Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Introduction

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables St Mewan 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.

The Council has a Website, Facebook and Twitter page and uses email to communicate.

The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

Overtime 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 Website, Facebook and Twitter page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

• Be civil, tasteful and relevant

• Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.

• Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright • Not contain any personal information

• If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk/Deputy Clerk to the Council

• Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

• Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.

• Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.

• Share freely and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.

• Stay on topic.

• Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page (or any other social media platform that the Parish Council may choose to use) for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not 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 monitoring or responding to requests for information through these channels.

Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

• Obscene or racist content

• Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language

• Potentially libellous statements.

• Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright

• Private, personal information published without consent

• Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum • Commercial promotions or spam

• Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy, or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available.

Any information posted on the Facebook and Twitter page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

The Parish Council's Facebook and Twitter page is generally moderated on the 5 working days of each week (Monday - Friday), in order that any malicious or malevolent comments are removed as soon as possible. This must be undertaken within the Council. Those members who act as moderators or administrators of the Facebook page (in support of the Clerk) will be required to use a Parish Council Facebook account rather than the use of a

personal Facebook account. This is to ensure uniformity of communication, in line with the Parish Council's policy of having Council email addresses, and for the avoidance of any confusion about any opinions provided (which, on this platform, must always be those of the Full Council, not personal views).

St Mewan Parish Council Website

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload. See also St Mewan Parish Council's Website Privacy & Use Policy.

St Mewan Parish Council Email

The Clerk to the Council has their own council email address parishoffice@stmewanparishcouncil.gov.uk (The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday), and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate. All councillors are provided with a parish council email address by the Clerk (name@stmewanparishcouncil.gov.uk) which they must use to receive and send emails relating to Parish Council business.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk , and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new Emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. NB any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. Parish Council email addresses should be used when communicating by email as a councillor.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept. Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council. This includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

SMS (texting)

Members, the Clerk & other staff may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing e.g. Skype/Zoom

If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

St Mewan Parish Consultation/Survey Platforms

Public comments to consultation/surveys will only be considered via the parish council published guidelines on 'how to comment'.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

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

As more and more information becomes 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 (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation). Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option, if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

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