

DOWNTON  
PARISH COUNCIL



**Downton Parish Council**  
**Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy**

**Re-Adopted 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

**Adopted May 2018 Minute 30.18**

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

The Council has a website, Facebook page and Twitter account and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications and over time it may add to those channels of communication 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's Facebook and Twitter accounts intend to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the parish and to promote the community positively.

**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 and for which it does not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information;
- If it is related to 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.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the Council asks members of 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 or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, it will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant

people or authorities. Members of the public are advised not include personal/private information in their social media posts to the Council. Sending a message/post on Facebook and Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through this channel. Members of the public are advised to make direct contact with the Council's Clerk, Mrs Bev Cornish, Clerk to Downton Parish Council, tel: 01725 513874 or email: [clerk@downtonparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@downtonparishcouncil.gov.uk), and/or councillors by email. Their addresses can be found on the Parish Council's website.

The Parish Council retains 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, personal information published without consent.
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.
- Commercial promotions or spam.
- Alleges a breach of the Council's policy or the law.

The Council's response to any communication received which does not meet the above criteria will be either to ignore, inform the sender of its policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available. The Council may post a statement that '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed*'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's 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.

#### **Parish Council Website:**

Where necessary, the Council may direct those contacting it to its website to see the required information, or it may forward their question to a member of the Council for consideration and response. It may not respond to every comment received, particularly if the Clerk is experiencing a heavy workload.

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 expectation' 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 expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it will be marked clearly that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

#### **Parish/Town Council email:**

The Clerk to the Council has their own Council email address: [clerk@downtonparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@downtonparishcouncil.gov.uk). The account is monitored mainly during office

hours, Monday to Friday, and the Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as possible. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate.

The Clerk or the Council's Administrative Officer are responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant emails to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from 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.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, if appropriate, to copy their emails to the Clerk. NB any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. Such procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Councillors are advised not to forward personal information to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

**SMS (texting):**

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

**Video Conferencing e.g. Skype:**

If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

**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:**

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

Councillors should also be careful only to copy (cc) essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.