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# SAWSTON PARISH COUNCIL

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## **Public, Press and Media policy**

Including: Protocol for Filming and Use of Social Media

### 1. Introduction

This document aims to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with the public, press and media, and provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise during council meetings and generally through Councils working hours.

### 2. Key aims

The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. The media (newspapers and other publications/radio/TV/social media) is crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

It is important that the press have access to the Clerk/ Members and to background information to assist them in giving accurate information to the public. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

### 3. Legal framework

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988 and the Openness in Local Government Regulations 2014. The Council must also have regard to the governments Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

#### 4. Contact with the media

The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who responsible and appropriate action taken.

When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

Data protection must be complied with. Advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made to the media.

When responding to approaches from the media, only the Clerk and Chair are authorized to make contact with the media.

Statements made by the Chair and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents. Such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come via the Clerk.

Should a member decide to submit a letter to the media on any subject they should not use the term 'Councillor' or give the impression, directly or implied, that they are writing on behalf of the Council.

#### 5. Press releases

The purpose of an official press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of an official press release may be beneficial.

All press releases must be issued by the Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

## 6. Protocol for Filming Meetings and Use of Social Media

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request. The Openness in Local Government Regulations 2014 permits any person attending to report on a meeting using any communication method and to permit the publishing, posting or sharing of the persons activities. (except where the Council has resolved to close the meeting to the public).

Councillors - To ensure meetings are focussed and to allow all members the courtesy for concentrated attention, councillors wishing to record the meeting should place their recording device unobtrusively and adhere to the general protocol for filming as below.

Regulations<sup>1</sup> allow the recording, broadcasting and use of social media at Council meetings.<sup>2</sup>

Such rights do not extend to the recorded material being used:

- Out of sequence
  - In a way that misinterprets the proceedings, or infringes the core values of the Council, including editing in a way that may ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being photographed/filmed/recorded.
  - In a manner that misinterprets the views of those speaking at the meeting
- Recording must be conducted in a non- disruptive manner<sup>3</sup>

Equipment may not be plugged in to the mains supply and is used at the owners own risk. The use of flash photography or additional lighting will not be permitted.

Council will allow 5 minutes prior to and after the close of the meeting to allow any recording equipment to be set up and removed from the designated area.

Recording equipment should only be positioned in the designated area to ensure;

Compliance with health and safety regulations.

Compliance with data protection – no overlooking of confidential documents

Courtesy to other attendees – not obstructing view of the Council and those speaking

Members of the public speaking at or attending the meeting must not be filmed if they have indicated to the Clerk that they do not wish to be included.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Includes committee and subcommittee meetings but not to working group or informal task group meetings or meetings where the press and public are excluded.

<sup>3</sup> The Chairman has the right to ask any person to leave or to suspend a meeting if the actions of those in attendance are deemed disruptive, if it is resolved to close the meeting for confidential business, where it is considered that continued recording/filming/photographing/webcasting may infringe the rights or privacy of or intimidate any individual of when the Chairman considers that a defamatory statement has been made.

## 7. Protocol for using social media

Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.

Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

All staff and councillors must ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.

The Council will appoint nominated persons as moderators (Clerk **plus two** councillors) – responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Policy. **The moderators have authority to reply to questions or comments pertaining to council business or activities** and may immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be contrary to the Policy below. Such posts will be reported to the Clerk for Council records.

## 8. Policy for use of Social Media

The Sawston Parish Council Facebook Page/X (Formally Twitter) feed (jointly referred to as page in this policy) intend to:

***Provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within Sawston Parish and promote positive thoughts and comments from residents within the parish***

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Sawston Parish Council page are productive, respectful, energized and consistent with the Councils mission and goals, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including Sawston Parish Council members or staff, will not be permitted.

- Share freely and be generous, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Facebook page for commercial purposes or to market products.

The sites are not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavor to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people.

Sending a message/post via FB/X (Formally Twitter) will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please see our contact details on [www.sawston.org.uk](http://www.sawston.org.uk) Please do not include personal/private information in your FB/X (Formally Twitter) posts/messages to us.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libelous statements
- Plagiarized material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam

***Non-compliance will not be tolerated and can result in a ban***

Sawston Parish Council are not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber in any forum; opinions expressed in comments on Sawston Parish Councils social media forums do not necessarily represent those of Sawston Parish Council.

All comments, once posted, become the property of Sawston Parish Council and we reserve the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display or edit. Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content, and used for any purpose, in any form and on any other media.

Sawston Parish Council is not responsible, liable for and do not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook /X (Formally Twitter) or any linked websites. Your use of Facebook/X (Formally Twitter) and any linked websites is at your own risk.

Sawston 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 these websites.

Facebook/X (Formally Twitter) may occasionally be unavailable and we accept no responsibility for this lack of service.

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

We will not engage in/with, and we discourage posts or comments on, issues of a political nature.

Comments should not advertise commercial products or services.

This comment policy may be revised at any time.

By choosing to comment and/or use any Sawston Parish Council social media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

Adopted May 2025