



STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET

PARISH COUNCIL

EMAIL, INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Adopted by the Council on 31st October 2018

E-MAIL, INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

The use of digital and social media now enables more direct contact between Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council (SMPC), parishioners and businesses it serves, and the agencies with whom it works and liaises. 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 Parish Council website, Facebook page and any other media outlet which may be used.

This policy details how SMPC will use social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates. SMPC has a corporate presence on the web and an e-mail channel which it uses to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications, and the Clerk and/or Members may ask for a preferred channel of communication. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers.

All communications from Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Will be civil, respectful and relevant
- Will not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Any information which is not in the public domain must not be communicated to the public by the Parish Council, by any member, any employee or attendee
- Will not contain content copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright
- Will not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising
- Should any issue arise, the Clerk will assess the position and report to the Parish Council

All communications to the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Will be civil, respectful and relevant
- Will not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the website and social media. On occasion requests for information may be forwarded to a Member(s) for their consideration and response, which will then be directed back via the Clerk to the Council.

Social Media:

The Parish Council may choose to respond to comments received.

Website:

The Parish Council's websites are an integral part of the Parish Council. Their purpose is to communicate information to third parties. The Parish 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
- Uttlesford District Council
- Essex County Council
- Essex Police
- Stansted Mountfitchet Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

- Links to approved charities (as requested)
- Parish Council agendas
- Parish Council minutes
- Parish Council committee minutes
- Parish Council Financial Information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended)
- Parish Council Policies and Procedures
- Parish Council Members' information
- Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website should be e-mailed to the Clerk to the Council
- The following will NOT be included:
 - Articles affiliated to, or promoting, any political organisation
 - Commercial advertisements
 - Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event

Emails:

Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council maintains one general email address parishcouncil@stansted.net which is viewed on working days. Office staff also have individual e-mail accounts.

General use of Social Media by Individuals

The following guidelines will apply to any online social media participation by councillors and employees.

The standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council are:

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in this Policy document.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the General Data Protection Regulations.
- When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Do not use the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only.
- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should not breach Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Use of the Parish Council's social media must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must be used to express personal opinions.

Taken from the national Code of Conduct for Councillors

Additional Guidance - 12 Blogging & Social Networking

A blog is a frequently updated individual website discussing subjects ranging from the personal to the political. Social networking is an online method of sharing information, opinions, photographs etc with contacts and associates. Social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter and Myspace.

Blogging or social networking can be sponsored by a council, carried out by a member as an individual or carried out anonymously.

Use of online media to promote a member's work as a councillor or through a council website is likely to be regarded as conducting the business of the authority and would therefore engage the Code of Conduct. Contents of private, non-political blogs are less likely to engage the Code of Conduct. It is the contents of a blog and not the circumstances surrounding its creation that would determine whether or not its contents fall under the Code of Conduct. A disclaimer in a private blog which says that any comments are not made in an official capacity will not necessarily prevent breaches of Code of Conduct being found. Anonymous blogging may engage the Code of Conduct but it will be necessary to demonstrate that a member was indeed the author of the blog.

When blogging or using social networking members should consider whether the Code of Conduct is engaged by reference to paragraph 2 of the Code. Factors which ought to be considered in reaching this decision are:

- How well known or how high a profile the member is. The higher the profile a member has the more likely it is that he would be seen to be acting in an official capacity.
- The privacy settings on a member's blog or social networking site. A blog with wide access may lead constituents to assume that a member is acting as their representative thereby making it more likely that the Code of Conduct is engaged.
- The profile on the member's blog or social networking site. A clear statement that the blog is political or personal will be of assistance although it may be possible in a personal blog to give the impression that a member is acting as such even though the blog states otherwise. Members may not discuss council business on a personal blog and/or make offensive remarks about others who are linked to the council and then claim to be doing so in a private capacity.

When using a blog or social networking site, members should have regard to the following provisions of the Code:

- 3.1 The requirement to treat others with respect.
- 3.3.2 Bullying
- 3.3.5 Restriction on disclosure of confidential information.
- 3.3.7 Not to engage in conduct which could reasonably be regarded as bringing the council or the office of councillor into disrepute.
- 3.4 The requirement to use council resources properly.

Members should also consider other online activity where the Code of Conduct may apply. For example, if a member places content on another site (e.g. forum posts or another person's social networking site) a member could give the impression that they are acting as such if they identify themselves as being a councillor or if they put content on these sites which could only have been obtained by a member of the council.