



Swillington Village Council recognises that electronic communication and social media are essential tools for conducting Council business and engaging with the community. This policy is designed to ensure such communications are used responsibly, professionally, and in a manner that promotes a respectful and inclusive environment and protects the Council's reputation.

This policy applies to all Village Council employees, councillors, and volunteers when using:

- Social media platforms
- Email
- Messaging services (including text and instant messaging apps)
- Council-owned devices and systems
- Personal devices where communication relates to Council business

Principles of good communication

All electronic communications connected with Council business must be:

- Professional, courteous and respectful
- Accurate and clear
- Lawful and compliant with data protection requirements
- Appropriate for public scrutiny, as communications may be subject to disclosures

Individuals should assume that any written communication could enter the public domain. Any emails sent using council email addresses are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the GDPR. Councillors should acknowledge their emails when requested to do so.

Official Council accounts and systems

The Council has a website and Facebook page available to the public. Only authorised persons may publish content on official Council platforms or send communications on behalf of the Council.

- Website: the Clerk is authorised to edit and respond to contact forms
- Facebook: the Clerk and Vice-Chair are authorised to edit and respond to comments and Messenger

The sites are not monitored at all times and the Council may not always be able to respond individually to all comments or messages received.

There are links to other organisations on the council website. These are vetted by the Clerk to ensure that the sites included are those of responsible organisations and their inclusion would be of interest to the residents of Swillington. The Village Council does not include website links to commercial sites however there is a disclaimer on the site as follows: *Please note that Swillington Village Council takes the utmost care with all outside bodies we are involved with and are advertised on our web site. However, we take no responsibility for any of their actions.*

Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website should be emailed to the Clerk at clerk@swillingtonvillagecouncil.gov.uk.

The following will not be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any, political organisation
- Commercial advertisements
- Publicity for any non-charitable fundraising event

Personal Use

The Council respects the right to private use of social media and electronic communication. However, employees and councillors must not publish or send content that could:

- Bring the council into disrepute
- Damage professional relationships
- Disclose confidential or sensitive information
- Give the impression they are authorised to speak on behalf of the Council when they are not

Councillors must remain mindful of their obligations under the member Code of Conduct when communicating electronically.

Standards of behaviour

When communicating in connection with the Council, individuals are expected to behave with courtesy and respect at all times. Breaches may be addressed under the Council's employee disciplinary procedures or the member Code of Conduct, as appropriate.

The following will not be tolerated:

- Bullying or intimidation
- Discriminatory or offensive remarks

- Harassment
- Personal attacks
- Inappropriate or abusive language

The Village Council has a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and is committed to taking reasonable steps to prevent it. Online or electronic sexual harassment – including unwanted sexual comments, messages, images, jokes, or any conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment – is strictly prohibited. This applies to behaviour on Council systems and personal devices where communication is connected to Council business, or impacts the working environment. Any such behaviour may be treated as serious misconduct and may result in disciplinary action or formal sanctions in accordance with the Council’s procedures.

The Village Council retains the right to remove comments or content from third parties that it considers inappropriate.

Email & messaging etiquette

When using email or messaging for Council business, employees, Councillors and volunteers shall:

- Use clear and professional language
- Avoid informal or ambiguous messages that could be misunderstood
- Consider whether email or message is the appropriate method for sensitive matters
- Do not send messages when angry or upset
- Check recipients carefully before sending

Council email accounts should be used for Council correspondence to support transparency and record-keeping. Council email accounts should not be used for personal matters.

Group messaging platforms should be used appropriately and not for official decision making, and should take into account work/life balance.

Video conferencing

Please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing, for example via Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom.

Confidentiality & Information Security

Confidential information must only be shared electronically where there is a legitimate Council purpose and the recipient is authorised to receive it. If there is any uncertainty, individuals should see guidance from the Clerk before sharing.

Care should be taken when forwarding emails, sharing documents, or storing Council information on personal devices. Where personal devices are used, reasonable steps must be taken to keep information secure (please see the Council's IT Policy).

Employees and Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of the information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality and data protection may be dealt with via the Council's employee disciplinary procedure or member Code of Conduct, as appropriate.

Reporting Concerns & Monitoring

Any concerns regarding inappropriate electronic communication or social media use should be reported to the Clerk in the first instance. If the concern relates to the Clerk, it should be reported to the Chair of the Council. All reports will be taken seriously and handled appropriately.

The Council reserves the right to monitor official communication systems to ensure compliance with this policy and legal obligations. Councillors and employees should be aware that any Council email account will be retained for 28 days following the end of their term in office or employment in order for the Clerk to archive any pertinent information.

Personal accounts will not be routinely monitored, however, publicly available content may be considered where concerns are raised.

Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside the Council's:

- General & Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy & Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Grievance Policy
- Member Code of Conduct
- Data Protection policies

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Approving committee: Full Council

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