

# **Linton Parish Council**

## **Communications & Social Media Policy**

### **1. Introduction**

In order to carry out its work, ensure it is representing residents and gain feedback on its activities, Linton Parish Council needs to communicate with residents and a range of organisations and bodies. This policy gives a framework to help officers, councillors and consultants make decisions around communication strategies and methods.

### **2. Purpose and scope**

The purpose of this policy is to define the aims and principles of Linton Parish Council's communication activity. It is intended to help officers and councillors make choices about the best ways to communicate.

The scope of this policy includes all Staff and Councillors of the Council and any consultants who are acting on behalf of the Council.

### **3. Legal/Policy background**

#### **3.1 Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity**

All Council communications activity will have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The publicity code provides guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. The code sets out seven key principles. Publicity should:

- Be lawful
- Be cost-effective
- Be objective
- Be even-handed
- Be appropriate
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

The full code can be found here:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicitycode2011](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicitycode2011)

Council staff and Councillors are governed by strict rules on impartiality and publicity and are not allowed to enter into any form of communication that supports or promotes, or may be interpreted as supporting or promoting, the political views of any councillor or group of councillors. Any communications either through public

statements or the media (including social media) must only support and promote council policy and not politicians or political parties.

## **4. Aims and Principles**

In all communications activity the Parish Council aims to communicate effectively with residents and other interested organisations. In its communications it will:

- Positively communicate its own work and that undertaken in its name by contractors and consultants
- Champion work by other agencies, organisations and businesses within the Parish
- Remain interesting and relevant
- Provide value for money

## **5. Detailed Policy**

### **5.1 Choosing communications methods and channels**

The Parish Council will look to communicate its activities using a range of digital and traditional media.

In making choices, the Council, its employees and consultants will always balance the value for money considerations with the need to reach as many residents as possible. It will consider the benefits of different channels, the reach and the timeliness of the channel.

### **5.2 Website**

The Parish Council will have an up to date, easy to navigate website. The website will include access to all meeting documents as well as up to date news about the Parish Council's activities.

It will also include full contact details for the Clerk and Councillors to assist residents wishing to ask questions and submit Freedom of Information requests.

### **5.3 Printed communications**

The Parish Council will use printed communications from time to time. These will be planned to get messages out to residents and the Parish Council will seek to ensure that printed communications are value for money.

## **5.4 Advertising**

Where is it appropriate to get a targeted message out to a particular group the Parish Council will consider paid for advertising in print, digital or broadcast channels.

## **6. Social media**

### **6.1 Choosing channels**

The Parish Council will actively use social media to communicate with residents, and will assess which channels are most appropriate, bearing in mind costs, usage and effectiveness. This may change from time to time, and individual projects may require specific channels or accounts.

### **6.2 Social media principles**

The Parish Council will post frequently on its own social media channels, and will support local interests and businesses. The Parish Council will not exclusively promote or endorse specific products or businesses. Retweeting or sharing does not mean endorsement.

The Parish Council will work with the rules of each social media network. It has the right to block or report any account that is using inappropriate or offensive language, spamming, causing a nuisance or harassing councillors, officers or consultants.

## **7. Social media channels and customer service/complaints**

The Parish Council does not monitor its social media channels 24 hours a day and as such channels are not intended for complaints. Those wishing to complain to the Council should do so by referring to the Complaints Procedure or by emailing the Parish Clerk: [cerk@linton-pc.org.uk](mailto:cerk@linton-pc.org.uk)

Where questions are asked within business hours, responses shall be made as quickly as possible, taking care to be accurate. Where a general answer can be found on the website, the Parish Council will share this information.

## **8. Personal use of social media**

Councillors, officers and consultants should be aware that when using social media in a personal capacity it is expected they will behave appropriately and in line with council policies, procedures and codes of conduct. In all matters involving the Parish Council,

Councillors, officers and consultants have a duty to support the democratic process and the corporate body of the Parish Council regardless of their own personal views.

Individuals may wish to add a disclaimer to their social media profile to make it clear that the account is personal – for example: 'These views are my own'. Where Councillors are expressing political views, they should make it clear that they are speaking on their own behalf and not representing or speaking for the Parish Council.

There will be occasions when individual Councillors do not support decisions reached by the Parish Council. In such cases, Councillors may wish to post on social media their reasons for opposing a particular course of action but must recognise that the Parish Council, as a corporate body, debated the issue and reached a democratic decision. All Councillors have a duty to respect the validity of such decisions and to ensure that the Parish Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

Individuals should check their online privacy settings. It is important to understand who can see the information that is published and to know who can view personal information.

Councillors, officers and consultants must comply with other council policies, procedures and codes of conduct when using social media, particularly confidentiality issues and proprietary information policies.

## **9. Resourcing**

The Parish Council shall resource its communications activity appropriately.

## **10. Transparency**

The Parish Council will be transparent in sharing the budget allocated to communications, marketing and social media.

## **11. Pre-election period or 'Purdah'**

The six-week run up to an election - local, general or European is a time of heightened political sensitivity. Separate guidelines will be produced for these occasions.