

Social Media & Digital Communications Policy

March 2026

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, Council staff and any members of the public who engage with the council or share information from or about the council using online communications. This includes social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

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1. Introduction

This policy covers all forms of digital communications.

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including social media sites and other sites 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 Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council's position on various aspects of social media and digital communication use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using ODA's social media sites. 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 forms of digital communications, social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- X (formerly Twitter) and other micro-blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council.

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

Over time Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur, this policy may be updated to reflect the new arrangements if required. This policy may be amended at any time.

2. How Social Media and digital communications will be 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
- Promotion and signposting of Northwest Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) & Leicestershire County Council (LCC) and Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC) information or partner websites e.g. Fix-My-Street, One. Network, including public consultations.
- 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 or supporting events and activities that Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council has organised or co-organised, or those organised externally but recognised as being beneficial for the community, including those that ODA may have awarded grant funding towards
- Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- Sharing safety information
- Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford area
- Providing, signposting 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 (at the Council's discretion and not by external organiser request)
- Acknowledgement of support received from businesses or any other organisation for Parish Council activities or events. This may include tagging businesses or organisations
- Advertising vacancies (including voluntary positions) for Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council, or NWLDC or LCC and its partner vacancies (specifically those that would be of benefit to the village) and/or any other community vacancies that are deemed as beneficial for the village (both paid for and voluntary)

- Share relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Libraries, Health, Fire and Rescue 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 local 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 sees fit

Ultimately it is up to the moderators to post content, however social media and digital communications will not be used for:

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

Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford (ODA) 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. As it cannot be moderated 24/7 due to the limitations of ODA resource, comments will usually be left switched off bar to those tagged in any posts.

Social media accounts will not necessarily be checked regularly and if comments are left on posts they will not necessarily be responded to. It may be that ODA is not notified of any of its posts that have been shared. ODA may not be notified of posts that it has been mentioned or tagged in. ODA will not comment on posts in which it has been mentioned and/or tagged even if aware.

As made clear on ODA's website under '[Contact Us](#)', the only way to contact ODA to gain a response to any enquiries or comments is via the methods listed on ODA's website.

Similarly, any comments, tags or shares of ODA's social media posts or on social media even if aware by a moderator will not be taken as official communications to Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council and will not be responded to or passed on to Council members or staff. Though ODA is keen to hear residents' views, it will not take comments made on its social media accounts (including on shared posts and/or posts in which it has been tagged) as official communications to the Parish Council, this includes planning applications and/or other consultations.

Who is covered by this policy

The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors who are currently elected to Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council, and current 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, when acting as a representative of ODA, must be consistent with the behaviour required generally.

3. Code of Practice

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 online communication as representatives of ODA (or when likely to be perceived as representatives of ODA), Councillors and staff must:

- Act in accordance with the [Code of Conduct](#) (Councillors only) and in a professional manner (staff)
- 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).
- 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 everything

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) unless with the expressed permission of the individual for the purpose of the post
- 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 Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford 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
- 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 attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post 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)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)

- 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, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or members of the public should report them to the Parish Manager for referral to the moderator(s) and/or the Parish Council as required.

Information about how to make a complaint about the Council's administrative procedures or about a serving Parish Councillor who may be in breach of the Code of Conduct can be found under '[Complaints](#)' on Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council's website.

4. Managing Social Media Accounts

ODA staff, including the Parish Manager, will primarily be responsible for posting content on council website and social media pages and for maintaining awareness of the public's engagement with ODA including its posts and accounts.

Staff, in consultation with the Chair, may create new social media accounts in the name of Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford

Parish Council, for ODA's use similar to any established social media accounts. If this is done the Council will be informed.

Staff, in consultation with the Chair if possible, may temporarily close any social media accounts held in the name of Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council.

The permanent closure and/or deletion of a Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council social media account requires a formal resolution by the Council.

There is no obligation for ODA to post any information on any or all of its social media accounts, although core Parish Council information that relates to meetings e.g. agendas and draft minutes, will be shared on social media whenever possible.

There is no obligation for ODA to post the same information across all its communication channels, including the same information on all of its social media platforms.

The Council will appoint a moderator, usually the Parish Manager, to moderate Parish Council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

Staff or any Councillor also acting as moderator will have authority, without notice or comment, to hide or remove any posts from council social media pages that include - but are not exclusive to - comments deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or libellous nature.

Further, Staff or any Councillor acting as moderator may: block accounts that tag ODA / block accounts that share ODA's posts / block accounts that take content from ODA's posts and create new posts etc. - that include - but are not exclusive to:

- Comments deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, irrelevant, upsetting, misleading or libellous nature; or Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) unless with the expressed permission of the individual for the purpose of the post.
- 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)
- 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
- 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 attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post 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)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

ODA may also delete such posts or un-tag ODA from any member of the public's posts (if possible) should they include the matters listed above.

Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also to Staff for council records.

Any contact made from members of the public who contact ODA through Social Media (including through tagging ODA's social media accounts or reposting ODA's posts with comments or sharing ODA's post contents with comments) may be taken into account by the Parish Council if considering communications when using ODA's 'Unreasonable behaviour policy (including abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints)'. It may take into account any behaviour on social media and electronic communications, or a combination of this with other forms of communication

(including those listed as ODA's official communication channels) when applying the policy.

Staff and/or any Councillor acting as a moderator have the authority to immediately hide individual's comments and immediately block or ban access from an individual or company's account to ODA's social media pages. A decision to hide comments, block or ban an individual can be taken directly by the Staff and/or any Councillor acting as a moderator without consultation or notice with others in ODA, though each moderator should inform the others of this action for awareness.

The Parish Manager and any other moderator 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, ODA 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.

Posts may be hidden or deleted and the holder of an account banned if a comment or post, or a shared post of ODA with comments, or a new post created with content originating from ODA, or a post that has been tagged in that:

- Gives out the personal data of others on social media without their expressed permission for such use, including name, home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain), or any other personal or identifying information – including tagging an individual without permission
- 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, online fights, 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 hidden and/or deleted and/or an account blocked. The decision of the moderator is final.

Staff will be responsible for checking the correct security settings are in place on the social media sites used.

Councillors may assist the Staff to disseminate information however all must ensure they follow this policy.

This policy will be reviewed on an as-and-when required basis.