SHALDON PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

ADOPTED 23 SEPTEMBER 2025
NEXT REVIEW MAY 2026

Introduction

1. 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.

2. The Council has a website and a Facebook page and uses email to communicate. The Council will always endeavour 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 the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

3. The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

Communications from the Council

4. Such communications will meet the following criteria:

    - be civil 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 the Council does not own the copyright;
    - not contain any personal information;
    - if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Council;
    - social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

5. To ensure that all discussions on the Council Facebook 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 or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.
    - Councillors must use their discretion and common sense when engaging on their own personal social media sites. Councillors should also be aware that if

information is shared onto subsequent sites, then the comments button will be enabled, any content that is posted on their own site may not be private and may be distributed beyond the intended recipients. ***Councillors are therefore strongly advised not to engage in 'conversations' on any social media sites where the subject concerns Parish Council business or Policy.***

6. The site is not monitored 24 hours, 7 days per week and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However the Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal or private information in your social media posts to the Council.

7. Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and thus it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Direct contact with the Council's Clerk or direct to a councillor by email is the only way to receive a reply from the Council.

8. The Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:
   - obscene or racist comments;
   - 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 law.

9. The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be either to 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 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. The Council may post a statement as follows:

   'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed.'

10. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or 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

11. Where necessary, the Council may direct those contacting us to its website to see the required information, or it may forward their question to one of the Councillors for consideration and response. The Council may not respond to every comment it receives particularly if it is experiencing a heavy workload.

Parish Council Email

12. Councillors have been provided with an email account as follows:

'first.surname@shaldonparishcouncil.gov.uk'

which is specifically for their work as Parish Councillors. This is the most secure, efficient and effective way of working together and keeping in touch with the community.

13. The Council should be aware of the following:

- the email account must not be used to make decisions or influence decisions that should be made at a meeting of the Council unless there is an urgent requirement due to time constraints. In instances such as this the decision must be ratified at the next meeting by the Council. The Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct are clear on the rules of debate and Councillors should check them if they are in any doubt.
- The law does not allow Councillors to act independently and every Councillor should ensure that they do not imply that the content of their emails (whether .gov.uk or private email) represents the opinion or policy of the Council as a whole. As an individual, A Councillor, acting as a private individual, can think, say and write what they like, but if acting in a Councillor capacity only the view of the whole Council can be given, whether the Councillor agrees with the decision or not.
- When a Councillor uses the Parish Council account to send an email, the recipient could be excused for thinking it is an 'official' communication sent on behalf of the Council. All Councillors should be particularly careful if they are agreeing to do something that may be seen as a commitment by the Parish Council.
- Neither private nor Parish Council emails are confidential; every email is stored in the archive and is available to the public through a Freedom of Information or Data Protection request. Although the emails will be cleared of any personal data before they are released, it is better to avoid disclosing anything person or confidential in the first instance; email is not a secure medium.
- No disclaimer will help if a Councillor sends an email that contains illegal, offensive, obscene, racist, abusive material or libellous, defamatory, or discriminative material which may bring the Council into disrepute.
- The only individual who can send an official email is the Clerk who writes on behalf of the councillors to give the Council's views.
- If important issues are raised by residents or other bodies, after discussion with the Chair and/or the Vice Chair the Clerk will forward the email to all Councillors for information but not discussion, as this could be considered pre-determination.

- At the request of the Clerk and with the agreement of the Chair/Vice Chair, in exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate for a Parish Councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must make it clear that it has been written in an official capacity and has been authorised.
- All outgoing emails regardless of the author shall observe relevant data protection legislation and, where there are multiple private addresses who have no association, such emails shall be distributed by blind copy only.
- Councillors may use the Council's email accounts for council business only.

SMS (texting/what's app)

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

Video Conference e.g. Teams/Zoom

15. If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this policy also applies to such communications.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

16. 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).***
17. Councillors should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. 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.

General principles of communication and legal waivers:

18. The Parish council will never publish personal details or pass them onto a third party without express permission and individuals should not include personal/private information in their social media posts/messages to the Council. The Parish Council will not take responsibility for any consequences resulting from a person or persons publishing personal details on their social media platforms but will make every effort to remove them where requested.
19. The Parish Council is not responsible nor liable for and does not endorse the privacy practices of any social media site and any linked websites. The use of social media sites and any linked websites are at the users own risk.
20. The Parish Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.
21. The Parish council is strictly non-political and will not engage in or with and will remove any posts or comments on issues of a political nature.

22. By choosing to comment and/or utilise any of the Parish Council platforms or posts, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

Adopted: 23 September 2025
Next Review: May 2026