy must be adhered to or there could be serious repercussions, thus leading to fewer security risks for the parish council as a result of staff negligence.

For the avoidance of doubt this policy applies to volunteers as well as staff and this includes parish councillors who make use of the parish council's IT equipment or internet connection.

Acceptable use of Parish Council owned IT equipment

The parish council's IT equipment is for work use only. In order to protect work laptops & IT equipment from risks of data exchange, there must be no exchange of data or programs between the parish council's IT equipment and employees', volunteers' or parish councillors' own IT equipment without prior written approval from the Clerk or in the case of the Clerk from the Chair or Vice Chair of the Parish council.

All users are expected to adhere to the Computer Misuse Act 1990. Users are not allowed to gain or attempt to gain unauthorised access to any IT equipment program or data held on IT equipment or undertake an unauthorised modification of IT equipment.

IT equipment, email and internet usage

This Policy applies to all staff or volunteers who have access to IT equipment and the Internet to be used in the performance of their work. Use of the Internet by staff is permitted and encouraged where such use supports the goals and objectives of the parish council. However, access to the Internet through the Parish council is a privilege and all staff must adhere to the policies concerning IT equipment, Email and Internet usage. Violation of these policies could result in disciplinary and/or legal action leading up to and including termination of employment. Staff may also be held personally liable for damages caused by any violations of this policy. All staff are required to acknowledge receipt and confirm that they have understood and agree to abide by the following rules:

1. Parish council staff are expected to use the Internet responsibly and productively. Internet access is limited to job-related activities only and personal use is not permitted

2. Job-related activities include research and educational tasks that may be found via the Internet that would help in an employee's role
3. All Internet data that is composed, transmitted and/or received by the Parish councils IT equipment systems is considered to belong to the Parish council and is recognised as part of its official data. It is therefore subject to disclosure for legal reasons or to other appropriate third parties
4. The equipment, services and technology used to access the Internet are the property of the Parish council and the parish council reserves the right to monitor Internet traffic and monitor and access data that is composed, sent or received through its online connections
5. Emails sent via the parish council email system should not contain content that is deemed to be offensive. This includes, though is not restricted to, the use of vulgar or harassing language/images
6. All sites and downloads may be monitored and/or blocked by the Parish council if they are deemed to be harmful and/or not productive to parish council business
7. The installation of software such as instant messaging technology is strictly prohibited

Unacceptable use of the internet includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images on the Internet or via the Parish council email service
2. Using IT equipment to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy
3. Stealing, using, or disclosing someone else's password without authorisation
4. Downloading, copying or pirating software and electronic files that are copyrighted or without authorisation
5. Sharing confidential material, trade secrets, or proprietary information outside of the parish council
6. Hacking into unauthorised websites
7. Sending or posting information that is defamatory to the parish council, its services, colleagues or residents.
8. Introducing malicious software onto parish council IT equipment and/or jeopardizing the security of the parish council's electronic communications systems
9. Sending or posting chain letters, solicitations, or advertisements not related to parish council purposes or activities
10. Passing off personal views as representing those of the parish council

If an employee, volunteer or parish councillor is unsure about what constitutes acceptable Internet usage, then he/she should refer to the Chairman for further guidance and clarification

All terms and conditions as stated in this document are applicable to all users of the Parish council's IT equipment and Internet connection. All terms and conditions as stated in this document reflect an agreement of all parties and should be governed and interpreted in accordance with the policies and procedures mentioned above. Any user violating these policies is subject to disciplinary actions or censure as deemed appropriate by the Parish council.

User compliance

Parish councillors, volunteers and employees will abide by this Policy on Social Media and Use of IT and should understand that any violation of this policy may result in them being censured or disciplinary and/or appropriate legal action being taken.

Policy Compliance

If you are found to have breached this Policy, the matter will be considered and investigated under the Parish Council's disciplinary procedure.

Serious breaches of this Policy e.g. incidents of bullying of colleagues, discriminatory behaviour or social media activity causing serious damage to the organisation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal. Breaches, where applicable, may also result in civil action and/or criminal charges.

Social media content which proves that employees have breached other Parish Council policies may be used in disciplinary investigations relating to these matters.

Review and Governance

The Policy was adopted on 9th March 2017 and will be subject to at least an annual review (at the Annual Parish Council Meeting), or as and where changes occur.

[This policy was reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council on 18th May 2023 and signed by Cllr S Murphy, Chairman](#)