KINGS'S SUTTON PARISH COUNCIL:
SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

"Social media" is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including social media sites and other platforms that are centred on user interaction. This policy is intended to help Councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and digital communications, and to outline King's Sutton Parish Council's position on various aspects of social media and digital communication use. It includes standards and guidelines for Councillors and council staff to observe when using social media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy.

This policy covers all social media and social networking sites which are under the control of the Parish Council:

- King's Sutton Parish Council website: www.kingssutton-pc.gov.uk
- Facebook: King's Sutton News https://www.facebook.com/KingsSuttonNews
- X (previously Twitter) King's Sutton News @KingsSuttonNews
- Instagram: King's Sutton News @KingsSuttonNews
- Email: xxx.xxx@kingssutton-pc.gov.uk

The current Councillors' Code of Conduct applies to all online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communications.

This policy may be amended at any time but will be reviewed at least every three years.

The King's Sutton Times is sponsored and published on behalf of the Parish Council (including on the website). However, the magazine maintains editorial independence and its content does not necessarily reflect the council's views. Therefore, articles submitted by the Parish Council for publication should adhere to the policy guidelines below but the publication as a whole is not included under the umbrella of the policy. This also applied to submissions by the Parish Council to the Banbury Guardian via the village correspondent which may later appear on the Banbury Guardian Facebook page.

How Social Media and digital communications are used by the Council

Social media and digital communications may be used for:

- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based information, services, decisions and actions
- Supporting local democracy (elections information)
- Distribution of council notices, agendas, minutes and dates of meetings
- Information specifically agreed to be communicated via social media at Council meetings
- Advertising events and activities which King's Sutton Parish Council has organised or co-organised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
- Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- Sharing safety information
- Announcing news relevant to people living in or around the area
- Providing, signposting and exchanging information about local services and events
- Gathering local residents' views (for example using links to Survey Monkey)
- Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area
- Advertising vacancies for Parish Council (Councillors or Parish Clerk)
- Sharing relevant information from the Unitary Authority, Police, NHS, etc
- Publishing relevant information from local community groups
- Publishing local business directory (website)

Social media and digital communications may not be used for:

- Promoting sponsorship of individuals
- Advertising sale of personal items
- Advertising general vacancies
- Helping to find lost property

(There are separate Facebook Pages run by others which cater to the above needs).

King's Sutton Parish Council runs its social media pages so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Its primary purpose is as an electronic noticeboard. Usually, external comments in response to posts are permitted but as continuous moderation is not possible, this is subject to review and change. Comments which are left on posts will not necessarily be responded to. The appropriate way to contact KSPC is via KSPC's website, telephone or by direct email using the contact details made available, not by commenting on posts.

Who is covered by this policy

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. 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 (including wardens) in breach of the policy will result in the council no longer using their services. The behaviour required in the Councillors' Code of Conduct https://kingssutton-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/member-code-of-conduct-2026FebPC.pdf applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors should bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Councillors must be aware that their public profile as a Councillor means it is likely they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking, even if they are not. 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 councillor and council would be content with the statement, should it be made public.

Code of Conduct

When using social media, Councillors and staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Councillors and staff should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

When participating in local online communication, Councillors and staff must, whilst dealing with local issues:

- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative and balanced
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points
- **Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and staff must ensure any information does not infringe copyright). Consideration should be given to subscribing to Shutterstock (or similar)**
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council, and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
- Spell and grammar check communications.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers, except with prior permission (even if available elsewhere in the public domain (Note: this information is published within a PDF on the website)
- Use an individual's name or tag an individual in social media communications unless pre-agreed, or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
- Present personal opinions as that of King's Sutton Parish Council. If a Councillor or member of staff blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as a Councillor or member of council staff, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks about local issues
- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Engage in personal local attacks and hostile local communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their local working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity. Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias and may also require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Parish Clerk for referral to the moderator and/or the Councillor for Communications.

Managing Social Media Accounts

The Parish Council website: The Parish Clerk maintains and updates the website

Facebook, X (previously Twitter) and Instagram are updated and moderated by a designated Social Media Councillor and the Communications Councillor. The Clerk should also be given access to update the Facebook page.

Email news service: members of the public can subscribe to this service via the website. An email is automatically generated to all subscribers when a new "post" is uploaded to the website. Posts are in the form of either a news item or an agenda and are uploaded by the Parish Clerk. News items and agendas are then automatically posted to the relevant section of the website.

The designated Social Media Councillor in their capacity as "first line" moderator will have authority, without notice or comment, to remove any posts from all council social media pages. These include comments deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (e.g. Facebook) and also to the Parish Clerk. They will also have the authority to hide individual's comments, and block or ban access from an individual or company's account to KSPC's social media pages. Final arbitration decisions are entrusted to the Clerk by the Parish

Council and therefore the Clerk may also take decisions to hide comments, block or ban an individual from KSPC's social media pages without consultation with others.

The designated Social Media Councillor can choose whether commenting is closed/off, fully open or open in part on its posts. When participating in online communication, when commenting is open, KSPC will generally allow posts on its social media pages from organisations and members of the public that:

- Are responsible and respectful
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Are objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

(Note that posting of comments on the website is set to "closed" removing the need for moderation)

Posts may be deleted, and the holder of an account banned if a comment or post:

- Gives out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) or inappropriately tags an individual
- Mentions an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless deemed reasonable (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation) or with permission of the person identified
- Makes intentionally false or misleading statements
- Includes potentially inflammatory, defamatory, libellous, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or offensive remarks
- Makes derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- Uses language that may be deemed offensive, in particular relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief, or use of any offensive language.
- Engages in personal attacks, and/or hostile communications
- Includes the publication of photographs or videos of identifiable minors without parental permission
- Includes any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Includes obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conducts any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence It is ultimately up to the moderators – either acting individually or in consultation - as to whether a post will be deleted and/or an account blocked.

An account holder who has been blocked by the moderator may appeal to the appointed Councillor for Communications for a second review and final decision.

Reviewed on 26th September 2023 Minute: FGP 40.23/24 C

Adopted on 5th October 2023 Minute: 111.23/24 B5

Reviewed on 22nd September 2025 Minute: FGP 22.25/26 C

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