

# Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

## 1. Purpose

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

1.2 The Parish Council has a website, various social media pages, and uses email to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

1.3 The Parish Council's social media pages intend to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and to promote our community positively.

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## 2. Procedure

### 2.1 Communications from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

2.1.1 Be civil, tasteful, and relevant.

2.1.2 Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive.

2.1.3 Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright, or contain any personal information.

2.1.4 If it is official Parish Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair or the Clerk.

2.1.5 Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

### 2.2 To ensure that all discussions on the Parish Council social media pages are productive, respectful, and consistent with the Parish Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

2.2.1 Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats, or abuse of language will not be tolerated.

2.2.2 Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Councillors or Employees, will not be permitted.

2.2.3 Share freely and be generous with official Parish Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.

2.2.4 Stay on topic.

2.2.5 Refrain from using the Parish Council's social media pages for commercial purposes or to advertise, market, or sell products.

**2.3 Social media pages are 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.

**2.4 Sending a message/post via social media pages will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes.** We will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Clerk and/or Councillors by emailing.

**2.5 The Parish Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:**

2.5.1 Obscene or racist content.

2.5.2 Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.

2.5.3 Potentially libellous statements.

2.5.4 Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright.

2.5.5 Private, personal information published without consent.

2.5.6 Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.

2.5.7 Commercial promotions or spam; or alleges a breach of a Parish Council's policy or the law.

**2.6 The 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 message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Parish Council social media pages not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible, and repeat offenders will be blocked. The Parish Council may post a statement such as 'A post breaching the Parish Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Parish 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.

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## 2.7 Parish Council Website

2.7.1 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.

2.7.2 The Parish 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 Parish Council's 'rules and expectations' 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 Parish Council's 'rules and expectations'. 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.

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## 2.8 Parish Council Email

2.8.1 The Clerk has their own Parish Council email address – [clerk@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk](mailto:clerk@dbhparishcouncil.co.uk). The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

2.8.2 The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Parish 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.

2.8.3 Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copying the Clerk. **Please note that any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.**

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

2.8.5 Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Parish Council, including names, addresses, email addresses, IP addresses, and cookie identifiers.

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## 2.9 SMS (Texting) and WhatsApp

2.9.1 Councillors and the Clerk may use SMS or WhatsApp as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages. **When using SMS or**

**WhatsApp for official communications, records should be kept and transferred to formal documentation (e.g., emails) when necessary.**

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## **2.10 Video Conferencing (e.g., Skype, Zoom, Teams)**

2.10.1 If these mediums are used to communicate, this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing. **Whenever possible, video conferences should be recorded for transparency purposes.**

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## **2.11 Internal Communication and Access to Information within the Council**

2.11.1 The Parish 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.

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## **2.12 Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Parish Council.**

2.12.1 As 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 Parish Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme, it may also involve a criminal investigation).

2.12.2 Councillors should also be careful to only CC essential recipients on emails, i.e., to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, while copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed. **Councillors should act with caution when sharing personal opinions on social media to avoid confusion with their role within the Parish Council.**

**Reference:** For further guidance on confidentiality and appropriate conduct, consult the [Parish Council's Code of Conduct](#).

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## **3. Policy Review**

- This policy will be **reviewed at least every two years** to ensure continued compliance with legal requirements and best practices.

- **Adopted by Parish Council:** 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025
- **Last reviewed:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Next review due:** 20<sup>th</sup> February 2027
- **Signed:** Chairperson: Janet Biggin    Parish Clerk: Kevin Spratt