



**ST CUTHBERT (OUT) PARISH COUNCIL**  
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## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY**

*SLCC Model (2024)*  
*Adopted by SCOPC: 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024*  
*Next Review Date: May 2026*

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council has a website, Facebook page and uses email to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council holds one live social media account. St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council Facebook pages will intend to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Parish and promote our community positively.

### **Communications from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:**

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not have permission to share
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- If it is official Parish Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Parish Council
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

### **All communications**

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council's pages are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the following guidelines should be observed:

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

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

Social media platforms are not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via social media will not be considered as contacting St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Council's Clerk and/or members of the Parish Council by email [parishclerk@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk](mailto:parishclerk@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk)

### **Removal of content or comments**

We retain the right to remove comments or content from Facebook pages controlled by St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised 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; or
- Alleged breaches of a Council's policy or the law

St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Parish Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Parish Council's Facebook pages not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Parish Council's Facebook pages. The Parish Council may post a statement that '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed*'. If the post alleges a breach of a Parish Council's policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Parish Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

### **St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council Website**

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

The Parish Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Parish Council's 'rules and expectation' for the website. The Parish Council reserves the right to remove any, or all, of a local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet the Parish Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council.

The following items may be included on the Parish Council's website:

- Meeting dates
- Meeting agenda and minutes
- Financial information as required under the Transparency Code and the Practitioners' Guide
- Policies and procedures
- Member information
- Links to the following external websites: the Unitary Authority
- Information on clubs, societies, organisations and events within the parish
- News articles

The following items will NOT be included

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation
- Commercial advertisements
- Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event

### **Parish Council Email**

The Clerk, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) & Assistant Clerk to the council have their own council email addresses:

Parish Clerk: [parishclerk@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk](mailto:parishclerk@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk)

Responsible Finance Officer: [rfo@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk](mailto:rfo@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk)

Assistant Clerk: [assistantclerk@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk](mailto:assistantclerk@stcuthbertout-pc.gov.uk)

The email accounts are monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message is used when applicable.

The Clerk, RFO and Assistant Clerk are responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council will usually come from the Clerk, the RFO or the Assistant Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

All new email contacts requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are also provided with council-owned email addresses and are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. (NB Any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.)

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council will not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council without consent. This includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

### **Mobile Communication Platforms**

Councillors and the Clerks may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

### **Video Conferencing e.g. Zoom**

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing. 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.

### **Internal communication and access to information within the Council**

St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communication is a major factor in delivering improvement.

### **Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council**

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that 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 (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Councillors should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

Councillors who post on social media must observe the Code of Conduct. Councillors are personally responsible for the social media content they create, publish and share. 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.

Any Councillor posting, referring to themselves as a Councillor – even if it is in a personal capacity – may be considered as acting in an official capacity.

When posting to social media, it should be remembered that:

- The Councillor is an elected representative of the St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council
- Any post can affect the reputation of the Parish Council
- It is the Parish Council which is the corporate decision-making body – no Councillor can independently make decisions for the Parish Council over social media
- Some issues and communications are best left to the Parish Council's official Facebook account
- Having a single voice or message can be critical in some situations
- St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council cannot be involved in party political issues
- It is not necessary to respond or make comment on everything on social media – in fact sometimes it is better not to
- Posts must not contain any form of discrimination, including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance

Everyone should be reminded that a good general rule is that if there is uncertainty about something – stop, think and ask for advice before doing anything else.