



PILLING PARISH COUNCIL

USE OF IT, SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1) Overview

- a) The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Town 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.
- b) The Council has an official website, 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.
- c) The Council Facebook pages is an informal site used to supplement the official parish council website. It's intention is to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Town and promote our community positively.

2) Communications from the Council

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- a) Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- b) Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- c) Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- d) Not contain any personal information.
- e) If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
- f) Social media will 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, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

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- a) Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarities, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- b) Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- c) Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- d) Stay on topic.
- e) Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products. The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all 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 your social media posts to us.

NB: Sending a message/post 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 and/or members of the council by emailing through the council's official website.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- a) Obscene or racist content
- b) Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- c) Potentially libellous statements.
- d) Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- e) Private, personal information published without consent
- f) Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- g) Commercial promotions or spam
- h) Alleges 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.

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3) Facebook

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 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.

4) Town Council Website

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

5) Town Council Email

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address clerk@pilling-pc.gov.uk.

The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday, Wednesday and Thursdays, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. 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 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, 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.

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.

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A guide for Councillors regarding email etiquette is attached at Appendix A.

6) Whatsapp (Texting)

Members and the Clerk may use SMS and/or Whatsapp as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

7) 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 communications 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 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).

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Email Etiquette

Clerk and Councillors must always use their official email address when sending emails to the Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer (clerk@pilling-pc.gov.uk) or when conducting council business:

1. When to use email

- Councillors and council staff should only ever use their council email address for council business.
- Email tends to be used for a variety of reasons and can be as informal as arranging refreshments for a meeting to communicating a formal business decision.
- Email is not always the best way to communicate information as email messages can often be misunderstood and the volume of email messages people receive can be prohibitive to receiving a meaningful reply as a result of email overload.
- The Clerk and Councillors have the responsibility of deciding whether email is the most appropriate form of communication and should consider the following factors before

2 The Subject

Some subjects are too sensitive to be sent via email, e.g. employee information. Careful consideration needs to be given as it is the responsibility of the sender to decide whether or not email is the most appropriate vehicle for communication in these circumstances.

3. Speed of Transmission

Where information is needed to be communicated urgently and the recipient is expecting it then this is fine, however, if an urgent message needs to be sent and the recipient(s) is/are not expecting anything, then it is probably better to use the phone or teams.

4. Speed of Response

There is no guarantee that an email will be read as soon as it is sent; if the email requires immediate action then this is probably not the best way to communicate. A read receipt may be used to help people who need a quick response, to note that the mail has been read.

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Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated. The will give a full response or a progress update within 10 working days of receipt.

5. Number of Recipients

Do not necessarily use *'reply all'* as not everyone in the previous communication necessarily needs to receive the email. Town Councillors should always identify in the body text of an email when they are copying in external email addresses, as this may not always be clear when large numbers of emails are included.

6. Writing emails

- Councillors must use their council email address (@pilling-pc.gov.uk) when conducting council business.
- The Town Clerk will only ever use Councillors council email addresses.
- Councillors should only send emails to fellow councillors to their council email addresses and from their own council email address.
- When Councillors receive emails to their personal email addresses, from non Councillors, which relate to council business, they should transfer it (either by forwarding it or moving it across inboxes) to their council email address and reply from their council email address.
- When writing an email, it is important to compose the message with the same care and clarity applied to drafting letters and memos, particularly as emails form part of the corporate record under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.
- Information and documents sent to your @pilling-pc.gov.uk in box if distributed further must be sent from the same email address.
- Always ensure that when sending an email from your Town Council email address the following Information and disclaimer is included:
 - Your Name including the title Cllr. Parish Council Website Address
 - *'This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and may be legally privileged and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom that they are addressed. If you are not the intended recipient, any use, disclosure, copying or forwarding of this email and/or its attachments is unauthorised.'*
- Always ensure that your Recipient List is appropriate to avoid causing a nuisance to other colleagues.
- Always complete the Subject Line with a clear description of what the email is about as recipients cannot always distinguish between what they need to look

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at immediately and what can wait. For example, full council minutes February 2018 for approval.

- Ensure language is simple, unambiguous and to the point.
- Avoid using abbreviations and emoticons - don't trade clarity for confusion. Be aware that other colleagues may not know the meaning of informal expressions, such as FWIW (for what it's worth).
- Be polite. Terseness can be misinterpreted. Please and thank you go a long way.
- Be patient. Not everyone can respond immediately or necessarily have the confidence to communicate using email.
- Be careful when replying to an email message with many recipients. Do you really want everyone to see your reply?
- Never reply in anger. Take a break or sleep on it before responding. 2.16 Never write your email in CAPITAL LETTERS. This implies shouting.
- Don't conduct an argument on email - it is unprofessional.
- Always, always read email before sending it and consider the resultant reaction. Ensuring clarity in the message is time well spent.
- Emails which include confidential information should have the corresponding sensitivity label applied. Where content is outlined as confidential (either with a sensitivity label or in the email content) by the sender, content and attachments should not be shared, forwarded or saved outside of the council's server, where sharing is not in accordance with the councils Code of Conduct, section 1, a, v: *You must not disclose confidential information unless: you have the consent of a person authorised to give it; you are required by law to do so; the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional advice, provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or, there is a clear and overriding public interest in doing so and the disclosure is made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the council and that you have consulted the Chair or Clerk prior to its release.*

7. Out of Office Replies

Users are required to use this facility within the email system to inform senders of email of absence and expected return to work date. Including an alternative contact is helpful. Applying an out of office reply to your council email address will also display an out of office reply on your team's account.

Where a Councillor or Officer is incapacitated an out of office reply may be applied remotely to inform external users that the Councillor or Officer may not be attending to emails.

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8. Leaving Office

Upon a Councillor leaving office as a Town Councillor information held in their council email address account will be retained in accordance with the councils Data Retention and Disposal Policy, for Freedom of Information request purposes (See guidance note).

The Town Clerk will save message trace records periodically, only to be used for Freedom of Information purposes.

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