

Sellack Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Date of Adoption: 14 September 2021

Date of Review: 13 January 2026

Date of Next Review: January 2028

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff and others who engage with and on behalf of the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors, council staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy). All Councillors and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Individual Parish Councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post, both in a council and personal capacity. In the main, Councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect serious breaches of this policy by employees.

This may include unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee. Volunteers in breach of the policy will result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken. The behaviour required in the Councillors Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. Councillors and staff must remember that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the council would be content with the statement should it be made public. A Councillor or council staff member's behaviour on any social media site must be consistent with the behaviour required generally.

1. POLICY

The Sellack Parish Council medium for social media will be via its Website and Facebook account with the intention to:

- Provide information and updates regarding activities and events within the parish and promote positive engagement from residents within the parish

The Website

The Parish Council will maintain a website that provides information that residents may find useful. It is also one of the official channels of contact a resident can use to contact the Parish Council with their issues.

Once the official Website has been developed, the following up-to-date information will be available on it:

- Parish Council and individual Councillor's official contact details
- Minutes and agendas of Parish Council meetings
- Documents and policies regarding the Parish Council
- Calendar of events and meetings
- Community links and amenities
- A contact form

The website will also include all the details of its terms and conditions.

Facebook

The Parish Council will use this medium to allow for a wider public access to communications. The aim is for content to be productive, respectful, positive and consistent with the Council's goals. The core guidelines of the Parish Council and those communicating with the Council through this medium are:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarly, threats or abuse cannot be tolerated. Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including Sellack Parish Council members and staff, cannot be permitted
- You have a responsibility to communicate truthfully, and this policy encourages you to remember that you are publishing your comments, when posting into a Facebook page
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws. Be accurate and give credit where credit is due
- Stay on topic
- Do not use the page for commercial purposes or to market products. Remember, you are legally responsible for what you say and post on the website or any social media entry and that legal action could be taken against you for any libellous or damaging comments that you make.

The Parish Council will remove, at the earliest opportunity, all comments and content that do not adhere to the operational guidelines and also includes:

- Obscene, racist or discriminatory content
- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarized material and any material in violation of any laws and copyright
- Private and personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum

- Commercial promotions or spam

The Parish Council will not engage in or with (and actively discourages) posts or comments of a political or religious nature.

Although the Parish Council's Webpage is an open forum, it is not monitored 24/7 and the Parish Council will not be able to reply to individual messages or comments received.

Sending messages/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes and it will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through Facebook. The Parish Council will, however, endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are considered and/or passed to the relevant people.

To contact the Parish Council for official purposes please email clerk@sellackparishcouncil.gov.uk

By choosing to comment and/or utilise Sellack Parish Council's Facebook page users are deemed to agree to this policy in addition to the standing terms relating to your registration with and use of that social media platform.

How Social Media will be used by the Council

Social media may be used for:

- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions and actions
- Supporting local democracy
- Distribute in whole or part information from council notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings
- Information specifically agreed to be communicated via social media at Council meetings
- Advertising events and activities that Sellack Parish Council has organised or coorganised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
- Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the Sellack area
- Providing and exchanging information about local services and events
- Support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Gathering local resident's insights
- Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area
- Advertising vacancies
- Re-post relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Post or share relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, Scouts/Guides and charities
- Link to appropriate websites and other social media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the council's expectations of conduct
- Post other items as the council see fit

2. LEGAL ADMISSIONS

Sellack Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any external contributor in any forum. Opinions expressed in comments do not necessarily represent those of Sellack Parish Council.

All materials, once posted become the property of Sellack Parish Council and it reserves the right to reproduce, distribute, publish and display or edit them.

Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content and used for any purpose and in any form or media the Parish Council deems fit. This excludes any posts that contravene the policy principles set out above. All such posts will be removed by Sellack Parish Council at the earliest opportunity.

Sellack Parish Council is not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook, or any linked website. The use of Facebook and any linked website is at the users own risk.

Sellack 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 the website.

Sellack Parish Council accepts no responsibility for the availability of Facebook.

The presence of any advertisement on Facebook is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and Sellack Parish Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.

3. SELLACK PARISH COUNCIL CODE OF PRACTICE

When using social media Parish Councillors and officers must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Councillors can have a blurred identity. They may have social media accounts of their own where they comment both as an individual and as a Councillor. They must ensure, in these cases that they are clear when they are posting in a private capacity or as a Councillor. They must be aware that by holding a position in the organisation does not provide them with immunity against actual defamation.

Parish Councillor's views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish Council at Full Council may constitute pre-disclosure, pre-determination or bias, and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Parish Council Members and officers must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal or political opinions as that of the Parish Council
- Present themselves in a way that may cause embarrassment to the Parish Council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council

- Commit the Parish Council to any work, campaign or process that is not a resolution of the full Parish Council
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given written consent to do so
- Publish any personal details of any Parish Councillor or officer without their written consent
- Publish photographs or videos of anyone without written consent
- Post any information that infringes copyright law
- Post any information that may be deemed to be libellous
- Post any information that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including content posted in a personal capacity
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or constitutes a criminal offence
- Publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

COUNCILLORS

Individual Councillors must adhere to this policy and other Parish Council policies in the conduct of their business. They are at liberty to set up their own accounts but should ensure that they comply with this policy and ensure that a personal view disclaimer is used when responding as an individual.

PARISH CLERK

The Parish Clerk is the designated council owner of Sellack Parish Council's Facebook page. Any volunteer or Councillor officially appointed by the Council may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Clerk will present to the next available Parish Council meeting any communications they consider requires to be discussed prior to an official response being made by the Parish Council to ensure that the response is minuted. The poster of the comment will be invited to the meeting to raise or answer questions relating to the post, if it is considered necessary.

The Parish Clerk and Chairman will be responsible for all final published responses.