Social Media & Digital Communications Policy

OCTOBER 2026

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, Council staff and any members of the public who engage with the council or share information from or about the council using online communications. This includes emails and social media (social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet).

Saltford Parish Council
Social Media and Digital Communications Policy October 2026

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1. Introduction

This policy covers all forms of digital communications (including emails).

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including social media sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and digital communications, and to outline Saltford Parish Council's position on various aspects of social media and digital communication use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using SPC's social media sites and the use of email by members of the public in relation to SPC contact and in relation to SPC members and staff.

It includes standards and guidelines for Councillors and Council staff to observe when using social media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments and digital communications, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy.

This policy covers all forms of digital communications (including emails) – also including social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Saltford Parish Council website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- X (formerly Twitter), BlueSky and other micro-blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Saltford Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct for Councillors applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Over time Saltford Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur this policy may be updated to reflect the new arrangements if required. This policy may be amended at any time.

For the purposes of this policy:

- "Staff" means employees of Saltford Parish Council.
- "Moderator" means any person authorised by the Council to manage Council social media accounts.

- "Volunteer" means any person authorised by the Council to assist with Council activities without being employed by the Council.

2. How Social Media and digital communications will be used by the Council

2.a Social media and digital communications may be used for:

- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based information, services, decisions and actions
- Promotion and signposting of Unitary Authority (B&NES Council) and WECA information or partner websites e.g. FixMyStreet, One.Network, including public consultations
- Supporting local democracy
- Distribute in whole or part information from council notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings
- Information specifically agreed to be communicated via social media at Council meetings
- Advertising or supporting events and activities that Saltford Parish Council has organised or co-organised, or those organised externally but recognised as being beneficial for the community, including those that SPC may have awarded grant funding towards
- Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- Sharing health and/or safety information
- Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the Saltford area
- Providing, signposting and exchanging information about local services and events
- Support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Gathering local resident's insights
- Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area (at the Council's discretion and not by external organiser request)
- Acknowledgement of support received from businesses or any other organisation for Parish Council activities or events. This may include tagging businesses or organisations
- Advertising vacancies (including voluntary positions) for Saltford Parish Council, or B&NES Council and its partner vacancies (specifically those that would be of benefit to the village) and/or any other community vacancies that are deemed as beneficial for the village (both paid for and voluntary)
- Share relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Libraries, Health, Fire and Rescue etc
- Post or share relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, Scouts/Guides and local charities
- Link to appropriate websites and other social media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the council's expectations of conduct
- Post other items as the council sees fit

2.b Ultimately it is up to the moderators to post content, however social media and digital communications will not be used for:

- Promoting sponsorship of individuals
- Advertising sale of personal items
- Advertising general vacancies unless as outlined above
- Helping to find lost pets or property

2.c Saltford Parish Council runs its social media pages so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Its primary purpose is as an electronic noticeboard. As it cannot be moderated 24/7 due to the limitations of SPC resource, comments will usually be left switched off bar to those tagged in any posts.

Social media accounts will not necessarily be checked regularly and if comments are left on posts they will not be responded to in most instances. It may be that SPC is not notified of any of its posts that have been shared. SPC may not be notified of posts that it has been mentioned or tagged in. SPC is unlikely to comment on posts in which it has been mentioned and/or tagged even if aware.

As made clear on SPC's website under 'Contact Us', the only way to contact SPC to gain a response to any enquiries or comments is via the methods listed on SPC's website.

Similarly any comments, tags or shares of SPC's social media posts or on social media even if aware by a moderator will not be taken as official communications to Saltford Parish Council and will not be responded to or passed on to Council members or staff. Though SPC is keen to hear residents' views, it will not take comments made on its social media accounts (including on shared posts and/or posts in which it has been tagged) as official communications to the Parish Council, this includes planning applications and/or other consultations.

SPC does not routinely monitor or respond to private messages received through social media platforms.

Members of the public wishing to contact the Council should use the official contact methods published on the Council website.

Messages received through social media may not be treated as formal correspondence, consultation responses, complaints, service requests or official communications to the Council.

3. Who is covered by this policy

The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors who are currently elected to Saltford Parish Council, and current council staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as 'staff' in this policy).

All Councillors and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Individual Parish Councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post, both in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, Councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

The Council may take disciplinary action in respect serious breaches of this policy by employees. This may include unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.

Volunteers in breach of the policy will result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

The behaviour required in the Councillors Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply.

Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.

Councillors and staff must remember that communications on the internet are permanent and public.

When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

A Councillor or council staff member's behaviour on any social media site, when acting as a representative of SPC, must be consistent with the behaviour required generally.

4. Code of Practice

When using social media, Councillors and staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Councillors and staff should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

4.a When participating in online communication as representatives of SPC (or when likely to be perceived as representatives of SPC), Councillors and staff must:

- Act in accordance with the Code of Conduct (Councillors only) and in a professional manner (staff)
- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative and balanced
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents; including not to name, tag or share any names or personal information about councillors, staff and residents (unless with their expressed permission)
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and staff must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- Content created for or on behalf of Saltford Parish Council for publication on Council communication channels to include any text or SPC images shall remain the property of Saltford Parish Council unless otherwise agreed in writing.
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council, and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
- Spell and grammar check everything

4.b Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including name and/or home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) unless with the expressed permission of the individual for the purpose of the post. This includes the name and role of those working for other public authorities unless already displayed on the authority's website for public use.

- Use an individual's name or tag an individual in social media communications unless pre-agreed, or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
- Present personal opinions as that of Saltford Parish Council. If a Councillor or member of staff blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as a Councillor or member of council staff, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

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, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or members of the public should report them to the Parish Clerk for referral to the moderator(s) and/or the Parish Council as required.

Information about how to make a complaint about the Council's administrative procedures or about a serving Parish Councillor who may be in breach of the Code of Conduct can be found under 'Complaints' on Saltford Parish Council's website.

4.c Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools may be used to assist in drafting, editing or summarising communications.

Any content published in the name of Saltford Parish Council remains the responsibility of the Council and must be reviewed and approved by a human before publication.

Personal, confidential or sensitive information shall not be entered into publicly accessible AI systems unless appropriate safeguards are in place and there is a lawful basis for doing so.

4.d Official council statements

Unless specifically authorised by a formal resolution of the Council, the Chair of the Council and the Parish Clerk shall be the only persons authorised to issue statements on behalf of Saltford Parish Council.

Individual Councillors may express personal views but must not imply that such views represent those of Saltford Parish Council.

Councillors who identify themselves as members of Saltford Parish Council on personal social media accounts should make clear that any views expressed are their own unless specifically authorised to speak on behalf of the Council.

5. Managing Social Media accounts and email correspondence

The Parish Clerk shall normally act as the principal person overseeing email correspondence to the Council as well as moderator of the Council's website and social media accounts, and shall be responsible for email responses, social media posting, monitoring and managing content to ensure compliance with this policy. The Parish Clerk may delegate moderation responsibilities to other members of staff or Councillors where appropriate, including during periods of annual leave or sickness absence.

The Parish Clerk shall hold the highest level of administrative access to all Council website and social media accounts and shall be responsible for their day-to-day administration and management.

Additional administrative access may only be granted where operationally necessary and shall be approved by the Parish Clerk.

Councillors or other staff acting as moderators shall not alter account ownership, recovery details, passwords or administrator permissions without the consent of the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Clerk may create and administer social media accounts in the name of Saltford Parish Council where operationally required following a resolution by the Council.

The Parish Clerk, in consultation with the Chair where practicable, may temporarily suspend or close any social media account operated in the name of Saltford Parish Council.

The permanent closure or deletion of any official Saltford Parish Council social media account shall require a formal resolution of the Council.

There is no obligation for SPC to post information on any or all of its communication channels. However, where practicable, core Parish Council information relating to meetings, agendas and approved minutes will be shared using appropriate communication channels.

There is no obligation for SPC to publish identical information across all communication channels.

Staff or any Councillor acting as a moderator shall have authority, without notice or comment, to hide or remove content from Council social media pages that is considered inflammatory, defamatory, misleading, offensive, irrelevant, upsetting or otherwise contrary to this policy.

5.a Further, Staff or any Councillor acting as moderator may: block accounts or email addresses that tag or c.c. in SPC including its members and staff / block accounts that share SPC's posts in a manner that breaches this policy./ block accounts that take content from SPC's posts and create new posts etc. - that include - but are not exclusive to:

- Comments deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or libellous nature; or Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) unless with the expressed permission of the individual for the purpose of the post;
- Use an individual's name or tag an individual in social media communications unless pre-agreed, or post information about an individual (including their name, address, phone number etc) unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
- Emails or social media where a SPC member or SPC staff's personal data is displayed or shared with any person or body (including SPC, authority or organisation) in email correspondence or via social media, including personal data in address(es), email address(es), phone number(s) etc. Only addresses and phone numbers as displayed on SPC's website are permitted to be shared by members of the public.
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

SPC may also delete such emails or posts without notification of this sent to the sender / poster, or un-tag SPC from any member of the public's posts (if possible) (again, with the need to notify the member of the public) should this be required according to the matters listed above.

Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also to Staff for council records, and also to any external body to which personal information may have been shared.

Any contact made from members of the public who contact SPC through digital communications, including email and Social Media (including through tagging SPC's social media accounts or reposting SPC's posts with comments, or sharing SPC's post contents with comments) may be taken into account by the Parish Council if considering communications when using SPC's 'Unreasonable behaviour policy (including abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints)'. It may take into account any behaviour on social media and electronic communications, or a combination

of this with other forms of communication (including those listed as SPC's official communication channels) when applying the policy.

Staff and/or any Councillor acting as a moderator have the authority to delete and block emails/email accounts and on social media immediately hide individual's comments, and immediately block or ban access from an individual or company's account to SPC's social media pages. A decision to block email addresses, hide comments, block or ban an individual can be taken directly by the Staff and/or any Councillor acting as a moderator without consultation or notice with others in SPC, though each moderator should inform the others of this action for awareness.

5.b On social media, the Parish Clerk and any other moderator can choose whether commenting is closed/off, fully open or open in part on its posts. When participating in online communication, when commenting is open, SPC will generally allow posts on its social media pages from organisations and members of the public that:

- Are responsible and respectful
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Are objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

5.c Emails and social media posts may be hidden or deleted and the holder of an account banned if a comment or post, or a shared post of SPC with comments, or a new post created with content originating from SPC, or a post that has been tagged in that:

- Gives out the personal data of others without their expressed permission for such use, including name, home address, personal email address and telephone numbers), or any other personal or identifying information – including tagging an individual without permission
- Mentions an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless deemed reasonable (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation) or with permission of the person identified
- Makes intentionally false or misleading statements
- Includes potentially inflammatory, defamatory, libellous, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or offensive remarks
- Makes derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- Uses language that may be deemed offensive, in particular relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief, or use of any offensive language
- Engages in personal attacks, online fights, and/or hostile communications
- Includes the publication of photographs or videos of identifiable minors without parental permission
- Includes any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Includes obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conducts any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Should such emails be sent to individual Councillors (rather than SPC), the Councillor will report this to the Parish Clerk and SPC moderators, and following this the Councillor may delete and block any communications received that are in breach of the bullet points under 5.a and 5.c above.

It is ultimately up to the moderators – either acting individually or in consultation - as to whether a post will be hidden and/or deleted and/or an account blocked. The moderator's decision shall apply and be final, unless reviewed by the Council.

Staff will be responsible for checking the correct security settings are in place on the social media sites used.

Councillors may assist the Staff to disseminate information however all must ensure they follow this policy.

5.d Website management

The Parish Clerk shall be responsible for the management, administration and maintenance of the Council website.

The Parish Clerk may publish information on the Council website and official social media accounts without prior Council approval where, in their professional judgement, the information relates to Council business, public information, community information, partner authority information, public consultations, public safety matters, emergencies or other matters falling within the purposes set out in Section 2 of this policy.

The Parish Clerk may also determine the timing, format and communication channel used for publication.

Content may be submitted by staff, SPC volunteers and/or Councillors for publication; however, publication decisions shall remain the responsibility of the Parish Clerk unless otherwise directed by a formal resolution of the Council.

The Parish Clerk may refuse to publish material that:

- Is unlawful;
- Is politically partisan;
- Breaches copyright;
- Breaches data protection legislation;
- Risks bringing the Council into disrepute; or
- Is inconsistent with Council policy or adopted decisions.

5.e Website and Social Media service providers

- Any contractor, consultant, website provider, social media provider, communications adviser or other third party engaged to provide digital communication services on behalf of Saltford Parish Council shall comply with this policy and any related Council policies, procedures and contractual requirements.
- Administrative access granted to third parties shall be limited to that necessary for the performance of their duties and shall remain subject to the oversight of the Parish Clerk.

5.f Cyber security

The Council shall take reasonable steps to protect its website and social media accounts from unauthorised access, misuse or loss.

Appropriate security measures shall include, where available:

- Strong passwords;
- Multi-factor authentication;
- Secure storage of passwords and recovery information;
- Timely software and security updates; and
- Periodic review of administrator and user permissions.

Any suspected cyber security incident, attempted unauthorised access, phishing attempt, data breach or compromise of a Council website, email account or social media account must be reported immediately to the Parish Clerk and other Councillors where relevant.

Any administrative access granted to a Councillor, employee, volunteer, contractor or other authorised user shall be removed as soon as reasonably practicable following cessation of their role or where such access is no longer required.

5.g Business continuity

The Parish Clerk shall maintain appropriate records and recovery arrangements to ensure continuity of access to Council website and social media accounts in the event of absence, resignation, incapacity or other unforeseen circumstances.

Appropriate recovery arrangements shall be maintained to ensure that Council business can continue without unnecessary interruption.

5.h Record retention

Digital communications that constitute Council records shall be retained and managed in accordance with the Council's Retention and Disposal Policy and any relevant legal requirements.

5.i Domain names

All domain names associated with Saltford Parish Council shall be registered in the name of Saltford Parish Council and administered through accounts controlled by the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Clerk shall be responsible for maintaining accurate registration, renewal and recovery information relating to Council domain names.

5.j Council Email Accounts

Where a Council email account has been provided, Councillors and staff should use that account for Council business wherever reasonably practicable.

Council business should not routinely be conducted through personal email accounts, social media messaging systems or other private communication channels.

Any Council-related correspondence received through a personal account should be forwarded to the appropriate Council email account as soon as practicable.

This policy will be reviewed on an as-and-when required basis and if required following changes in legislation, guidance, technology or Council practice."