

**Online Communications and**

**Social Media Policy**

**Purpose**

The use of online communication and social media enables Sunningwell Parish Council to improve communication within the Council and between the Council and parishioners.

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Councillors and Clerk in the acceptable use of online communications and social media. It has been prepared with reference to the Local Government Association’s Social Media Guidance for Councillors that can be found at : [Social media guidance for councillors | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/communications-and-community-engagement/social-media-guidance-councillors#:~:text=These%20guides%3A%201%20explain%20how%20to%20use%20various,engage%20in%20healthy%20debate%20and%20tackle%20online%20abuse.)

The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

* Sunningwell Parish Council website
* Facebook and other social networking sites
* Text messaging and WhatsApp
* X (formerly Twitter) and other online news and social networking sites
* YouTube and other video sharing platform sites
* LinkedIn
* Blogs and discussion forums
* Sunningwell Parish Council emails

**Who does it apply to?**

The principles of the policy apply to Councillors and Clerk. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration including the Code of Conduct.

**Communication with Parishioners - approved channels**

Sunningwell Parish Council has three approved online communication platforms. They are:

* Sunningwell Parish Council website  [(sunningwell-pc.gov.uk)](https://sunningwell-pc.gov.uk/)

The Clerk and designated Councillors (as agreed from time to time in Parish Council meetings) are responsible for updating the website with content approved by the Parish Council.

* Parish Council emails: clerk@sunningwell-pc.org.uk

The Clerk is responsible for dealing and responding to email received. Where Councillors need to communicate with local residents, businesses and organisations they should, preferably, send their email to the Clerk of the Council, or where for reasons of expediency this is not practical the email concerned must be copied to the Clerk. This procedure ensures that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Sunningwell Parish Council uses the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) domain and email addresses in line with best practice. All council business should be conducted through the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) email addresses.

* The Sunningwell Parish Council newsletter

Sunningwell Parish Council sends a regular newsletter (monthly where possible) by email to any Parishioners who sign up via the Sunningwell Parish Council website. The newsletter contains information about Parish news and events, as well as information on upcoming Parish Council meetings. Parishioners are invited to suggest content for inclusion in future newsletters. The email list may also be used for emergency communications with Parishioners, for example in the event of flooding or other major event, with the prior approval of the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Parish Council.

The use of online communications and social media will not replace existing forms of communication. Notices will continue to be published on the Parish Council’s noticeboards for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council to those who do not have access to computers/tablets, smartphones etc.

Sunningwell Parish Council does not currently have or manage accounts on any other social media platforms as a means of communication with Parishioners. This position will be kept under review and may be changed at any time with the agreement of the Council.

**Communication between the Councillors and Clerk - approved channels**

Councillors and the Clerk must use the Parish Council email to discuss all Council business between meetings. No personal email addresses may be used, with the exception of setting up the relevant Parish Council accounts. All Councillors must ensure that they keep information exchanged via the Sunningwell Parish Council email confidential and secure, and follow the guidance set out by the National Association of Local Councils on password security. See <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/publications/4034-briefing-on-council-email-addresses>

The Councillors may also use WhatsApp to facilitate communication between them from time to time, particularly on practical/administrative issues such time/location of informal working group meetings. However, WhatsApp must not be used to share, discuss or decide any Council business of substance, which must always be conducted via the official Parish Council email channel and in Parish Council meetings.

**Guidance for communications**

Councillors and the Clerk using online communications or social media, whether in an official or personal capacity, should always be mindful of the Council’s Code of Conduct and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

When participating in any online communication, Councillors or the Clerk must:

* Be responsible and respectful.
* Not report or comment on Council business on social media accounts or channels at any time. Councillors and the Clerk must be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute.
* Not disclose confidential matters or criticise the Council policies or personnel.
* Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks on any topic. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, sex, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
* Councillors and the Clerk should remember that if they break the law using social media (for example posting something defamatory) they will be personally responsible.
* Avoid personal attacks, online disagreements and hostile communications.
* Never use an individual’s name unless they have written permission to do so.
* Respect the privacy of other the Councillors, Clerk and residents.

Councillors or Parishioners who have any concerns regarding content place on social media sites should report them to the Clerk. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken against individual Councillors under relevant laws and/or the Code of Conduct.