

The Policy.

This Policy will cover all issues relating to the use of electronic information in the form of Email, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApps and any other similar Social Media that is used by South Willesborough and Newtown (SWAN) Community Council. It will be relevant to Council Members in their capacity as a Councillor, while acting in their capacity as a Councillor and in their private lives; it will also include any staff and Volunteers. It is also the policy that will be used to regulate the use of voice recording, filming and the taking of pictures during Parish Council and Committee Meetings.

Key Aims.

- It will set down rules governing the use of the all electronic Information.
- It will ensure that everyone associated with the Parish Council gives out correct information if asked and, in the manner, agreed by the Council.
- It will protect the reputation of the Council, its employees and Members.
- Provide guidance and should any pitfalls.

The Legal Bit

The Local Government Act 1986 and 1988, The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, The Freedom of Information Act and the Transparency Code 2015 is the legislation that govern Local Councils and everyone that this policy is for, should have this in mind when using data of any type, written or electronic.

In Addition, the Standing Orders of the Council and the Code of Conduct for Councillors are also important when dealing with the public in the written or electronic form and need to be adhered to as well.

Filming, voice recording and photography at meetings

Although not required by law, if time allows permission should be obtained prior to the meeting.

This will allow the Chairman of the Council or the Committee to arrange seating so that the person filming or recording:

- Will not disrupt the meeting
- Will not film, record or take pictures of anyone young or vulnerable, or those who do not wish to be filmed, recorded or have their pictures taken.
- The right to refuse any of the above should be respected.
- Can be made aware of any confidential item on the agenda that will be excluded from filming or being recorded as allowed by law to exclude members of the press and the public.

The Chairman of the meeting will not withhold permission without good reason.

If the Chairman of the meeting considers that filming or voice recording or the taking of pictures is becoming intrusive, or preventing those present to comment or join in the debate, the Chairman will request that the activity to stop until such time as the intrusive nature has been resolved.

If getting permission prior to the meeting is not possible then the person requiring the permission should arrive early so that they can speak to the Clerk and or Chairman before the meeting starts. (This should be only in exceptional circumstances)

The Parish Council is not obliged to provide any filming or voice recording or camera equipment.

The person filming or voice recording is responsible for obtaining consent from the members of the public prior to the meeting and must respect anyone's decision to abstain from being filmed or recorded.

These regulations will only apply to formal meetings where decisions are to take place; they will not apply to working groups or other informal meetings where decisions are not made.

Emails

SWAN Parish Council uses email to communicate with members of the public, outside organisations, other local government bodies and each other.

Members use their own laptops and computers for the sending of emails and other work related to the Parish Council.

Members should be aware these emails can be requested under the Data Protection Act 2000, a Data Access Request, or Freedom of Information. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that each Councillor keeps all Parish Council communication within its own separate file, which must be protected by passwords; this will prevent accidental access by other family members if the laptop or computer is used by more than person in the house.

Members must not pass on any passwords to anyone even within their own family.

Should use an encryption to further protect files.

To ensure good practice in sending emails:

- Reply only to those who need to see them, try not to 'reply all' if it is obvious from the originator that only they need a reply.
- Never forward information of a confidential nature.
- Any information sent by email should always be in accordance with the Parish Council policy on communication.
- Comments of a personal nature, or that which could be offensive or abusive would constitute unacceptable behaviour; and would be contrary to the Standings Orders of the Parish Council.
- Emails which constitute harassment and bullying will be contrary to the Councillors Code of Conduct and will be reported to the monitoring officer at Ashford Borough Council.
- Members of staff may use the office laptop or computer provided it does not interfere or affect work or delay actions requested by the Council or Committee. In addition no personal use should adversely affect the resources of the Parish Council.

Social Media.

Twitter and Facebook and other message platforms

Once the Community Council has a Twitter page, and a Facebook Page the following will regulate their use:

Any item, information, picture or other material uploaded to Facebook/Twitter MUST be of a positive nature.

Differing opinions are useful and helps the Community Council when considering issues at meetings and committees and should be encouraged.

Posts should not engage in threats, abusive language neither should pictures of a sexual nature be uploaded or forwarded to others.

No commercial promotions should be uploaded to the Community Council Facebook/Twitter page.

Be aware of copyrights.

Councillors, if they reply to comments or messages on Facebook or Twitter must ensure that they do not give out confidential information or any decisions made by the Parish Council that has not yet been made public.

Ensure that any comment made by a Councillor will be regarded as the Councillors private comment and not that which is or could be council policy.

The Community Council cannot always respond to individual comments, in fact it may not be useful to do so; but if it is noted that a theme is emerging the Community Council will consider the theme at a meeting or pass on the information to any relevant organisation that can help.

Whether a Councillor, member of staff or the public need to contact the Parish Council, it is considered that the Facebook or Twitter page will not be considered as a formal contact for official purposes. Any issues that require a definitive response from the Community Council must be addressed to the Community Council via the Clerk in the normal way.

Any private, personal information, violation of any laws or plagiarised materials, will be removed.

SWAN Community Council Website

SWAN Community Council has a Website, and this is maintained by staff employed by the Council.

The website is to ensure that information relevant to the Community Council and its environs is available to a wider audience as well as those who live in the Parish of SWAN. It gives information on the work of the Community Council, when meetings are taking place and allows Minutes of those meetings to be accessible.

Information is checked prior to being placed on the website and is correct at the time of the uploading to the Website.

Any links placed on the website are for ease of finding information they are not an endorsement of any of their services.

Pictures placed on the website are for historical and social interest only.

Permission will be gained for any pictures that can identify individuals, unless those individuals are deceased or unable to be contacted.

Any group pictures will be removed if a request is made by an individual who is present within the group picture.

A bit more legal stuff

Any and all comments placed on either the Facebook or Twitter sites will become the property of SWAN Community Council.

SWAN Community Council does not assume any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of use of any information placed on SWAN Facebook, Twitter and website pages.

This policy will be reviewed at least once every two years or sooner if it is felt appropriate.

While this policy cannot control what individuals do within any personal Electronic platforms they use; it is expected that as a Councillor or staff, comments must not be derogatory of the Council as this undermines the Community Council.

Each Councillor will be given a copy of the Policy and they will be encouraged to adhere to the contents.

Agreed on15th April 2019

Adopted on13th May 2019

Review date.....End of May 2021

Reviewed 05th February 2024

Adopted 5th February 2024 CL Minute 32/24

Review Annually. Annual Meeting of Council 2023, Adopted

Annual Meeting of Council 24 Adopted Review May25 Annual Meeting of Council