



Moulton Parish Council

<https://moultonpc.org.uk>

Communications and Social Media Policy

Introduction

This policy defines and guides communications with the Parish Council, its officials and its councillors. It is binding on all councillors and employees of Moulton Parish Council and a breach of this policy could lead to disciplinary action.

Effective, clear communication is vital for both the reputation and efficient operation of the council and will ensure that the council responds to the parish's needs and priorities.

Objectives

The objective of this policy is to ensure that the Council:

- Informs residents and stakeholders of the Parish Council's aims, objectives and activities.
- Uses appropriate methods of communication to ensure Moulton Parish Council communicates effectively.
- Builds trust by being open and transparent.

Responsibilities

Clerk

The Clerk, as the Proper Officer of Moulton Parish Council, is authorised to receive all communications from parishioners, the unitary authority and all other third parties. They are further authorised to issue all approved communications and statements, on behalf of Moulton Parish Council, in consultation with the Chairman.

In the absence of the Clerk, all communications will be handled by the Chairman, in consultation with the Vice-Chairman. In the absence of the Chairman, or Vice-Chairman, then their authority will be delegated to another councillor.

Communications, made by the Clerk, will relate only to the stated business and day-to-day activities of Moulton Parish Council, in accordance with the adopted policies of the Council.

They must not speculate on matters that have not been considered by Moulton Parish Council or act without direction from the Chairman. Where such queries are posed to the Clerk, they must seek guidance from the relevant councillors and/or Chairman before responding.

The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman (or delegated authority) is authorised to publish statements to the Press or Social Media, on any urgent matter, where there has been insufficient time for a public meeting and a timely response is required. A summary of such communications must be provided at the next Council meeting. Any statement must represent the position of the council and not the personal or individual opinions of the Clerk or the councillors.

Employees

Any employee of Moulton Parish Council, other than the Clerk, have no authority to represent the Council, unless they have been given a specific mandate to do so by the Chairman (or delegated authority), the Clerk or a Council meeting.

Employees should be mindful of their employment contract and should refer any queries to the Clerk.

Councillors

Councillors are mandated to abide by the Code of Conduct, which encourages open, informed and courteous communication.

Councillors must not be ambiguous in all interactions that they have no authority to represent the Council unless the matter had been agreed at a Council meeting, or they have been given a specific mandate by the Chairman (or delegated authority) or a Council meeting.

Councillors must be clear, if offering comment, whether they are giving a personal opinion, or referring the matter to the Council for a formal response. In the former case, councillors should be mindful of previous decisions made by Moulton Parish Council, the council's policies and procedures, and respect the community, the council and those who serve it.

Councillors must not make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the Clerk who will progress the matter appropriately
- request an item on a relevant agenda
- investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Clerk.

Approved methods of Parish Council external communication

The following methods of communication are approved for Moulton Parish Council matters:

- Official Moulton Parish Council website
- Official Moulton Parish Council social media accounts
- Moulton Parish Council newsletters
- Parish Noticeboard
- Councillors or employees on official Moulton Parish Council business.
- Moulton Parish Council E-mail
- Letters

Official Moulton Parish Council website

All websites that are hosted on domain names owned by Moulton Parish Council, or are setup to host Moulton Parish Council content by a member of the Council, are covered by this policy.

The website is updated by at least two designated “webmasters” who are appointed at a Council meeting. One of these webmasters should be the Clerk, if they are technically able.

The following content should be hosted on Moulton Parish Council websites:

- Agendas and minutes of Moulton Parish Council for the previous three years
- Policies, procedures and newsletters of Moulton Parish Council
- Information about the village, amenities and events
- Information about the purpose and activities of the council.
- Press Releases

Any councillor can propose or provide content for the website, and the webmasters should upload it, if approved, within two weeks.

Official Moulton Parish Council social media accounts

All social media accounts that are created by a member of the Council for Parish Council activities are covered by this policy.

Each social media presence is managed by at least two designated “account masters” who are appointed at a Council meeting. One of these account masters should be the Clerk, if they are technically able.

The following content should be hosted on Moulton Parish Council social media accounts:

- Information and publicity about the village, amenities and events
- Information and publicity about activities of the council.
- Links to content on Moulton Parish Council website

Any councillor can propose or provide content for social media, and the account masters should upload it, if approved, within two weeks.

Personal social media accounts

Personal social media profiles, operated by councillors and employees, are considered private accounts, providing the following applies:

- Their profile does not include their job title (for employees) or their elected title (for councillors).
- Their profile does not discuss Moulton Parish Council business that is not already in the public domain.
- Their profile does not claim to officially represent Moulton Parish Council.

In addition to the Moulton Parish Council Councillor Code of Conduct, councillors must not:

- Publish obscene material, give unwelcome sexual attention or make unwanted sexual advances.
- Publish others' private information without their explicit permission.
- Troll, or disrupt the ability of others to debate.
- Consistently mentioning or making contact with others, when this is unwelcome.

- Publish any information that infringes copyright of others.
- Publish any information that may be deemed libellous.
- Present personal opinions as that of the council.
- Publish content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council.
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without appropriate permission.
- Publish discriminatory content, defined as hostility towards another person because of race (including colour, ethnic or national origin, nationality, citizenship), sex, gender re-assignment, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, disability, age, religion or belief, political views, pregnancy and maternity status, or any status covered by Equality Act 2010.
- Create or operate “sockpuppet” (a false online identity, typically created by a person or group in order to promote their own opinions or views) accounts.

Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings, committees or working groups.

Councillors and officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party services, and adhere to these at all times.

Councillors and officers are encouraged to utilise the “blocking” facilities of social media services when confronted by abusive content, bullying individuals or harassment.

Employees and councillors must be mindful that they do not breach their responsibilities when communicating on that platform and be careful that they do not breach any confidences. Employees must ensure their conduct does not bring Moulton Parish Council into disrepute, and Councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct at all times.

Official Moulton Parish Council newsletters

Moulton Parish Council issues newsletters, as approved by a Council meeting. Each newsletter is produced by a designated editor. Content within newsletters should focus on information and publicity about the village, amenities and events, and information and publicity about activities of the council. The final draft must be approved by the Chairman (or delegated authority).

Parish Noticeboard

Moulton Parish Council maintains a Parish Noticeboard in the centre of the village and is maintained by the Clerk, in accordance with the directions given by the Chairman and the council.

The following content should be hosted on Moulton Parish Council Parish Noticeboard:

- Information and publicity about activities of the council.
- Contact details for the council

Councillors or officials on official Moulton Parish Council business

Moulton Parish Council will, occasionally, run official events as well as host Council meetings. During such events, or when undertaking activities for the parish council, all councillors and officials should ensure that they conduct themselves appropriate to the circumstances of the event.

Official Moulton Parish Council e-mail

All Moulton Parish Council activities should be conducted via the provided e-mail account, and official business must not be conducted by personal e-mail accounts. All users of the official e-mail facility should only use the e-mail service for official business and must remember that all e-mails are subject to Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act legislation.

All councillors of Moulton Parish Council must use out-of-office "auto-responders" when they are not available for an extended period of time. The Clerk must use an out-of-office "auto-responder" to signify when senders can receive a response.

Letters

All letters sent by Moulton Parish Council should be on headed paper and follow the above guidance. Copies of the letters should be stored and archived for later retrieval.

Internal Electronic Communication

The following methods of communication are approved for Moulton Parish Council matters with an internal audience:

- Secure Instant Messaging services, such as WhatsApp and Viber
- Official Moulton Parish Council e-mail

Councillors and employees of the council must ensure that their communications between other members of the parish council are professional and adhere to the general principles of communication below.

General Principles for Communication

All communication must abide by the following general principles when communicating about council matters within the community:

- Remain calm, measured and respectful.
- Ensure that communications, comments and publicity are unambiguous, informed and correct.
- Ensure that communications, comments and publicity are consistent with Parish Council policies and past decisions.
- Ensure that communications, comments and publicity do not attack, undermine or violate accepted moral or legal norms.
- Ensure that communications, comments and publicity are professionally written and grammatically correct.
- Ensure that publicity and advertisements are objective and concentrate on facts, rather than opinions.
- Ensure that publicity on controversial issues are handled with particular care.
- Ensure that any comments do not bring the community, the Parish Council, including the councillors and employees, or our partners into disrepute and that they are neither libellous nor slanderous.
- Public resources must not be used to fund publicity or communications, as being political or promoting particular members within six months of a known election date.
- Ensure that communications, comments or publicity do not disclose information or data which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law.
- Councillors should not use their title (“Councillor”, “Vice-Chairman” or “Chairman”), and employees should not use their job title, if they are expressing their personal views in a private capacity.

Breaches

Employees

A reported breach of the Communications and Social Media Policy will be addressed by the disciplinary policies of the council.

Councillors

A reported breach of the Communications and Social Media Policy, will be assigned an investigator by the chairman of Moulton Parish Council to probe the alleged transgression. They will report to Moulton Parish Council who must vote to accept the recommended course of action which will be one or more of:

- a) No significant breach found, and no action to be taken.
- b) Significant breach found, and the councillor(s) are officially censured by Moulton Parish Council, with a warning to their future conduct.
- c) Potential breach of the Code of Conduct, and a referral is made to the monitoring officer at the unitary authority.