# LEA PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL

# COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Adopted 24th June 2024

The aim of this policy is to set out a code of practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, Council staff and others who engage with Lea Parish Council using social media and digital communications.

Social media is 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):

* Lea Parish Council website
* Facebook, Instagram and all other social networking sites
* Twitter and other micro blogging sites
* Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
* LinkedIn
* Bloggs and discussion forums
* Emails

The use of social media is in addition to existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to all councillors and council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media and digital communications may be used to:

* Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
* Surveys and engagement of local residents
* Advertise events and activities
* Good news stories linked website or press page
* Vacancies
* Share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
* Announcing new information
* Post or Share information from other parish related organisations such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
* Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

# Code of Practice

Only the Chair and Vice Chair can post messages on any social media platform if the post is in the name of **Lea Parish Council**. Any other Councillor wishing to post a comment online, in their role as a Lea Parish Council Councillor **MUST** put a request to the Chair or Vice Chair for this to be done.

When participating in online communication councillors and council staff must

* Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative and balanced
* Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
* Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or loud ie do not use capitals letters to emphasise points or in red
* Seek permission to publish photos or videos
* Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council and not hide their identity
* Be objective, balanced, informative and accurate
* Check spelling and grammar

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

* present personal opinions as that of the council
* express any views which may have a Party-political bias
* 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
* 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

Publishing 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 libelous 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 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 or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

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.

**Date adopted:** August 2024

**Reviewed annually**