



Horton Parish Council

Social Media and Communications Policy

Introduction

This policy outlines the approach of Horton Parish Council towards website and social media to ensure consistent, accurate, and respectful communication with residents and the broader public. It establishes guidelines for councillors and staff, when interacting with these platforms, promoting transparency while safeguarding the council's reputation.

1. Purpose of the Policy

- To set out the process by which the council manages its' social media which may include Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and the parish council website.
- Ensure clear and professional communication between Horton Parish Council and the public.
- Establish a unified and consistent message.
- Prevent the misuse or misrepresentation of council information.
- Protect the reputation of Horton Parish Council, its councillors, and staff.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- Councillors
- Council employees
- Contractors, consultants, or volunteers acting on behalf of the council. It covers:
- Social media posts on council-run accounts
- Website Content
- Personal social media usage by councillors and staff when it pertains to council matters

3. The Legal Framework

- The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988.
- The Council must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- Localism Act 2011 • Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

4. Official Social Media Accounts

- **Account Management:** Council social media accounts will be managed by the clerk /admin assistant.
- **Approval Process:** All social media posts must be pre-approved by the clerk in consultation with the chair/vicechair. (Excluding the publication of council meeting dates, agenda and minutes. The Clerk is empowered by Council to make routine updates to the social media accounts without prior reference to Council.
- **Content Guidelines:** Post factual, non-political updates about council events, decisions, and public services. Avoid posting personal opinions, political endorsements, or information that could compromise council integrity or neutrality. Respond promptly to public inquiries but refrain from engaging in disputes or controversial issues. Ensure all content aligns with the council's values and public responsibilities.
- **Monitoring and Moderation:** Social media accounts should be monitored regularly for inappropriate comments, spam, or harassment. Inappropriate or offensive comments may be hidden or removed following council protocols, with users informed of moderation policies where applicable.

6. Guidelines for Councillors and Staff on Personal Social Media

- **Personal Opinions:** When discussing council matters on personal social media, councillors and staff should:
 - Clearly state that opinions are personal and not reflective of the council's official stance. ➤ Avoid sharing confidential or sensitive council information.
 - Be mindful of the council's reputation, using respectful language and avoiding conflicts of interest.
- **Confidentiality:** Councillors and staff must not disclose any private or confidential information about the council or its stakeholders.
 - **Respect and Conduct:** Personal social media activity should reflect the integrity and responsibilities of public office. Defamatory, discriminatory, or inflammatory language is strictly prohibited.

7. Website

- **Account Management:** The day-to-day working of the Website is subject to the control of the Clerk and is empowered by Council to make routine updates to the Website without prior reference to Council. **Approval Process:** Any Councillor or organisation may submit material for inclusion on the Website PROVIDED THAT it is consistent with the general policies and falls within any limits of technical feasibility to upload. All content must be pre-approved by the clerk in consultation with the chair/vicechair.
- **Content Guidelines:** The Website shall contain material that arises from Council business, such as agenda, minutes, policies, and factual information about the Council and Councillors. It may also include any material that has been commissioned by the Council, such as reports or surveys or material that is directly derived from these. The Website may also contain other material, such as history and geography of the Parish, news of local events, or any other material of a non-controversial nature which is appropriate for the Website on a "custom and practice" basis. The Website may also possess interactive functionality, customary for such local authority websites (such as questionnaires, visitor response facilities, links to other sites etc.).

The footprint of the Website may change from time to time according to requirements and circumstances, subject to approval by Council for significant changes. The Website shall, in principle, not contain material of a deliberately contentious, offensive or disputatious nature or material that criticises or implies criticism of one or more members of the public, individual Councillors, groups of Councillors or the Council as a whole. Council meetings can be disputatious, and this is recorded in the Minutes and, once passed, this material may appear on the Website in the minutes or otherwise. Additionally, it can happen that Council may approve material for inclusion on the Website that not everybody necessarily agrees with. Regardless of what has been voted on by the Council, the Website shall not contain any material that is libellous or defamatory or in any way against the law or which could expose the Council to legal challenge.

8. Handling Complaints and Criticism

- Public Complaints: Complaints made through social media or press should be acknowledged and directed to the council's official complaint handling process. Public comments should not address individual complaints in detail on social media.
- Constructive Engagement: The council encourages respectful dialogue and constructive criticism on its platforms. However, abusive, defamatory, or otherwise inappropriate comments may be moderated following council guidelines.

9. Crisis and Emergency Communication In the event of an emergency or critical incident:

- Only the designated spokesperson or approved personnel should post updates or statements.
- Information should be factual, timely, and reassure the public without spreading panic.
- Updates should be frequent, and the council should coordinate with other local authorities as necessary.

10. Policy Compliance and Disciplinary Action

- Compliance: All councillors, employees, and representatives must adhere to this policy. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, which could include removal of social media privileges or further council action.
- Training: Horton Parish Council will provide training or guidance on this policy to all councillors and employees who are involved in press or social media activities.

11. Review of Policy

- This policy will be reviewed annually or as needed to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Adjustments will be made based on emerging best practices, legal considerations, or feedback from council members and the public.

Clerks Signature: *Harley Spillane*

Date: 17/02/2026

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