

# **Hughenden Parish Council**

## **Communication and Social Media Policy**

Adopted: 16 May 2023  
Review Date: 21 May 2024

This document is intended to provide a framework that empowers the Parish Council and individual Councillors to take a proactive approach to communication with the public, especially using social media. The Policy is adapted from and largely follows the Social Media Civility and Respect Guide and Policy Supplement produced by Breakthrough Communications for and on behalf of the Civility and Respect Project.

It is designed to be used both as an internal council document and in the public domain.

At the time of the publication of the current version of the Policy, it should be noted that Hughenden Council makes very little use of social media, though individual Councillors may be active users.

The Communication and Social Media Policy is divided into three sections. The first covers the Council's approach to communicating with the public, amongst Members and Officers, and with other organisations. The second sections covers the responsibilities of Councillors when they communicate about the Council, on behalf of the Council or in the role of a Councillor, and specifically when they use social media to do so. The third section sets out what the Council expects from those who engage with the Council, including members of the public, other organisations and, of course, Members and Officers of the Council.

### **1. The Council's Communication Principles**

#### **We communicate responsibly and respectfully**

- Be open and honest.
- Be civil and respectful.
- Do not post anonymously or use a false name.
- Debate is fine, so long as it is carried out in a civil and respectful way.

## **We engage in positive conversations**

- Actively participate in positive discussions.
- Be open to different points of view and others opinions.
- Share good news and success from our area.
- Share posts or content from other local organisations, groups and individuals where it is appropriate to do so.

## **We do not accept poor conduct**

- Do not spread false information or unsubstantiated accusations.
- Posts must not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.
- Posts must not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.
- No social media user should have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour. I/we reserve the right to delete content, block individuals or report individuals to social media platforms when necessary.

## **2. Responsibilities of Councillors**

Councillors are personally responsible for the social media content they create, publish and share. Being a councillor will not prevent someone else from pursuing legal action following the publication of an untrue statement. In such a situation you will likely be held personally liable.

Councillors should be mindful of the difference between fact and opinion. Councillors play a central role in preventing the spread of disinformation. They should think twice before they press 'send' or 'share,' or 'retweet'.

On social media, councillors should also keep in mind their responsibility in relation to confidential information, copyright, data protection, the pre-election period and exempt reports.

Councillors are subject to the Code of Conduct when communicating about the Council, on behalf of the Council or in their role as a Councillor, including on social media.

When using social media, Councillors should bear in mind the following principles of good practice:

- Be as open, inclusive and professional as possible when using social media.
- Get and give support. Where you feel able, provide support to fellow councillors online, and reach out to colleagues and your council for support where needed.
- If you are unsure about posting something, stop and ask for advice from an appropriate source first, before doing anything else.
- Bear in mind that what you post can affect the reputation of the council
- The council is a corporate decision-making body. Councillors cannot independently make decisions for the council over social media.
- You should make clear you are expressing personal views and opinions, and not speaking on behalf of the council unless authorised by the council to do so.
- For some issues and communications, responses may need to come from the council's official social media, rather than individual councillors responding.
- Councillors should be mindful of the difference between fact and opinion.
- Elected members play a central role in preventing the spread of disinformation.
- Don't leave your social media to take care of itself. Social media doesn't stop - it keeps going all day every day.
- Don't dismiss or ignore advice and guidance, particularly legal advice.
- Don't assume that a disclaimer or excuses will prevent someone from taking legal action against you.
- Make sure that your social media accounts are safe and protected with strong passwords and multiple-factor authentication where possible.
- Understand privacy settings. There is a range of settings to help you manage who can see or comment on your posts.
- Consider personal mental health and well-being. Taking a break from social media from time to time can be beneficial.

### **3. The Council's expectations of others and ourselves**

#### **1. Engaging with the council on social media**

1.1 The council encourages members of the public, local organisations and community groups, members of the press, local councillors and others in our wider community to follow and engage with the council, including through social media accounts.

1.2 We also encourage everyone in our community to share content from our newsletters, website and social media accounts with their own social media networks. This is especially important, for example, during emergency situations or where sharing timely information is essential.

1.3 Councillors may choose to engage with the community on their own 'councillor' social media accounts. Communication about the Council, on behalf of the Council or in their role as a Councillor are subject to the Code of Conduct.

1.4 Individuals and organisations are responsible for the content that they choose to post to their social media accounts. This includes content created by others that individuals or organisations choose to distribute, re-post, retweet or share.

#### **2. Conduct on social media**

2.1 The Council will treat everyone with courtesy and respect in its communications including on its social media channels, and we therefore ask for the same in return from those who choose to engage with us.

2.2 We ask that council staff and councillors are treated courteously. Council staff and councillors should never be subjected to bullying or other forms of abuse or harassment.

2.3 Council staff and councillors have the right to carry out their civic duties and work without fear of being attacked or abused. Any behaviour whether that be verbal, physical or in writing, which causes either councillors or council staff to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or threatened, is unacceptable.

#### **3. Reporting a civility and respect-related issue**

3.1 Council staff and others communicating on behalf of the Council or operating the Council's social media accounts will at all times be mindful of the council's relevant policies, procedures and processes, including the Code of Conduct.

3.2 The council will record and report abuse directed at the Council. The Council may, for example, create screenshots of comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications, and may take further action as appropriate.

3.3 Council staff and councillors should not have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour. When subjected to such behaviour. The council reserves the right to enact its relevant social media policies and may, for example, delete content, block individuals or report individuals to social media platforms when appropriate to do so.

3.4 The Council may need to report issues of poor conduct directly to social media platforms. For instance, if someone has created a 'fake account' or if someone is persistently abusive to the Council.

3.5 The Council reserves the right to report criminal matters it notices on social media to the Police. For instance, hate crime/speech or threats of violence.

3.6 Please get in touch with the Council if you feel that a councillor, member of staff or a user of our social media has failed to act in a civil and respectful way on our social media.

3.7 You can contact **Alice Fisher** the **Clerk** in the following ways:

**Hughenden Parish Council**

**Council Office**

**The Common**

**Great Kingshill**

**High Wycombe**

**HP156EN**

- **01494 715296**
- [clerk@hughenden-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@hughenden-pc.gov.uk)