

Colgate Parish Council
Communication Policy Inc.
Social Media and Website Policy

Communication

The Council's address, e mail address and telephone number should be advertised on the noticeboards, council correspondence and the website.

Written

Letter and email

The Clerk and Councillors will ensure any written correspondence is replied to within 5 working days.

Letters received by post should be date marked on day of receipt.

The Clerk should be copied in on all correspondence sent by Councillors.

Telephone

A record of all telephone conversations should be made and actioned within 5 working days.

There should be the facility for residents to leave messages on the Clerk's answer machine and the Clerk/Councillor should contact the caller within 5 working days.

Noticeboard

Each village will have a noticeboard where agenda and other information will be displayed within the timescales required to meet the Transparency Code 2015.

Social Media and Website

What is Social Media? 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools allowing users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones and new generation technology such as tablets.

Examples of social media websites include:

- social networking (e.g. www.facebook.com)
- video sharing (e.g. www.youtube.com)
- blogs (e.g. www.london2012.com/blog)
- micro-blogging (e.g. www.twitter.com)
- message boards
- wikis (e.g. www.wikipedia.org)
- social bookmarking (e.g. www.delicious.com)

Council Use of Social Media

Principles

- To publish information about the work of the Parish Council to a wider audience.
- Not to enter into online debates on the work of the Council.
- Social Media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or Councillors as this could lead to privacy, potential discrimination claims and also data protection issues, with the exception of placing vacancy advertisements.

Approved Council Social Media and use of as of 11th January 2016 Colgate PC agreed that the only form of Social media used by the council would be:

- Parish Council website only.

Facebook, Twitter etc. will not be an approved method of communication at this time.

The social media may be used to:

Post minutes and dates of meetings and all documents to ensure the Council is meeting the Transparency Laws.

Advertise events and activities

Provide good news stories linked website or press page

Advertise vacancies

‘Share’ information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.

Announce new information.

Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups

Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business.

Individual Parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business.

Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

Users of Council Social Media

The Council will appoint a nominated Councillor/Clerk or Councillors as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts that are not applicable.

The Council will appoint the Clerk as the nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Parish Council Website supported by another 2 nominated councillors.

The Parish Clerk and the Chair are the Council’s nominated Press Officers authorised to issue press releases and newsletter articles. No other member of staff should issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

Councillors should refer residents to the official website where all documents posted should be in PDF format.

Any publication should be referred to either the Clerk or the Chair before being uploaded to the website.

Guidance for Officers on the Use of Council Social Media

- **Officers should know the terms of use on third party websites, e.g. Facebook and take care in posting on any social media website/Facebook.**
- **No information should be published that is not already in the public domain, e.g. already available on the Council’s website.**
- **Information should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.**
- **Be mindful that this information may stay in the public domain ad infinitum.**
- **Respect copyright laws.**
- **Do not publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal without permission.**
- **Do not reference other organisations without their approval. When you do make a reference, link back to the source where possible.**
- **Do not publish anything that would not be acceptable in the workplace.**
- **Remember that you are an ambassador for the Council and be cordial at all times**

Usage of Third Party Media in your Official Capacity as a Parish Councillor

You will need to think about whether you are acting as a Councillor, or giving the impression that you are representing your authority. The Council has adopted a Code of Members Conduct which is binding for all members of the Council.

Do

- Set appropriate privacy settings for your blog or networking site – especially if you have a private, non-political blog
- Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on your blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid the perception that you condone such views
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a Councillor, the more likely it is you will be seen as acting in your official capacity when you blog or network
- Be aware that by publishing information that you could not have accessed without your position as a Councillor you are likely to be seen as acting in your official capacity
- Make political points if you wish, but be careful about being too specific or personal if referring to individuals. An attack on individuals may be seen as disrespectful, whereas general comments about another party or genuine political expression is less likely to be viewed as disrespect.

Don't

- Blog in haste.
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
- Use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.

Remember: The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct and if you use social media in your official capacity as a Parish Councillor, or may be perceived to be acting in your official capacity, you should be mindful of the seven Nolan principles of the public life: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership

The Members' Code of Conduct:

Councillors can have 'blurred identities, you may have a social media account

where you comment both as a councillor and as an individual. Ensure it is clear when you are posting in a private capacity or as a councillor. Such blurred identities might for example have implications where your views are taken as those of your organisation or political party, rather than your personal opinion. There is the need to get social media accounts/ profiles clear, to be confident as to what you can and can't say while you are representing the Parish Council.

How you use your online identity will also determine how online content will be treated in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillors are expected to communicate politically. There is a difference between communicating on behalf of the council, for example blogging as a councillor, or as a private citizen and the former will be held to a higher standard than the latter. The key to whether your online activity is subject to the Code of Conduct is whether you are giving the impression that you are acting as a councillor. And that stands whether you are in fact acting in an official capacity or simply giving the impression that you are doing so.