

DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish 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.

The Council has a website, one Facebook page 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 page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community and the Town Hall positively.

Users of Council Social Media

In accordance with the Council's adopted Communications Policy, clause C (ii), the Parish Clerk is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other member of staff (other than the Community Manager deputising for the Parish Clerk) has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

Principles

- To publish information about the work of Kirton Parish Council, and relevant local information from other agencies to a wider audience.
- To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council's work. Social Media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors - other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements - as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues

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.
- Not contain any personal information.
- 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, we ask you 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 Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products, other than when deemed acceptable by Council for the promotion of local chargeable events of community interest. (The Town Hall are responsible for their own Facebook page will promote the Hall, and commercially run classes / groups that take place in the Hall when requested by hirers).
 - The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not be able to reply individually to 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.
 - Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.
 - Sending a message/post via Facebook 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, please make direct contact with the Parish Clerk 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, 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 either ignore, 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, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook pages not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. 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, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information.

Parish Council email.

The Parish Clerk has their own council email address kirtonpc@gmail.com The email account is monitored during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate.

Council officers are 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 (or an appropriate Council Officer) , and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new Emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data consent request before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners via their Parish Council issued email addresses, in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. NB any emails sent via Parish Council email are official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

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

Do not, without prior consent, forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

SMS (texting).

Members and Officers 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. Teams.

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).

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

Third party social media and Individual Councillor Usage

Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Kirton Parish Council.

The Council's adopted a Code of Conduct is binding on all members. If you use social media in your official capacity as a councillor, you should always be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

Do:

- Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site
- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such views
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network
- Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriately – if using a Council-provided website or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity
- Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a councillor
- Be careful if making 'political' points and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.

Don't:

- Blog in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to-face contact
- Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes

To be reviewed July 2026