

Chigwell Parish Council

Social Media Policy for Councillors

Adoption Date: 28 August 2025

Review Date: August 2026

Applies to: All elected and co-opted members of Chigwell Parish Council ("the Council")

1. Purpose

This policy sets out clear rules for councillors' use of social media in order to protect the integrity, reputation and effective operation of the Council. Social media can be a valuable tool for engagement, but misuse risks damaging public confidence, breaching the Code of Conduct or exposing the Council to legal and reputational harm.

This policy applies to all councillors at all times, whether posting as a councillor, a private individual or in any other role, where the content relates in any way to the Council, its decisions, its officers or parish matters.

2. Standards of Conduct

Councillors are reminded that they remain bound at all times by:

- **The Members' Code of Conduct** adopted by the Council
- **The Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life:**
Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, Leadership

Councillors must always act in a manner that upholds public confidence in the Council all Councillors and officers and does not bring the Council into disrepute

3. Prohibited Conduct on Social Media

When using any social media platform, councillors must not:

3.1 Post, share, "like," or comment in a way that criticises, ridicules, or undermines:

- Decisions or policies of the Council
- Council officers or staff
- Other councillors

3.2 Make or encourage assumptions about the Council's or officers' decisions, positions, motives or actions, particularly when information is incomplete or unverified.

3.3 Publish, endorse or repeat inaccurate, misleading or speculative statements about the Council's business or its officers.

3.4 Fail to fact-check information before posting, sharing or commenting

3.5 Use language, tone or imagery that may inflame a situation, provoke hostility or encourage conflict.

3.6 Use language, tone or implication that conveys disrespect towards decisions properly made by the Council and/or its officers, even if the councillor personally disagreed with them.

3.7 Publish material that is defamatory, discriminatory or otherwise unlawful.

3.8 Engage in any online behaviour that brings the Council into disrepute or is inconsistent with the standards expected under the Code of Conduct.

4. Transparency of Public Platforms

4.1 If a councillor runs, moderates or administers a social media page, group or account as a Councillor that discusses or comments on parish matters, all posts must be openly visible to all serving councillors and the Parish Clerk

4.2 Councillors must not configure audience settings or moderation tools to deliberately exclude other councillors or officers, particularly where doing so would allow negative, speculative or misleading comments about the Council to be made or hosted.

5. Official Council Communications

5.1 Only the Clerk (or another officer or representative formally authorised in writing by the Clerk) may issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

5.2 Councillors must not present personal views as those of the Council. Where expressing a personal opinion about parish matters, councillors must clearly state that it is their own view.

6. Removal of Content and Retractions

6.1 The Council will require the immediate removal of offending content.

6.2 If instructed by the Clerk or other duly authorised person to remove or amend content or to issue a retraction/correction, the councillor must do so within 24 hours of being notified in writing to do so.

6.3 Failure to comply within this timeframe will be treated as a breach of this policy and may be subject to Code of Conduct procedures.

7. Public Complaints about Councillor Online Conduct

7.1 If a member of the public makes a complaint about a councillor's social media activity, it will be acknowledged by the Clerk and assessed under the Members' Code of Conduct framework.

7.2 The Clerk will gather relevant evidence, including screenshots and context, and will notify the councillor concerned.

7.3 If the complaint potentially breaches this policy or the Code of Conduct, the matter will be referred to the Monitoring Officer by the Clerk.

7.4 The councillor must fully cooperate with any investigation, provide requested information promptly, and not delete or alter relevant content until the process is complete (except when instructed to remove it under section 6).

7.5 The Monitoring Officer's decision is final and any recommendations for action or sanction will be implemented.

8. Dispute Resolution

8.1 In the event of any dispute regarding the interpretation or application of this policy, the Clerk will seek guidance from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

8.2 The Monitoring Officer's decision is final and any recommendations for action or sanction will be implemented.

9. Enforcement

9.1 Breaches of this policy may amount to a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct and may be referred for investigation in accordance with statutory procedures.

9.2 Where publication is defamatory, misleading or damaging to the Council's reputation, the Council reserves the right to take legal and procedural action

10. Good Practice

- Assume anything you post will be read by residents, the media and other councillors, even in "private" groups.
- Post factually, respectfully and constructively.
- Where unsure of the facts or the appropriateness of posting, seek advice from the Clerk before publishing.