



Council Name: Hail Weston Parish Council

Email Address: clerk@hailweston.org.uk

Adopted: 20/04/18

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Hail Weston Parish 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.

The use of digital 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 has a website, a Facebook page, a Twitter account and uses email to communicate. Hail Weston Facebook Page/Twitter/website feed are jointly managed by volunteers and the Council (Councillors and Clerk) so this policy is intended to help Councillors and the Hail Weston Parish Clerk (the Clerk) to make appropriate decisions about appropriate content.

Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. The Clerk and Parish Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address which is used for council business. They should disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council and take care to ensure that personal opinions cannot be mistaken for the view of the Council.

All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that appropriate security settings are in place. The Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from the Council's social media channels and website. The Council does not endorse products or services advertised by any social media channels it uses.

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.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;

- Be objective, balanced, informed and accurate
- Be respectful and 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 own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information except where unavoidable or permission has been given or can reasonably be assumed.
- Comments or posts that relate to official Council business will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
- Will not be used for the dissemination of political advertising.

Our expectations of those who engage with us via our website and social media channels

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council's webpages or social media channels are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask all users to 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 or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's social media channels for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

Our site/channels are 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.

Sending a message/post via social media channels 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 email, telephone or in person. Contact details are available at www.hailweston.org.uk.

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

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal or sensitive information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum

- Commercial promotions or spam
- Allegations of 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. Any information posted that is not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from our channels. 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 or other appropriate authority as soon as possible to allow due process.

Parish 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.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

Parish Council email

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address clerk@hailweston.org.uk. The email account is monitored daily, Monday to Friday, 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 Councillors 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 a data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence. 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.

SMS (texting)

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

Video Conferencing e.g. Skype

This policy also applies to the use of video conferencing where used.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and to comply with UK data protection legislation 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).

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 as appropriate.