

Mary Tavy Parish Council

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

The use of digital, social media and electronic communication enables the parish council to interact in ways that improve 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, a 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.

Facebook

The council's Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our parish and to 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 or have permission to use
- Not contain any personal information
- If it is official council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair of the Council, the Clerk to the Council or other nominated persons, e.g., appointed administrators of the Facebook page
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Statements made by councillors on Facebook posts/replies to Facebook posts should reflect the council's opinion as a whole. Councillors must ensure that it is clear that any opinions given that are their own are acknowledged as not necessarily representative of the whole council's view.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the council Facebook 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 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 for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

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 clerk and/or members of the council by email, telephone or letter.

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 and/or 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
- Alleged breaches of a council's policy or the law.

The council's response to any communication received but not meeting the above criteria, will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our social media 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 practicable. 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.

Parish Council Website (www.marytavyparishcouncil.co.uk)

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to the clerk or 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.

Parish Council Email

The Clerk to the Council and all councillors have their own parish council email addresses. These email accounts are monitored and we aim to reply to all questions as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message will be sent when appropriate.

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. The senders of all new emails requiring data to be passed on will be asked for their consent before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, but must copy to the clerk. Please note that 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)

Councillors and the clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this social media and electronic communication policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing e.g., Zoom

Our social media and electronic communication policy 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 are a major factor in delivering improvement.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Members' 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 Members' Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

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.

Changes

This policy is a living document and may be altered by the parish clerk if deemed necessary. Any changes to the policy will be highlighted at the next parish council meeting.

This Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy was last reviewed and adopted by Mary Tavy Parish Council during the Meeting held on 8th August 2023

Minute reference: page 44-45

Next review due: August 2024