

SILCHESTER PARISH COUNCIL

E-MAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

This policy applies to:

- Employees
- Elected and Co-Opted members (Councillors)
- Members of the public
- Volunteers
- Other people, companies and organisations in contact with Silchester Parish Council

It provides an overview of social media, guidelines on how to use social media, and advice on minimising or mitigating any risks or pitfalls associated with social media.

Silchester Parish Council (SPC) will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We will ask those who contact us for their preferred method of communication when we deal with them.

This document provides a structured approach to using social media effectively, lawfully and without compromising SPC. Councillors must ensure their use of social media will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

SPC is clear on the range of audiences it needs to communicate with, the reasons for doing so and their information requirements. Our audiences and their requirements are listed in Appendix A.

1.1 Policy context

This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity ('the Code'). The Code is statutory guidance and SPC must have regard to it and follow its provisions. It also takes account of national guidance, for example 'The Good Councillor's Guide 2018 (National Association of Local Councils – 'The Guide').

2 Responsibilities

A [media](#) team will oversee the SPC social media presence. The role of the team is to:

- Advise upon and monitor social media interactions.

The [media](#) team will consist of four Councillors plus the Clerk. Members of the team will be appointed by the Parish Council and membership will be reviewed annually at the Annual General meeting.

The Clerk will be responsible for the administration of this policy on behalf of SPC and will report any breaches to the Chairman for advice on any action

- The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email correspondence, all email to SPC should be addressed to the Clerk at clerk@silchester-pc.gov.uk
- The Clerk is the owner of the email account, Facebook and WhatsApp group
- Email correspondence will be filed in Outlook, attachments on emails deemed to be important will also be filed on the SPC OneDrive facility
- The Clerk is the moderator of the Facebook group

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Councillors and Council employees must use social media sensibly and responsibly. As with all communication, it should not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

- Members of SPC must have separate social media profiles for their role as Councillor, distinct from their private life.
- Councillors are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media, no indemnity from the Council will be available.
- Do not disclose personal details of others, such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's data protection policies.
- Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are open to misuse by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report them.
- Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Freedom of Information Act 2000).
- Copyright laws still apply to social media. Using images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.
- Use of the Council's social media platforms must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances may it be used to express personal or political opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor.
- Statements made on behalf of SPC should be either statements of fact or SPC policy.
- Council email addresses are provided for Council business and should not be used for private purposes

3. Communications requirements

3.1 Communications from SPC

SPC will ensure that any communication from the Council will:

- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, defamatory, abusive or obscene
- Will not contain any personal data other than necessary basic contact details
- Not be used for the dissemination of any advertising or for commercial purposes

3.2 Communications to SPC

SPC expects that any incoming communications will:

- Not contain any content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, racially offensive or contravenes any SPC policy. Any incoming communications with such content will be ignored by the recipient and in extreme cases may be reported to the Police for further action.
- Not contain content copied from elsewhere for which the sender does not have copyright or the express permission of the copyright owner
- Not be spam from either individuals or businesses
- Not contain any personal data other than necessary basic contact details

4. GDPR Compliance & Security

All communication from SPC will comply with GDPR requirements.

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Passwords for all forms of social media must comply with the SPC password policy.

5. Use of email and social media

5.1 Email

5.1.1 General

- All users must use email responsibly. SPC reserves the right to take disciplinary or legal action against any person failing to comply with this policy
- Councillors will be provided with a council email address from their acceptance of the role, the email address will be deleted on their resignation
- All users must accept that communication via the email system is not secure or encrypted and so should take particular care when sending potentially sensitive or confidential information
- All users must accept and agree that communications both to and from all SPC email addresses may be monitored for ensuring appropriate use of the system. Users should also be aware that deleted emails may continue to be accessible from back up files
- Messages sent to groups of people must be relevant to all concerned
- Email messages are not necessarily viewed by the recipient immediately. If a message is urgent an alternate method of contact should be used
- SPC cannot be held responsible for damages, losses, expenses, demands and/or claims which may be suffered by a user of the email facility
- The Clerk may choose to operate a filtering system in order to monitor offensive or clearly inappropriate material and may quarantine messages in that category
- The SPC email system is monitored between 9am and 5pm from Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays.
- Email enquiries from the public, organisations and Councillors will be answered as soon as practicable and must be acknowledged within 2 working days of being sent. A full response will be provided as soon as practicable, depending on the resource required to provide the full response.

5.1.2 Business use

- The Clerk has the sole authority to purchase or acquire goods or services on behalf of SPC via email
- Where Councillors need to communicate with outside organisations on behalf of SPC they should send the email through their SPC email address and copy the Clerk
- The Clerk and Councillors must check their email inboxes on a regular basis, at least daily for the Clerk and at least every 2 days for Councillors.
- The Clerk must ensure that their inbox is monitored whilst they are travelling on business, vacation or are on sick leave. There should either be a designated person to cover these periods, or an out of office message that redirects the email to the designated person.
- All users must comply with any relevant licence terms or conditions when copying or downloading material
- Users accept that there is no guarantee of delivery of an email unless acceptance of delivery is requested of the recipient
- All users must comply with the relevant regulations including the Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the GDPR regulations

5.1.3 Inappropriate use

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- Users must not use email to abuse or inflame others, to harass or threaten anyone. Responding to an abusive, harassing or threatening email will not be accepted as an excuse for inappropriate language or behaviour
- Recipients of abusive or threatening emails related to the business of SPC must immediately inform the Clerk and Chairman
- Users must not send emails containing obscene, abusive or profane language
- Users must not send, access, download, display, copy or circulate information containing stories, jokes or anecdotes which contain:
 - Pornography or sexually oriented images
 - Gambling
 - Gaming
 - Promotion of unlawful discrimination of any kind
 - Promotion of racial or religious hatred
 - Threats including promotion of violence
 - Fraudulent or illegal material, promotion of illegal and/or unlawful acts
 - Information considered to be inappropriate, offensive or disrespectful
 - Unauthorised and copyrighted material including music and video

SPC will report to the Police all known incidents in which users intentionally receive or send emails containing:

- Images of child pornography and child abuse
- Adult material which breaches the Obscene Publications Acts (1959 and 1964)
- Criminally racist material

If inappropriate material is accessed accidentally, users must report this immediately to the Chairman. It can then be taken into account as part of the SPC monitoring procedures.

5.1.4. Monitoring

- Serious breaches of this policy by an SPC employee will amount to gross misconduct and may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal
- Serious breaches of this policy by Councillors, members of the public or any outside company/organisation will result in legal or Police action

5.2 Other social media

SPC will maintain a website, a Facebook group and a WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group is solely for the use of Councillors and the Clerk for rapid communication and is not for public access. No other forms of social media are to be used for any communications by or on behalf of SPC.

5.2.1 Facebook

SPC will have a Facebook group accessible by Councillors, members of the public and companies/organisations. Employees and Councillors must ensure they use any SPC social media appropriately. Material posted on the SPC Facebook group by Clerk and Councillors will be viewed as posts having been made in an official capacity

- Posts must not contain any personal information other than basic contact details
- The Clerk is the moderator of the Facebook group and is responsible for the posting and monitoring of the content on the group pages and ensuring compliance with this policy. The moderator will have the authority to immediately and without notice or comment to remove any contents from the SPC social media pages if they are deemed inflammatory or libellous. Such posts will also be reported to Facebook. The SPC [media](#) team will provide support to the Clerk in maintaining and updating the website as necessary

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5.2.2 WhatsApp

The Parish Council will have a WhatsApp account for rapid communications. The account will be owned by the Clerk and all Councillors will have access to the account. It should be noted that:

- Communications on WhatsApp are subject to GDPR guidelines
- Communications on WhatsApp are subject to Freedom of Information and are considered as part of the public domain
- Communication using WhatsApp should be limited to short messages where either a rapid response/action is required. Communication between Councillors should normally be done using the Council email account

5.2.3 Website

SPC will maintain a website. The SPC Communications team will provide support to the Clerk in maintaining and updating the website as necessary. The website may be used to

- Post notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertise events and activities relevant to Silchester village residents
- Publish the SPC policies and procedures
- Post news items and new information appropriate to SPC or the village
- Provide links to appropriate websites or press pages if those meet the SPC expectations of conduct
- Advertise vacancies on SPC or village community organisations
- Post information from partners including but not limited to Police, BDBC, HCC
- Post information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, libraries, sports clubs, youth groups and other community groups
- Maintain a section outlining the history of Silchester
- Post other items as SPC see fit.

Posts outside the above list may be made by the moderator when a majority of Councillors agree to the post.

Employees and individual Councillors are responsible for their posts

6. Social media and meetings

SPC encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Silchester issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official Council meetings. Where it is considered appropriate, Zoom or similar video meeting sites may be used at an SPC meeting to enable those unable to attend personally to follow the meeting.

7. Communications with the Press

Staff and Councillors who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt they should consult the Clerk. Employees Council staff should refer all media enquiries to the Clerk in the first instance.

SPC should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual employees and Councillors. The phrase “no comment” should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. SPC is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

7.1 Managing negative issues

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It is important that any negative issues are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Employees and Councillors must alert the Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. Employees and Councillors should work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted SPC about an issue.

7.2 Correcting inaccurate reporting

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about SPC, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the Clerk to decide what action is appropriate. It will also be necessary to decide who is the most appropriate person to take the agreed action.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.

Occasionally SPC will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how SPC will learn from the error or put it right.

7.3 Press releases

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising SPC activities, decisions and achievements. An official SPC release is made on behalf of SPC as a whole; it will be written and issued by the Clerk or a designated Councillor. Official SPC releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained by the Clerk. All releases will accurately reflect the view of SPC, contain relevant facts and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Councillor.

7.4 Interviews

Any employee or Councillor who is contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a representative of SPC should refer the matter to the Clerk.

The situation and the information required by the journalist will inform the choice of person put forward for interview. Employees should never give their opinion on specific SPC policy but must keep to the SPC line and key messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of SPC's approved and agreed policies.

7.5 Media coverage of council meetings

Provision is made for members of the media to attend Parish Council and Committee meetings. During meetings employees and Councillors should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

Where a meeting of SPC includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by SPC's Standing Orders

8. Political use of Council resources and media

When using the resources of the Council or Council media, Councillors must ensure that the resources are not used for any political purposes (including party political purposes) and must have regard to any applicable Local Authority Code of Publicity made under the Local Government Act 1986 and any subsequent amendments.

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9. REVIEW

This will be reviewed annually by the Council and any agreed changes implemented.

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APPENDIX A

AUDIENCE						
Information required	Silchester residents	Community groups	School	Parish Councillors	Neighbouring councils	Suppliers current & potential
Village news & opportunities						
Planning applications						
Community events						
Council meetings date/time						
SPC meeting papers						
Council policies						
Topic specific information						
Information signposting						
Business opportunities						
Councillor contact numbers						
FAQ section						
Email list						
Emergency contacts						

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