

TOLLER PORCORUM PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT Digital Communication and Social Media Policy

Adopted: 10 September 2025 | Next review date: May 2027 | Last review date: n/a

Introduction

The use of digital communication and social media enables Toller Porcorum Parish Council (known as “the Council” in this policy) to interact in a way that improves communications within the Council, and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council uses email, the Council’s website and social media platform Facebook to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications and over time may add further channels to improve its communication, particularly with residents. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The Council Facebook page and posts from said page are intended to provide information and updates regarding the Council and activities and opportunities within the parish.

All communications

1. Communications from the Council will:
 - a. Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
 - b. Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
 - c. Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere which the Council does not have permission to share;
 - d. Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
 - e. Not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.
2. Councillors, officers and employees are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, the Data Protection Act and the UK General Data Protection Regulation in all work on behalf of the Council.
3. Councillors, officers and employees are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council’s Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (and may also involve a criminal investigation).
4. The Council retains the right to ignore, inform the sender of the Council’s policy, or send a brief response, as appropriate, to all forms of communication with the Council, councillors and/or employees that include:
 - a. Obscene or racist content;

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- b. Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language;
- c. Potentially libelous statements;
- d. Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright;
- e. Private, personal information published without consent;
- f. Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum;
- g. Commercial promotions or spam;
- h. Alleged breaches of the Council's policy or the law.

Email

- 4. Emails on behalf of the Council usually come from the clerk and emails originating elsewhere within the Council will usually be copied to the clerk. These procedures ensure a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.
- 5. The clerk has a designated Council email address: clerk@tollerporcorumparish.org. The clerk works part-time hours Monday – Friday and will reply to all email as soon as possible. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate and will provide the email address of the chair to the Council's for urgent enquiries.
- 6. Councillors, other officers besides the clerk, and employees are provided with an email address dedicated to conducting Council business and personal email accounts must not be used.
 - a. Councillors, officers and employees must take care not to share or forward personal information to people or groups outside of the Council. Personal information includes, but is not limited to, names, addresses, email addresses, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.
 - b. Councillors, officers and employees must take care only to 'cc' essential recipients on emails and take special care that only essential recipients are included when using the 'Reply to All' option.
 - c. Councillors, officers and employees must take care to remove email trails, where appropriate, when forwarding emails.
- 7. Councillors, officers or employees sending email from the email account dedicated to conducting Council business will be considered as acting in an official capacity.
 - a. Councillors, officers or employees sending email from a personal email account, referring to themselves as a councillor, officer or employee – even in a personal capacity – may be considered as acting in an official capacity and such emails could be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.
- 8. All emails sent to councillors and to officers and employees of the Council become official and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.
- 9. All new emails requiring data to be passed on will be followed up with a Data Consent Form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

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Text messages and WhatsApp

10. The Council is not in possession of a Council-owned mobile telephone therefore, use of text messages and WhatsApp on personal mobile devices should be limited to rapid communication for sharing information in the event of the Community Emergency Response Plan being activated.
 - a. Any such text messages or WhatsApp messages will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.
11. Text messages and WhatsApp will not be used for:
 - a. Day-to-day discussion of, and views on, Council business and implementation;
 - b. As evidence of agreement/disagreement;
 - c. An alternative to voting
 - d. An agreement of a specific course of action or financial commitment by the Council;
 - e. Providing feedback to other councillors;
 - f. Proposing agenda items, sharing papers or notification in advance of apologies.

Website

12. The Council operates a website: www.tollerporcorumparish.org, as required by law, to share information with residents and other interested parties.
13. The following items are on the website:
 - a. Meeting dates and meeting agendas and minutes;
 - b. Financial information as required under the Transparency Code and the Practitioners' Guide;
 - c. Policies and procedures;
 - d. Councillors' information;
14. The following items may be on the website:
 - a. Links to external websites, including the County Council;
 - b. Information on village clubs, societies, organisations and events;
 - c. News articles.
15. The following items will not be on the website:
 - a. Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation;
 - b. Commercial advertisements;
 - c. Publicity for any non-charitable fundraising event.
16. Those contacting the Council may be directed to the website for the information they require, or their query may be forwarded to councillors for consideration and response.
17. The clerk is the Council's nominated "webmaster" and is responsible for maintaining and updating the Council's website.

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Social media

18. The Council operates a Facebook page: [Toller Porcorum Parish Council](#), to share information with residents.
19. Commenting on a Facebook post or sending a message via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels.
 - a. Direct contact should be made the clerk (clerk@tollerporcorumparish.org) and/or a councillor using the details available on the Council's website.
 - b. The Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions from the Facebook page or posts are passed to the relevant people or authorities.
20. Any information posted on the Council's Facebook page or posts that meet the criteria listed in section 4. a-h, will be removed as quickly as practically possible and the Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'.
 - a. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.
21. If a comment or a post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.
22. When councillors or employees post to social media on behalf of the Council, it will be remembered that:
 - a. Councillors are elected representatives of the Council;
 - b. Any post can affect the reputation of the Council;
 - c. It is the Council which is the corporate decision-making body – no councillor can independently make decisions for the Council over social media;
 - d. Some issues and communications are best left to the Council's official social media accounts;
 - e. Having a single voice or message can be critical in some situations;
 - f. The Council cannot be involved in party political issues;
 - g. It is not necessary to respond or make comments on everything on social media – in fact sometimes it is better not to;
 - h. Posts must not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.
23. Councillors who post on social media must observe the Code of Conduct.
 - a. Councillors are personally responsible for the social media content they create, publish and share.
 - b. Being a councillor does not prevent a member of the public from pursuing legal action following the publication of an untrue statement and councillors may be held personally liable.

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23. Councillors, officers or employees posting to social media, referring to themselves as such – even if it is in a personal capacity – may be considered as acting in an official capacity and such posts could be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.
24. The Council's Facebook account, page and posts are moderated by the clerk to the Council and/or the chair or vice chair of the Council.

Video Conferencing

25. If this medium is used to communicate, this policy will apply to the use of video conferencing.
 - a. The Council is not able to hold formal meetings via video conferencing, although hybrid meetings to enable the public to attend via video are permissible. Councillors must, however, be in attendance in the meeting room.

Recording of Meetings

26. The Council does not record meetings. Should this change, the Council will adopt a Recording of Meetings Policy.

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