

Croft Parish Council Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy

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1. Users of Council social media

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the 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 will maintain a website and uses Email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective way that improves the 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 from time to time to reflect the new arrangements. This policy will apply to new methods of communication as they develop.

Approved Council social media:

- Council website.

Users of Council social media

The Clerk is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other member of staff (other than any employee deputising for the Clerk) has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

2. Principles

- To publish information about the work of Council and relevant local information from other agencies to a wider audience.
- To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council's work.
- Social media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new Councillors, other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements, as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues.

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 have copyright.
- Not contain any personal information.
- Official Council business and the account will be administered by the Clerk to the Council.
- 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 that you follow these guidelines:

- 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 of staff, will not be permitted.
- Stay on topic.

3. Guidance for Council Officers on the Use of the Council Social Media

- a. Councillors must ensure that they are familiar with the guidance that is set out within this policy and that their use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the Council.
- b. Councillors should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites, e.g. Facebook, and adhere to these at all times.
- c. No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain, i.e., available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, etc. Where necessary, this should be ratified by the Council first.
- d. Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
- e. Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
- f. Copyright laws must be respected.
- g. Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- h. Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval - when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
- i. Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
- j. Staff and Councillors must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.
- k. Councillors must adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct and be aware of the risks of action for defamation and the need to respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws.
- l. Councillors must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.
- m. Social media sites are in the public domain, and it is important that Councillors are confident about the nature of the information they publish. They must not publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the Council.
- n. Councillors must not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.
- o. As members of the public may nevertheless recognise officers as employees of the Council, it is important that officers ensure that their personal use of social media is

not damaging to the reputation of the Council. They must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

- p. If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media then they must report such incidents to the Clerk.
- q. Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the Council, the Council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer. Council email addresses will be used. The use will be non-party political.
- r. Officers using social media in this way must respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws. They must be aware of the risks of action for defamation.
- s. Officers must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace or elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.
- t. Officers must not download any software, shareware or freeware, unless this has been approved and authorised by the Clerk.
- u. Failure to comply with the guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken.
- v. 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.
- w. Sending a message via social media 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 or services through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Clerk and/or members of the Council by email. The official email address is croftparishclerk@gmail.com.
- x. We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:
 - i. Obscene or racist content
 - ii. Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
 - iii. Potentially libellous statements
 - iv. Plagiarised material: any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
 - v. Private, personal information published without consent
 - vi. Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
 - vii. Commercial promotions or spam
 - viii. Alleged breach of the Council's policy or the law

- y. 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. The Council delegates the day-to-day administration to the Clerk.

4. Council Website

Where necessary, those contacting the Council may be directed to the Council's website to see the required information, or their question may be forwarded to one of the Councillors for consideration and response. The Council will maintain the website to provide transparency regarding its decisions and will comply with its Publications Scheme.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow approved local groups to have a link to their own website or source of information on the Council's website. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's standards to be on its website.

5. Council Email

The Clerk has their own Council email address: croftparishclerk@gmail.com. The email account is monitored during office hours, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'Out of Office' message will 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. All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with seeking a data subject's consent if the information is to be shared before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners about Council business in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. Please note that any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to the Data Protection Act and The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Do not, without prior consent, forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

6. SMS (Texting) and Messaging Apps

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

7. Video Conferencing

If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

8. Internal Communication and access to information within the Council

The Council are 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, Standing Orders 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 and Staff 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 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.

9. Third Party social media and Individual Councillor Usage

Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If a councillor uses social media in their official capacity, they should always be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Do:

- a. Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site.
- b. Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such opinions.
- c. Be aware that the higher a Councillor's profile is, the more likely it is that they may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network.
- d. Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriately. If using a Council-provided blog site or social networking area, any posts made are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in an official capacity.
- e. Avoid publishing any information that could only have been accessed by being in position as a councillor.
- f. Be careful if making points that can be regarded as political and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.

Don't:

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