

DOVERIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Doveridge Parish Council 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.doveridge.org.uk), and has access to the Doveridge Parish Council Facebook page, and uses email to communicate.

The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications with official notices posted on the Website. (Parish Council Noticeboard located outside the village Post Office may be used where appropriate. 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 Facebook page may be used to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Parish and 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
- not contain any personal information
- if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the Council or nominated Parish Councillor(s)
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the following guidelines should be followed.

- 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 for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products
- Councillors will refrain from entering into 'debates' on subjects posted on Facebook especially where it might cause contention.

The Facebook site is not monitored 24 hours a day 7 days a week and we will not be able to reply individually to 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 social media posts to us.

Sending a message or posting 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 (clerk-doveridgepc@hotmail.com) and/or members of the Council by sending an email, 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 or defamatory 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
- allegations of 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 social media not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as

practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked. 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.

PROHIBITED ACTIONS

The Council will not tolerate the use of any Social Networking sites by staff, members of the council (councillors) or members for unofficial or inappropriate purposes including:

- messages produced by employees or Members, either during or outside of normal working hours, which could constitute bullying, harassment or other detriment to colleagues, the Council or anyone associated with the Council
- Communicate or distribute libellous or defamatory material about any individual, firm, body or organisation, including the Council by email or social media
- Claim to represent the views of the Council unless authorised to do so
- Transmit confidential, or sensitive information relating to individuals, or any aspect of the Council's business over the internet, social media sites, or via e-mail
- Publish material, or a comment that could undermine public confidence in the Council, or misrepresent the Council and its services
- Manipulate dialogue, or attempt to control people's points of view
- Publish untrue statements about another person which could damage their reputation or working relationships
- Post comments to newsgroups, or chat rooms on social media on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so

PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Website will be used for official Parish Council Information. Minutes and agendas for all Parish Council meetings are located on the Website along with other council information e.g., which council is responsible for what in and around the village. There are also contacts for all members of the council. There is a wealth of information on village groups operating and information on how to book the Village Hall.

We regularly post information we feel may be of value or interest to residents. Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website in the first instance to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response.

PARISH COUNCIL EMAIL

All communication should be directed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance. The Clerk to the Parish Council has a specific council email address; clerk-doveridgepc@hotmail.com The email account is monitored mainly during office

hours for up to 10 hours per week between Monday to Friday. We aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. However, it should be noted that the Clerk works part-time, which may delay a response.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email 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.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. 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.

Do not forward personal information to other people, or groups outside the Council. This includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

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 communication 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.

As increased information becomes available, 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 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.