

WESTON WITH GAYTON PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

Overview

The use of digital media, social media and electronic communication enables Weston with Gayton Parish Council (WGPC) 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 (www.westonstaffs.org.uk), 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.

Communication Requirements

Communications from the Council and individual Councillors should always 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;
- where it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the Council or nominated Parish Councillor(s);

Communication by Email

The Clerk to the Parish Council has a specific council email address – parishclerk@westonstaffs.org.uk. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours 10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday. Questions will be responded to as soon as possible, however it should be noted the Clerk works 11 hours a week and therefore responses may take a few days. An 'out of office' message is used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on 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 be copied to the Clerk.

Facebook

The Parish Council Facebook page is maintained and managed by the Clerk. Posts to the Facebook page will only be made by the Clerk in discussion with the Chairman.

Conduct of Councillors

In accordance with the Code of Conduct for Councillors it is incumbent upon Councillors not to conduct themselves in a manner which is likely to bring the Council in disrepute.

Councillors should at all times apply the seven Nolan principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, and honesty.

Councillors should display respect for fellow Councillors and the Clerk and not use e-mail or social media for personal bullying or vindictive comments, acting always within the Law.

Emails and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram should not be used for canvassing support or to express personal views where Members are posting in their capacity as a Parish Councillor. For the avoidance of doubt, Councillors should always be clear if they are writing in their capacity as Parish Councillor or as an individual.

Any emails sent to the Clerk or Councillors in their official capacity will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act 2018.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Personal information should not be forwarded to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email addresses, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

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

This policy was adopted at a meeting on the 9th July 2019 and will be reviewed annually at the May meeting.

Reviewed May 2024