



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

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;
- And not contain any personal information.
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council.
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

## Social Media

The Council has a website, Facebook page, Twitter account 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 to reflect the new arrangements.

The Council Facebook pages and Twitter account intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within Swillington and promote our community positively.

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 Council staff, councillors and the public to 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 of staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws.

- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

The sites are not monitored at all times 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. We ask that the public do not include personal/private information in their social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via Facebook or Twitter 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 through these channels. Instead, the public are asked to please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.

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 and/or 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 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. 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. If the post alleges a breach of Council 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 as soon as possible to allow due process.

## Village 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.

The 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 Council's rules and expectations for the 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 rules and expectations for its website. 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 Council.

There are links to other organisations on the council web site, these are vetted by the clerk and chair 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](mailto: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

## Village Council Email

The Clerk to the council has their own email address [clerk@swillingtonvillagecouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@swillingtonvillagecouncil.gov.uk) . The email account is monitored by the Clerk and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. Instant responses should not be expected from the Clerk and any relevant level of urgency should be stated. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email 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. Please note, any emails sent using your council email address are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the GDPR. Councillors should acknowledge their emails when requested to do so.

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

Councillors should not send any emails regarding personal matters from their council email addresses. Do not forward personal information to other people or groups outside of the

Council. This includes names, addresses, emails, IP addresses and cookie identifiers. Members should also be careful to only cc essential recipients on emails.

## Postal Correspondence

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

The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the village council, a committee, sub-committee or working party.

Most official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper. For correspondence not sent by the Clerk, he/she must be provided with a copy.

## SMS / texting / electronic messages and telephone calls

Members and the Clerk may use these messages as a convenient way to communicate. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the village council. The Clerk's business phone should be used only for village council work.

## Video conferencing

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

## 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 and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.**

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. In particular, Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'. 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.

No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chair of the council, the Chair of a committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk or another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

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

- Agendas should be clear and concise. They 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.

## Changes

This policy will be a living document and can be altered by the Village Council, if necessary, to allow immediate action should anything unexpected arise. Changes to the policy will be highlighted at the next full council meeting to keep members abreast of the changes for their approval. This policy will be kept under review by the Village Council.

*Date of policy: July 2023*

*Approving committee: Full Council*

*Date of committee meeting: 04/07/2023*

*Policy version reference: Version 2*

*Supersedes: Media Policy adopted 02/02/2019*

*Policy effective from: 04/07/2023*

*Date for next review: Summer 2023*