Dinnington St John's Town Council

COMMUNICATIONS, PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY

(including Social Media and Electronic Communication)

October 2026

Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out how Dinnington St John's Town Council communicates with residents, businesses, stakeholders, the media and other interested parties.

1.2 The Council is committed to clear, timely, accurate and accessible communication, and to ensuring that residents can raise issues easily and receive a proper response.

1.3 The Council will communicate openly and transparently, whilst respecting confidentiality, data protection, equality, and the proper distinction between personal views and the corporate position of the Council.

1.4 Councillors represent the whole community and must act in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct.

2. Purpose and scope

2.1 This policy applies to councillors, the Town Clerk, employees, and any person authorised to communicate on behalf of the Council.

2.2 It covers official Council correspondence; meetings and public engagement; noticeboards and website content; media relations and press releases; social media; electronic communication; publication and transparency duties; and moderation and enforcement.

2.3 This policy should be read alongside the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Code of Conduct, Data Protection Policy, Publication Scheme and any related guidance or procedures.

3. Aims

3.1 To provide clear and consistent channels of communication between the Council and the community.

3.2 To support informed public participation in Council business.

3.3 To ensure that official Council communications are accurate, professional, timely and properly recorded.

3.4 To ensure compliance with legal duties relating to information, data protection, openness and equal treatment.

4. Principles

4.1 The Council will communicate openly and transparently with the community.

4.2 Information will be accurate, objective, proportionate and not party political.

4.3 Councillors and staff must protect confidential, exempt or personal information.

4.4 All communications must respect equality, dignity and the rights of others.

4.5 Electronic and online communications are official Council communications and must be treated accordingly.

4.6 Personal opinions must not be presented as the official position of the Council unless expressly authorised.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 The Council: approves this policy and any significant amendments; monitors compliance where necessary; approves formal responses to significant issues where required.

5.2 The Town Clerk: acts as the principal point of contact for official Council correspondence; is responsible for managing administration, records and information governance; acts as the principal communications officer unless the Council decides otherwise; approves press releases and official statements before issue, unless authority has been delegated.

5.3 The Chair: may speak on behalf of the Council where authorised or where this is an agreed function of the role; may issue statements in consultation with the Town Clerk where appropriate.

5.4 Councillors and staff: may communicate with residents on matters relating to their role; must not present personal views as the official position of the Council; must keep the Town Clerk informed where correspondence relates to Council business; must not disclose confidential, exempt or personal information.

6. Council meetings and public engagement

6.1 Ordinary meetings are normally held on the second Monday of each month except August, at The Lyric, Laughton Road, Dinnington, commencing at 6.00 pm unless otherwise stated.

6.2 Members of the public may attend meetings in accordance with the Council's meeting procedures and Standing Orders.

6.3 Public participation will normally be allowed at the start of the meeting for up to 30 minutes to enable comments on agenda items or matters within the Council's remit.

6.4 Any person wishing to record a meeting should notify the Chair before the meeting starts and comply with the Council's Recording of Meetings Policy.

6.5 The Annual Parish Meeting is usually convened by the Chair and provides an opportunity for residents to receive an annual summary of Council activity and raise local issues.

7. Noticeboards

7.1 The Council will publish key public information on its noticeboards and keep it reasonably up to date.

7.2 Items normally displayed will include meeting agendas and Clerk contact details.

7.3 Agendas will be displayed in accordance with the statutory notice period and the Council's publication arrangements.

8. Correspondence and enquiries

8.1 All correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Town Clerk in the first instance by email or post.

8.2 The Town Clerk will acknowledge correspondence where appropriate and will pass matters to the relevant councillor, committee, employee or external body as necessary.

8.3 Councillors may correspond directly with residents on matters within their ward or personal knowledge but should keep the Town Clerk informed where the matter relates to Council business.

8.4 Anonymous correspondence will be recorded but may not be acted upon where it cannot be properly assessed.

8.5 Attachments and unsolicited files should only be opened where they are expected and relevant to the enquiry.

8.6 The Council will not usually share correspondents' personal information without a lawful basis and will handle all personal data in accordance with data protection law.

9. Freedom of Information and information requests

9.1 Requests for information will be handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and, where applicable, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

9.2 The Council will normally respond within 20 working days of receipt.

9.3 If a request is unclear or requires clarification, the Town Clerk may seek further information and advise the applicant accordingly.

9.4 Where an exemption applies, the Council will issue an appropriate refusal notice or partial response as required by law.

10. Website and electronic publication

10.1 The Town Clerk, or an authorised officer, will ensure that agendas are published on the Council website in good time before meetings.

10.2 Draft minutes will be published as soon as practicable after the meeting and final minutes once approved.

10.3 The website should also carry key governance information, contact details, and other material the Council is required to publish.

10.4 The Council will seek to keep the website accurate, accessible and current.

10.5 Website and electronic content should be reviewed regularly for accuracy and accessibility.

11. Media relations and press releases

11.1 The Council encourages constructive media relations.

11.2 Requests from the media should normally be directed to the Town Clerk.

11.3 The Town Clerk and Chair are authorised to issue statements on behalf of the Council.

11.4 In specific cases, the Town Clerk may authorise another councillor to respond.

11.5 Confidential, exempt or draft papers must not be disclosed.

11.6 If legal proceedings are possible, no response should be made without appropriate advice.

11.7 Personal data, disciplinary matters and sensitive staffing issues must be handled with particular care.

11.8 Any letter to the press on behalf of the Council must be approved and issued by the Town Clerk.

11.9 Press releases should be used where they will inform residents, correct factual errors or explain Council decisions.

11.10 All press releases must be approved by the Town Clerk before issue and should be clear, balanced and suitable for public publication.

12. Social media

12.1 Social media is used to support, not replace, the Council's other communication channels.

12.2 The Council operates official social media accounts to share information, promote engagement and signpost residents to Council services.

12.3 Only authorised persons may post official content on behalf of the Council.

12.4 Social media content should be accurate, professional and consistent with the Council's agreed position.

12.5 The Council is not obliged to monitor messages continuously.

12.6 Social media posts do not constitute formal correspondence with the Council.

12.7 Residents should not post personal or sensitive information.

12.8 Comments may be moderated where necessary to prevent abuse, unlawful content, defamation, discrimination or the publication of personal data.

12.9 The Council may remove, hide, delete or restrict content that is abusive, discriminatory, defamatory, obscene, spam, commercial, off-topic or unlawful.

12.10 Users may be blocked or restricted where necessary to protect the integrity of the Council's pages.

12.11 Councillors and staff should not disclose confidential or personal information via social media.

13. Electronic communication

13.1 Electronic communication includes email, website content, text messaging, instant messaging and other digital channels used by the Council.

13.2 Official accounts and devices should be used for Council business wherever possible.

13.3 Email should be used carefully, with attention to confidentiality and data retention.

13.4 Mass messaging or mailing lists must comply with data protection and privacy requirements.

13.5 Electronic communication should be written in a professional manner and, where appropriate, retained in accordance with the Council's records management arrangements.

13A. Email use and operational rules

13A.1 Email is an official means of Council communication and may be used for routine correspondence, internal communication and external enquiries.

13A.2 Council business should be conducted using official Council email accounts. Personal email accounts should not be used for Council business except in exceptional circumstances and, where this happens, relevant messages should be forwarded to the Council account as soon as practicable.

13A.3 Emails relating to Council business are Council records and must be handled in accordance with the Council's records management and retention arrangements, including any applicable deletion and archive procedures.

13A.4 Users must take reasonable steps to protect confidential and personal information, including checking recipients before sending, using blind copy where appropriate, and avoiding unnecessary forwarding of emails containing personal data.

13A.5 The Town Clerk, or nominated officer, will monitor the main Council inbox and will allocate, acknowledge or action emails as appropriate.

13A.6 If the Town Clerk is absent, a nominated deputy should monitor urgent correspondence to ensure continuity of service.

13A.7 Emails should be written in a professional, courteous and factual manner and should not be sent when the sender is angry, upset or unable to check accuracy.

13A.8 Councillors must not present personal views as the corporate view of the Council in email correspondence unless authorised to do so.

13A.9 All users should be alert to phishing, suspicious links and attachments. Suspected malicious emails should be reported immediately and not opened or forwarded.

13A.10 Where appropriate, a standard email disclaimer may be used to remind recipients that information is confidential and intended only for the named addressee.

14. Data protection and privacy

14.1 Any personal data processed through media, social media or electronic communication must be handled in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's privacy notices.

14.2 Council members and staff must not collect, share or reuse personal data unless there is a lawful basis to do so.

14.3 The Council will only use personal information for the purpose for which it was collected and for as long as necessary.

14.4 Personal data will be managed in line with the Council's retention arrangements.

15. Transparency and publication

15.1 The Council will publish information in line with applicable transparency requirements and its Publication Scheme.

15.2 Where relevant, the Council will publish expenditure, governance and meeting information within the required timescales.

15.3 Publication should be clear, accessible and proportionate, while respecting data protection and other legal restrictions.

16. Moderation and enforcement

16.1 Where posts or comments breach this policy, the Council may hide, delete, report or restrict them.

16.2 Serious or repeated breaches may be referred to the Chair, the Town Clerk, the platform provider, or the relevant authorities where appropriate.

16.3 Breaches of this policy by councillors may also be considered under the Council's Code of Conduct.

17. Review

17.1 This policy will be reviewed periodically and may be amended to reflect changes in legislation, guidance or Council practice.

Adopted date: 12/10/2026
Minute reference: 98/27 (A)
Review cycle: Every 2 years
Next review date: October 2028