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## **Social Media & Electronic Communication Policy**

### **Introduction**

The use of digital and social media now enables better and more direct contact between St Erth Parish Council (the Council), parishioners and businesses that it serves, and the agencies it works and liaises with. 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, Facebook page and Twitter only.

This policy details how the Council will use social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with its local residents, local businesses and various government agencies it deals with.

Social media provides an alternative channel to written correspondence, telephone and face to face conversation to enable the Council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised by people who live in, work in and visit the parish. It also enables the Council to deal more efficiently with the various agencies that deliver services to local people.

Use of digital and social media will form an integral part of how the Council delivers its services in a way that improves communication between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it serves and works with.

The Council has a corporate presence on the web and an e-mail channel which it uses to communicate with residents, as well as those working in and visiting the parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications, and the Clerk and/or Councillors may ask for a preferred channel of communication. 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 the Social Media Policy will be updated.

### **Social Media**

All communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, respectful and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- nor contain content copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright unless credited appropriately;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- will be moderated by the Clerk to the Council with support by limited Councillor input as required by the Clerk;
- will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

All communications to the Council should meet the following criteria:

- be civil, respectful and relevant

- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere; for which the enquirer does not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- not contain religious messages;
- will not seek to disseminate any political advertising;
- differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Councillors or staff, will not be permitted;
- not share private, personal information published without consent;
- not contain information or links unrelated to the content of the forum;
- not contain commercial promotions or spam;
- not allege a breach of a Council's policy or the law.

The Council's communication channels are not monitored 24/7. Sending a message/post via Facebook or Twitter 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, direct contact should be made with the Council's Clerk and/or Councillors using the [contact information](#) on our website. However, the Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities.

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of this policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given 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 Parish 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.

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the website, Twitter and Facebook page. On occasion, requests for information may be forwarded to a Councillor 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.

### **Twitter**

The Council may choose to re-tweet comments that mention the Council.

## **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 and/or Central Government organisations. The Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant.

The following items may be included:

- information on village clubs, societies and organisations and events;
- links to the following external websites:
  - Cornwall Council;
  - Police 101 report it;
- links to approved charities (as requested);
- Parish Council agendas, minutes, policies & procedures, Councillors information, financial information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended);
- planning applications that the Council is a statutory consultee for.

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@sterth-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@sterth-pc.gov.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 Councillors 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.

## **Council email**

The Clerk to the Council has their own Council email address ([clerk@sterth-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@sterth-pc.gov.uk)). The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and the Clerk aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as possible. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to Councillors 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. All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, 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.

## **Messaging Platforms**

Councillors and the Clerk may use a variety of forms of messaging as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

## **Video Conferencing e.g. Zoom**

If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

**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 through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Councillors should also be careful only to copy 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.

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