

LONG ASHTON PARISH COUNCIL
DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

The use of digital and social media is an integral part of how Long Ashton Parish Council communicates with local residents, local businesses and agencies it serves and works with.

This policy details how Long Ashton Parish Council will use digital and social media and gives guidelines to ensure that digital and social media use remains productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives.

Digital and social media provides an alternative channel to written correspondence, telephone and face-to-face conversation to enable the Parish Council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised by people who live in, work in and visit the parish. It also enables the Parish Council to deal more efficiently with the various agencies that deliver services to local people.

Long Ashton Parish Council has a corporate presence on the web, an email channel, Facebook page (including the Parish Council's projects Facebook pages and groups) and Twitter account which it uses to communicate with residents, as well as those working in and visiting the parish. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications, and the Clerk and/or Councillors may ask for a preferred channel of communication. Over time the Parish 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 the Digital and Social Media Policy will be updated.

Long Ashton Parish Council Facebook page (including the Parish Council's projects Facebook pages and groups) and Twitter account intends to provide information and updates regarding activities, opportunities and issues that will impact on residents within our Parish and promote our community positively.

Social Media

GUIDELINES

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Long Ashton Parish Council Facebook page and the Parish Council's projects Facebook pages and groups and Twitter account are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you 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 Facebook page(s) and groups or Twitter for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

All communications from Long Ashton Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, respectful and relevant.

- Not contain content that is unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Nor contain content copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright.
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.
- Will be moderated by the Clerk to the Parish Council and/or the Community Engagement Officer.
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

All communications to Long Ashton Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, respectful and relevant.
- Not contain content that is unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Not contain content copied from elsewhere for which the enquirer does not own the copyright.
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.
- Will not seek to disseminate any political advertising.

The Long Ashton Parish Council Facebook page (and the Parish Council's Facebook pages and groups for projects) and Twitter account are not monitored 24/7. The Parish Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages, posts 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/comment via Facebook or Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Parish 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, the Community Engagement Officer, or Members of the council by emailing. Only an email sent to the Clerk or copied to the Clerk will be regarded as official.

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the website, Twitter and Facebook page(s) and groups. On occasion, requests for information may be forwarded to a Councillor(s) for their consideration and response, which will then be directed back via the Clerk to the Parish Council.

Long Ashton Parish Council retain the right to remove posts, 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 information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

Long Ashton Parish 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 Parish Council's discretion based on the communication received, given our limited resources available. Any communication posted and/or commented on the Facebook page(s) and groups and Twitter account not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page(s) and groups and Twitter account. The Parish Council may post a statement that 'A

post/comment breaching the Parish Council's Digital and Social Media Policy has been removed. If the post/comment 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 Parish Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

Facebook

The Clerk to the Council and/or the Community Engagement Officer reserves the right to remove any post(s)/comment(s) considered in breach of the above. Long Ashton Parish Council may choose to respond to a post/comment received, particularly if one response can be considered to address all. Long Ashton Parish Council *may* permit local organisations to maintain a presence on its Facebook page, subject to the adherence of the criteria detailed above. It should be clearly identified that such information and its content is not the direct responsibility of the Parish Council.

Twitter

Long Ashton Parish Council may choose to re-tweet comments that mention the Parish Council or are relevant or provide information to residents.

Website

Long Ashton Parish Council's website is an integral part of the Parish Council. Its purpose is to *provide information* to residents, local clubs, societies and organisations as well as external bodies including Local and/or Central Government organisations. The Parish Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant.

The following items may be included:

- Information on village clubs, societies and organisations and events
- Links to relevant external websites such as North Somerset Council, gov.uk, external auditor, bus companies, TravelWest, Bristol City Council, balloon fiesta management etc
- Links to approved charities (as requested)
- Parish Council agendas
- Parish Council minutes
- Parish Council committees minutes
- Parish Council Financial Information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended)
- Parish Council policies and procedures
- Parish Council members' information

Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website should be emailed to the Clerk at clerk@longashtonparishcouncil.com

The following will NOT be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation
- Commercial advertisements
- Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event.

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 website. The Parish 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 '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 Parish Council.

Emails

Long Ashton Parish Council maintains one email address [clerk@longashtonparishcouncil.com]. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to other officers, Councillor(s) 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.

Personal information including names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers must not be forwarded on to other people or groups outside of the Council, without the permission of the data subject. In very limited circumstances the clerk may pass information to North Somerset Council as described in the Privacy Policy.

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.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. Any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

Councillors 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.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

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, zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet etc.

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

Internal communication and access to information within the Council

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of digital and social media 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).

Long Ashton Parish Council will not participate in the publication of defamatory material nor read out letters from parishioners at council meetings, reproducing complaints, etc verbatim in the minutes or permitting third parties to post material on to the council website as per NALC Legal Topic Note 30 - Defamation available at <https://www.lalc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LTN30-defamation.pdf>

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