

Rowlands Castle Parish Council

11 The Green, Rowlands Castle PO9 6BW

Email: clerk@rowlandscastlepc.org.uk Tel: 02392 413044 Website: www.rowlandscastlepc.org.uk

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Adopted on 7 February 2022

Policy is based on SLCC 2019 Example(s) with additional T & Cs from HALC guidelines

Introduction

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables better and more direct contact (the Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and) between Rowlands Castle Parish Council ('the Council'), the residents and businesses it serves, and the agencies with which it works and liaises. Social media is a collective term for the ways to create and publish information via the internet and for the purpose of this policy refers to the Council website and Facebook page and any social media platforms it may join in the future.

The Council has a website and Facebook page, and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time 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.

Social Media

The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Parish and promote the community positively.

All communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, respectful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Nor contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information;
- Will be moderated by the Clerk or Administrative Assistant to the Council;
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council's page(s) 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 Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the website and Facebook page, and any other social media platforms the Council may choose to

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join. On occasions, requests for information may be forwarded to a member(s) for their consideration and response, which will then be directed back via the Clerk to the Council.

Facebook: The Council may choose to respond to a comment received, particularly if one response can be considered to address all. The Council may permit local organisations to maintain a presence on its Facebook page, subject to the adherence of the criteria detailed above. The Clerk to the Council reserves the right to remove any information considered in breach of the above. It should be clearly identified that such information and its content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always 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 obliged to monitor or respond 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 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.

Council's Website

The Council's website is an integral part of the Council. Its purpose is to communicate with residents, local clubs, societies and organisations as well as external bodies including Local and/or Central Government organisations. The Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant.

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.

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The following items may be included:

- Information on Parish clubs, societies and organisations and events;
- Links to the following external websites - East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire County Council and Hampshire Police;
- Links to approved charities (as requested);
- Council agendas;
- Council minutes;
- Council Committee(s) minutes;
- Council financial information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended);
- Council Policies and Procedures;
- Council members' information;

Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website should be emailed to the Clerk to the Council at clerk@rowlandscastlepc.org.uk

The following will not be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting, any political organisation;
- Commercial advertisements;
- Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event.

The Clerk to the Council and Members will treat all information confidentially, securely and sensitively. Failure to observe this may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

Electronic Communications

Officers' Emails: The Council maintains several email addresses for its Clerk, Administrative Assistant, Facilities Officer and Parish Hall Administrator. Those respective officers are responsible for dealing with all emails received and will forward to a member(s) or external agency, or respond as appropriate.

Councillors' Emails: Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, 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. 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 and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing: If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this Policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

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.

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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 ie 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.