

SPARKFORD PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

**Approved - May 2024
To be reviewed – May 2026**

This policy is intended to help Councillors, the Parish Clerk, members of Parish groups and other volunteers make appropriate decisions about the use of social media.

Social Media includes emails, blogs, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and similar websites.

The Council will use social media for the purposes of:

- providing information about services
- supporting local democracy
- gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships
- promoting events or tourism for the area
- supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- improving internal communications

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

1. The Council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

2. 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 Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

3. Councillors, Clerk and volunteers 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.

4. Councillors, Clerk and volunteers are responsible for what they post and are considered personally responsible for any online activity conducted via any email address which they use for Council business. They are therefore urged to consider having a separate email address for council business if their personal email address is shared with anyone else.

5. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments by an employee. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council dispensing with their services and if necessary taking other appropriate action.

The Council's Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or oral communication. Councillors shall bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Inappropriate remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when spoken but once posted online they cannot be contained.

Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. When councillors are blogging or networking in a personal capacity they should take care as they may be thought to be acting in an official capacity.

It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and potentially public.

When Councillors are communicating in a 'private' group they should not make statements which would cause the Council embarrassment should they be made public.

6. Councillors, Clerk and volunteers should:

- Be responsible, respectful; direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Never conceal their identity and connection with the Council.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Take care not to allow their communication via email, websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others.
- Not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about the Council, Councillors or the Clerk or about the people, businesses and agencies who work with or are served by the Council.
- Not post comments that they would not be prepared to make on paper or face to face.
- Be mindful that words and images in digital or electronic form (including emails and text messages as well as posts on social media) can easily be circulated widely regardless of the wishes of the original author and so particular care must be taken to avoid expressions that could cause embarrassment to the Council.
- Make sure that personal opinions cannot be construed as being those of the Council.
- Maintain a respectful tone in all written comments: use 'parliamentary' language, avoid sarcasm and condescension and do not 'shout' in print by using capital letters or writing in red.
- Refrain from using inflammatory language including expressions relating to race, gender, sexuality, disability, age or religion which some may find offensive.
- Do not publish the names of third parties without their written permission.
- Seek permission to upload original photographs or videos.
- Where practicable secure parental permission before publishing photographs of children (and remove any such photographs whenever parents express an objection).
- Respect the privacy of other Staff and residents.
- Take care not to post information or conduct online activity that may be in danger of contravening the law or official regulations, such as the laws of libel or copyright.

7. Posts must not contain personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

8. When blogging or tweeting in a personal capacity Councillors, Clerk and volunteers they must not give the impression of acting as a representative of the Council.

9. Posts on the Council's website or Facebook page may be viewed as official so Councillors, Clerk and volunteers should not use these sites for personal or political communications.

10. The website may be used to:

- Post notices and minutes of meetings and other matters relating directly to the Council
- Advertise events and activities
- Post news stories

- Provide links to relevant and appropriate websites
- Advertise vacancies
- Pass on relevant information from national and local authorities and other service providers
- Announce new information concerning the Council
- Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit
- Post other items as the Council sees fit.

Social Media sites may be used to support the website and its information as above.

11. The Council will appoint a webmaster to run and maintain its website.

12. Residents and Councillors should be aware that not all communication to the Council through social media requires a response although an acknowledgement will be made if appropriate. Communications that are anonymous or without a residential or business address will not be acknowledged or answered.

13. Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Parish Clerk.