



Controlled Document

Title	Social Media Policy
Author	Lenham Parish Council
Owner	Lenham Parish Council
Subject	Main Policy Documents
Government Security Classification	Official
Document Version	Version 1
Created	29.09.2025
Approved By	Full Council
Review Date	05.11.2028

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Description of Change	Sign
1	05.11.2025	Lenham Parish Council	Original Policy	A.Ratcliffe



Introduction

Lenham Parish Council's social media Policy is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way we do business. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we communicate, reach out and interact with the different communities we serve.

'Social Media' is the term given to web-based tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinion, knowledge and interest online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.

Amongst others, social media encompasses blogs, forums, and social networking websites (such as Facebook and X), contents sharing websites (such as Flickr, YouTube) and many other online channels.

These platforms open up many new and exciting opportunities, however the practical application of such technology by Parish Councils is in its infancy and there are many potential issues to consider for Parish Councillors, Parish Council Employees and the Parish Council itself.

To avoid major mistakes and turn a well meant social media experiment into a reputational disaster it is important to manage any potential risks through a common-sense approach and framework as well as proactively monitoring the development of such applications.

These guidelines aim to provide Parish Councillors and Council Employees with information to consider before participating in or developing any new social media posts. This is to help them get the best out of the tools available whilst maintaining a safe professional environment and protecting themselves and the Parish Council.

All official council communications, (e.g. an agenda for Council meetings) where possible will be sent by email.

Using Social Media to Consult and Engage

Social media is a powerful tool that can give Parishioners the opportunity to raise issues and enter a dialogue with the Parish Council. The Parish Council can in turn quickly clarify and elaborate issues of concern and easily feedback relevant information.

Social media is one of the few ways in which Parish Council can directly and instantly receive feedback on policies and decisions.

Sometimes just listening is as valuable as engaging; the Parish Council does not have to respond to everything. Deciding whether to engage or not should be based on whether the Parish Council, or the Parishioners will gain something from the exchange.

If a Parish Councillor, Council Employee or the Parish Council receives praise for work done, this should be passed on. Social media is one of the best ways in which to promote the work of the Parish Council and the benefits it provides to the Community.

Social media is a fast and efficient way to communicate with the Parish Council to communicate with Parishioners in an emergency, as well as for one-off or regular events.

Stories and discussions on social media can quickly go viral meaning they may be picked up within hours and could end up on the front pages of newspapers. The Parish Council can use social media to either reinforce or prevent those front-page headlines.

Using Social media to be more Transparent and Accountable.

Explaining what the Parish Council does, how we do it and why we do it through websites and other media is already embedded in our ethos. Social media adds a further level of transparency and accountability.

Social media allows Parishioners to have an input into decisions and to question them. We can hear directly from those affected by our decision and explain and/or defend them. Our replies can be broadcast to all Parishioners and not just the individual raising the question.

The Parish Council would naturally want to play an active part in all social media conversations but that does not mean we have to answer every query and question directed to us. We should not try to assist everyone who asks a question of us because in some cases it won't be appropriate for reasons of impartiality or legality.

The Parish Council is part of a network of public service organisations, many of which have digital and social media presences that users can be redirected to for information and assistance.

Personal Use of Social Media

Whether or not an individual Parish Councillor or Council Employee chooses to create or participate in a personal online social network, or any other form of online publishing or discussion, is his or her own business. The views and opinions expressed however will be their own and they are personally responsible for any content published.

A Councillor or Employee who talks about the work they do or a Council service they are associated with, should make it clear that they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the Council. They should use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed here are on my own".

Councillors should not include the term "councillor" (or any abbreviation) on any personal accounts.

Using social media as a Parish Councillor or Employee

The relationship with social media changes as soon as you identify yourself as a Parish Councillor or Parish Council Employee, speak in any kind of professional capacity or seek to deploy social media. In such circumstances there are certain responsibilities, standards of behaviour and other considerations which apply. Remember, you are the

public face of the Parish Council and should participate in the same way as you would with other media or public meetings or forums.

Always remember that participation on line results in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media.

You should also be aware that you may attract media interest in yourself no matter whether you are participating in an official or a personal capacity.

Parish Councillors should be aware of and follow the Parish Council's Code of Conduct.

Use of WhatsApp

Lenham Parish Council has agreed that Councillors and staff will use a Council WhatsApp group to share important information quickly. This enables instant communication, especially during emergencies or when email access is unavailable.

Membership of the group is discretionary and does not replace the decision-making framework of properly convened meetings and the Council's scheme of delegation. Lenham Parish Councillors and employees who have given their consent for their data to be processed in this way will be added to WhatsApp groups as appropriate.

These groups will only be for Councillors and employees of Lenham Parish Council. Any members of the public who are on any sub-committee will be contacted separately via phone/email by an officer to share any relevant information.

Mobile phone numbers of Councillors and employees will be visible to everyone in the group.

Any apologies to not be able to attend a meeting can be given via WhatsApp as a last resort to ask for a substitute.

The Parish or Deputy Clerk will be sole administrator of all Council groups and everyone should be mindful that it is classified as formal communication and is subject to FOI rules.

Social Media Rules

It is important to remember that there is a human cost in using social media as an employee or any other professional capacity. Social media is about the social connections and conversations we have with our customers, peers and friends. To gain the maximum value from these tools, you should look to foster relationships and therefore you will need to acknowledge and understand the commitment and investment of time in building and developing sustainable online relationships.

- **Get official approval** – Ensure you have the full approval and support the clerk before any official deployment of social media.
- **Be professional** – Always remember that you are a representative for the organisation. Anything you publish reflects directly on the Council as a whole.

- **Purpose and outcomes** – Make sure you think through why you are deploying social media and what outcome you wish to achieve. For example, if you are inviting public response then think about how you will make use of the results and how these fit in with other forms of consultation. Ask yourself, is social media appropriate for this activity?
- **Assess any risks** – Think through any potential risks and make sure you have plans in place to manage and mitigate these.
- **Respect your target audience** - Think about their specific needs and be aware of any language, cultural or other sensitivities you may wish to take account of.
- **Ask and seek permission to publish** – any information, report or conversation that is not already in the public domain. Do not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.
- **Stay within the legal framework** – and be aware that data protection, financial regulations apply.
- **Respect copyright** - when linking to images or other online material.
- **Monitor and evaluate** – the success of your activity.

Freedom of Information

Listed below are the circumstances where information might be considered as non-disclosure under Freedom of Information (FOI).

- **Commercial Interests**- Information that constitutes either a trade secret or information that, if released, might prejudice the commercial interests of either the Parish Council or a third party.
- **Information provided in confidence** – Information that has had been given to the Parish Council by a third party and to which a duty of confidence is owed. Such confidentiality may be expressly stated, such as by way of contractual confidentiality, or could be implied. The information in question must have a quality of confidence, or order to be considered confidential.
- **Prejudice to the effective conduct or public affairs** – Any information that is release, would prejudice the ability of the Council to perform any of its functions. This exception requires formal sign off by the Monitoring Officer.
- **Legal Professional Privilege** - Information that has been given to the Parish Council by a third party and to which a duty of confidence is owed. Such confidentiality may be expressly stated, such as by way of contractual confidentiality, or could be implied. The information in question must have a quality of confidence, to order to be considered confidential.
- **Personal Information** – Information pertaining to a living identifiable individual

such as a staff member, client or even the requester.

- **Investigations of a public authority** – Any information that would prejudice the ability of the Parish Council to carry out an investigation. This might include investigations under a statutory instrument or could include HR investigations.

Social Media Policy

All Parish Council publication must be:

- Managed by the Clerk and/ or an authorised Communications Officers under delegated authority from the Parish Council.
- Posts will be:
Limited to factual information about the Council and its business.
Current and relevant