

SUTTERTON PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media & Communications Policy

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Sutterton Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, the community, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council will maintain a website and Facebook page and uses email to communicate. 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 from time to time to reflect the new arrangements. This policy will apply to new methods of communication as they develop.

The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- 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.
- Official Council business and the account will be administered by the Clerk to the Parish Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask that they 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 for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

The site is 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 Facebook 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 or services through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the Council by e-mail. The official email address is Suttertonparishclerk@outlook.com

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 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

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.

The Parish Council delegates the day to day administration to the Clerk to the Parish Council (*Note: this allows day to day administration to take place in accordance with S.101 Local Government Act 1972 without having to call a parish Council meeting*). Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible.

Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. 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 the external auditor for the matter to be properly investigated.

Parish Council 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 do not respond to every comment made or received and there is no obligation to do so. The Parish Council will maintain the website to provide transparency regarding its decisions and will comply with its Publications Scheme.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow approved local groups to have a link to their own website or source of information on the Parish Council's website. The 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 standards to be on its website.

Parish Council E-mail

The Clerk to the Parish Council has their official Council work email address for most official communication with the Parish Council. The e-mail account is monitored and the aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. The Council does not have formal office working hours. It is expected that a response to an e-mail will occur at some point during the week that it is received. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with e-mail received and passing on any relevant mail to members 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 e-mails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with seeking a data subject's consent if the information is to be shared before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners about Parish Council business in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. Please note that any e-mails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to the Data Protection Act and 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) and Messaging Apps

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

Video Conferencing

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 social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders 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 and staff 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.

Parish Council Correspondence

The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.

The Clerk shall deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a Committee, Sub-Committee or Working Party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper.

Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).

Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

The agenda should be clear and concise. It should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.

Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.

Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for “information only”, this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

Communications with the Press and Public

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the council or the Chair of the relevant committee.

Press reports from the Council, its Committees or Working Parties should be from the Clerk or an Officer or via the reporter’s own attendance at a meeting.

Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.

If a Councillor receives a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council’s adopted Complaints Procedure, or via a Council agenda item.

This Policy was approved at a Parish Council meeting on the 1st May 2024