

SEVERN STOKE AND CROOME d'ABITOT PARISH COUNCIL – WORCESTERSHIRE**PRESS, IT, WEBSITE, AI, SOCIAL MEDIA and EMAIL POLICY**

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1. Introduction**1.1 Policy Overview**

This policy is advised by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The Code is statutory guidance, and the parish council must have regard to it and follow its provisions. Failure to follow the parish council's policy could lead to a breach of the Code and the risk of adverse publicity, which could damage the parish council's reputation.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of councillors and the clerk involved in dealing with the media and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest.
- to ensure that the parish council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner.
- recognise the importance of effective and secure information technology (IT) and email usage in supporting its business, operations, and communications.

This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity but does provide advice and guidance on their sensible use of conventional and social media. The parish council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the parish council. If the views of councillors are different to the parish council's corporate position and views, they will make this clear.

1.2 Approach

In all cases, the parish council's approach in relation to the press, social media, emails and the website, in accordance with the Code, should be lawful, cost effective, objective, even-handed, appropriate, have regard to the parish council's Equality & Diversity Policy and, be managed with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

1.4 Scope

This policy applies to all individuals who use this parish council's IT resources, including computers, networks, software, devices, data, and email accounts.

2. Media (Press) and Publicity

2.1 Role of the Media.

It is vital to communicate effectively and positively with the media so that:

- the parish council is recognised as one which is open, accountable, accessible and willing to listen
- there are opportunities to share and celebrate the parish council's successes
- people feel more informed about the parish council and its work
- negative issues are handled clearly and decisively

2.2 Handling Media Enquiries

The clerk and Chair co-ordinate all responses. Councillors who are directly approached by the media should not answer questions themselves. Never comment on leaks or allegations. "No comment" should not be used. The council should explain why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

2.3 Press Releases and Identifying Newsworthy Items

It is the responsibility of everyone within the parish council to identify newsworthy items. It is the decision of the clerk and Chair as to whether a press release should be issued. Official releases, accurately reflecting the corporate view of the parish council, are written by the Chair and clerk in consultation with councillors and then issued by the clerk. Official releases will not promote the views of political groups, publicise individual councillors, identify a councillor's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view. All official releases will be placed on the parish council's website within three working days of issue.

2.4 Interviews

Councillors contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a councillor should refer the matter to the Chair and clerk. The person put forward for interview will depend on the situation. Councillors should never give their opinion but must keep to the corporate line and key messages. Their role is to provide factual knowledge supporting the council's policies.

2.5 Media Coverage of Meetings

During meetings councillors should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture to report, rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue. Where a meeting of the parish council and its committees includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the parish council's Standing Orders.

2.6 Publicity during Elections

During elections and the 'pre-election period' council publicity should not publish views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual councillors or parties.

2.7 Non-Parish Council Related Media

Councillors who have contact with the media in a personal/separate capacity must not refer to their parish council posts and must make it clear to the journalist concerned that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-parish council related organisation.

2.8 Managing Negative Issues

It is important that these negative issues are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity. Councillors must alert the clerk and Chair as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media.

2.9 Correcting Inaccurate Reporting

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the parish council, the clerk and Chair decide what action is appropriate. Occasionally the parish council will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the parish council will learn from the error or put it right.

3. Website

The domain of the website is www.severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk

3.1 Purpose of Website

The parish council website is an important vehicle for the promotion of parish council activities. The parish council website has two main functions:

- to disseminate parish council notices and to communicate the legally required information (Transparency Code for smaller authorities). This includes agendas, minutes and designated financial information, including audit paperwork and a historical archive of audit paperwork.
- to communicate other information relating to the Parish which is not legally required – but is helpful. i.e. to provide a single reference point for residents and visitors to the parish.

3.2 Use of the Website

The website will not:

- contain content that may result in actions for libel, defamation or other claims for damages
- be used to process personal data other than for the purpose stated at the time of capture
- promote any political party or used for campaigning
- promote personal financial interests or commercial ventures
- be used for personal campaigns
- be used in an abusive, hateful or disrespectful manner

The website will generally avoid presenting any names of individuals or businesses on the site itself, without permission in writing (email is appropriate). Announcements regarding deceased individuals will require the permission of the next of kin or family.

All photographs published should have the permission of the copyright holder.

No images of younger persons (under 18 years) are to be included without permission of the parent/guardian.

Local groups and charities that are eligible to apply for S.137 parish council grants are also eligible to apply to place adverts and notices on the News section of the website. This matter may be decided by the clerk upon application, subject to the criteria above and an expiry date being appended to the advert/notice.

3.3 Funding

All costs of website hosting, domain name & management are to be met by the parish council funded through the precept in an annual budget allocation.

3.4 Website Management

Support and website administration is currently provided by WJP Software Limited.

Day to day management, monitoring and approval of content (where necessary) is delegated to the clerk who will be the Web Editor and to the Chair of the parish council as a back-up. The clerk will review the content on the website annually and report to the council as required.

4. Social Media

4.1 Introduction

Social media is a generic term that refers to websites, apps and other platforms that allow users to share opinions and information. Any planned campaigns/promotions can be included on social media to increase reach and exposure as part of a general communications mix.

4.2 Personal responsibilities, including Data Protection and Safeguarding

Councillors and the clerk are at liberty to set up personal accounts but should adhere to the below **guidance on Personal Use of Social Media**:

- Avoid use of the parish council e-mail address and logos. Include a disclaimer: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the council's policies or opinions".
- Personal social media accounts must not bring the council into disrepute and not violate any council policies (Code of Conduct, Freedom of Info, Equality/Diversity and Community Engagement).
- Care must be taken to ensure that council/resident/personal information (including home address and telephone numbers) remains secure. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act. Do not disclose anything of a confidential nature.
- Councillors using social media should make use of stringent privacy settings. Use a secure password (eight characters long and using a mixture of letters and numbers) and never share them.
- Do not post images of under 18s without parental permission. If you are worried about a young person inform the clerk and Chair, who will decide together with you what action to take.
- Do not forward photos or videos of an offensive, violent or abusive nature, even if the context is 'jokey' - you might still be breaking the law and will be personally liable. If councillors/the clerk find content on a social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines, they must report it as required by law. **To report a crime**, contact the police, call 999. If the person is not in immediate danger, contact the police, call 101.
- Threats, abuse or harassment via social media should be reported to the clerk and/or the police.
- Care should be exercised when accepting invitations to "friend" others within personal social networking sites. Remember that people classified as "friends" can download and share your information with others. Set your profile's security and privacy settings carefully.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Be aware of phishing scams providing a link to click, leading to a fake login page.

4.4 Commenting/responding online

Councillors should obtain permission from the clerk and Chair to respond on social media on behalf of the parish council. When commenting online, they should identify themselves as a parish councillor and make it clear whether or not they are representing the views of the parish council. **It is important not to respond to 'pitch forking' (n.b. social media is a fertile ground for rumours and false or biased information), which must be treated as anonymous correspondence.** Everyone remains personally responsible for the content they publish even if they have been given permission to respond/comment on social media. Comments of a derogatory, disrespectful, offensive, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made, and care must be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

4.5 Social Media during Council Meetings

Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'. Councillors/the clerk should NOT be making social media posts during meetings, and their full attention must remain in the room.

4.6 Use of WhatsApp

Councillors are reminded not to use WhatsApp for parish council decision making. WhatsApp is subject to FOI (freedom of information) requests in the same way that parish council emails are. It is mandatory to implement a 7-day rolling erasure of all parish council WhatsApp and text messages. Guidelines 4.1 to 4.5 apply here to all councillors/the clerk.

5. Email

5.1 Email Accounts

Councillors and the clerk have been provided with an email account. The address is in this format:

cllr.firstinitial.surname@severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk

The email account is to be used specifically for official parish council related work and councillors/the clerk are **not permitted** to use personal Gmail/Outlook or similar for council business. The council believes this is the most efficient and effective way of working together and with the community.

The email account remains the property of the parish council. The clerk can request passwords at any time, and these must be surrendered immediately upon such request.

5.2 Use of Parish Council Email

In using the provided email account, councillors agree to points a. – e. as follows:

- a. Councillors/the clerk must not use email to make decisions or influence decisions that should be made at a meeting of the council. Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct apply.
- b. The law does not allow councillors to act independently, and councillors should make sure that they do not imply that the content of an email represents the opinion or policy of the council as a whole.
- c. Councillors/the clerk may use the council's email accounts for council business only. When councillors use their parish email account to send an email, the recipient can be excused for thinking it is an 'official' communication sent on behalf of the council. Councillors should be particularly careful if agreeing to do something as it may be seen as a commitment by the council.
- d. Parish council emails are not confidential; every email is stored in the gov.uk archive and is available to the public through a freedom of information request. Although the emails will be cleared of any personal data before they are released, it is better to avoid disclosing anything personal or confidential in the first place; email is not a secure medium.
- e. Email monitoring – this parish council reserves the right to monitor email communications to ensure compliance with this policy and relevant laws. Monitoring will be conducted in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR.
- f. All emails must comply with data protection legislation. It is the sender's responsibility to ensure compliance or check first if unsure.
- g. No disclaimer will help if anyone sends an email that contains illegal, offensive, obscene, racist, abusive material or libelous, defamatory or discriminative material.
- h. Account holders within the Domain consent to receive Summons of Meetings by electronic means.
- i. All users must adhere to ethical standards, respect copyright and intellectual property rights.
- j. All users must avoid accessing inappropriate or offensive content.
- k. This parish council will require return of the official parish council email account within 48 hours upon the resignation of a councillor. The account password must be provided to the clerk, so that access can be gained and all emails archived/deleted as required. The email account providers can gain access in the event where passwords are forgotten/withheld by an individual.
- l. Retention and archiving - Emails should be retained and archived in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- m. All persons should regularly delete unnecessary emails to maintain an organised inbox.
- n. **Reporting security incidents** - All suspected security breaches or incidents should be reported immediately to the clerk for investigation and resolution and for the clerk to pass all details to the Email Account Providers for their support and to pass all details as necessary to the Information Commissioners Officer (regulating data protection).

5.3 Email Accounts Good Practice

Before sending an email message, consider if it may be more effective to communicate face to face or by telephone. It is easy to misconstrue the contents of an email which can lead to confusion and poor

communication, whilst a quick telephone conversation can prevent extensive email “ping-pong” conversations clarifying an email’s meaning.

Users should not send or forward any chain emails (e.g. jokes and virus warnings) from their council email account as both of these can contain malware. In addition, almost all virus warnings and police warnings circulating via email are actually hoaxes designed to clog up email systems by scaring people into forwarding them across the internet.

Remember that the authenticity of any email received cannot be guaranteed, especially with the prevalence of email “spoofing” (emails pretending to come from a source gathered through dubious means). In particular, users should always avoid opening any attachments to emails that are unexpected.

When sending an email users should only “cc” and “bcc” people who really need to be informed. Users should take care when using the “Reply to All” function as this may be inappropriate, especially when you have been the blind recipient.

Email etiquette construes capitalisation as SHOUTING, so it’s best to avoid inappropriate use of upper case in messages.

5.4 Email Signatures

All users of a parish council email address must create an email signature and include appropriate footnotes and a disclaimer. See examples in Appendix 1. The following guidelines should be adhered to when creating an email signature.

- A councillor should not include the words “Severn Stoke and Croome d’Abitot Parish Council” in their signature without their Parish Councillor title as this may imply that the email has been authored by the council itself.
- A councillor may not use the words “on behalf of” or “for” in front of the words “Severn Stoke and Croome d’Abitot Parish Council” or otherwise give any impression that they are representing the Council as part of their email signature without the express permission of the clerk.
- An email may be signed by the clerk by using name, title and “for Severn Stoke and Croome d’Abitot Parish Council, on behalf of Severn Stoke and Croome d’Abitot Parish Councillors”.
- A full signature is to be used in the first instance of communication. Subsequent emails in a chain need only contain a condensed version – reference the blue text only, in the examples contained in Appendix 1 (n.b. colour is applied for ease of identification only. Black text should be used within emails).

5.5 Further legal terms and conditions of use of parish council emails

Whereas SS&CDA Parish Council is the licensee of the domain severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk (the Domain) it authorises its councillors and employees to hold and use email accounts within the Domain.

The number of email accounts may be amended from time to time as the council sees fit.

The names of any email accounts including any aliases shall have no meaning or context beyond that of being a device to identify/differentiate the account holders within the council’s domain.

The council shall be held harmless from any claims made or views expressed or any other content within an email distributed from the domain by its members through the inclusion of a ‘Disclaimer’ footnote – see below.

An email authored by the clerk shall be the same as if it had been authored by the council itself.

All outgoing emails from the domain shall observe relevant data protection legislation.

6. Other aspects of this IT policy

6.1 Device and software usage

Where possible, authorised devices, software, and applications will be provided by this parish council for work-related tasks.

Unauthorised installation of software on authorised devices, including personal software, is strictly prohibited due to security concerns.

6.2 Data management and security

All sensitive and confidential parish council data should be stored and transmitted securely using approved methods. Regular data backups should be performed to prevent data loss, and secure data destruction methods should be used when necessary.

6.3 Network and internet usage

This parish council has no dedicated network and internet connections. No reimbursement is provided for use of home connections, other than to the Clerk covered in homeworking allowance as per their contract and/or financial regulations. Downloading and sharing copyrighted material without proper authorisation is prohibited.

6.4 Password and account security

Parish council users are responsible for maintaining the security of their accounts and passwords. Passwords should be strong and not shared with others. Regular password changes are encouraged to enhance security.

6.5 Training and awareness

This parish council can provide upon request resources to educate users about IT security best practices, privacy concerns, and technology updates.

6.6 Compliance and consequences

Breach of this Policy may result in the suspension of IT privileges and further consequences as deemed appropriate at a meeting of the complaints committee.

7. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

How staff, councillors, contractors, temporary workers and consultants can safely use AI tools (like ChatGPT, Copilot, Bard, Bing, Grammarly and similar tools). Our aim is to make sure AI is used safely and legally, protect people's personal information and keep our work accurate, ethical and secure.

"AI" means computer systems that can do tasks that normally need human thinking. Some of these features may appear inside everyday software like email or video-calling tools. Examples include Chatbots and virtual assistants, tools that predict, analyse or summarise information, machine Learning, autocorrect, translation, or grammar tools, facial recognition tools and, smart devices and monitoring tools

NEVER put personal, sensitive, or confidential information into a public AI tool.
Do not enter names, addresses, contact details, case notes or personal stories, health information, HR information or financial detail, anything that can identify a person. This is because most public AI tools store what you type and may use it to train their systems. This means your data could appear in answers given to other users. This is a data protection risk.

Traffic-Light Guide to Safe AI Use

RED – Do Not Do This (High Risk) In order to avoid breaking data protection laws, never use AI for:

- Any personal data (even if the name is removed)
- Asking for advice about real people or real cases
- Making important decisions (e.g., hiring, funding, or assessments)

AMBER – Use with Care (Medium Risk) Allowed only if the information is fully anonymised:

- Summarising non-sensitive documents
- Writing newsletters or general communications
- Analysing feedback where all personal details are removed
- Brainstorming ideas

Before using AI, remove:

- Names, places and addresses, contact details, birth dates, ages, or anything that could identify someone, job titles that point to a single person (e.g., “the headteacher at [School]”)

GREEN – Safe to Use (Low Risk) These tasks do not involve any confidential information:

- Research on public topics
- Learning new skills (e.g., Excel formulas)
- Improving your own writing
- Creating public images or posters

If you use a public AI tool, you must switch off data training in your account settings.

- ChatGPT: Settings → Data Controls → turn off “Improve the model for everyone”
- Google Gemini: myactivity.google.com → turn off “Gemini Apps Activity”
- Microsoft Copilot (personal): Privacy → turn off model training for text and voice

This protects your information from being used to train AI systems.

Accountability and AI

- Human responsibility: Check all AI-generated content for accuracy, fairness and tone before using it.
 - Transparency: If AI is used in a major way (e.g., a chatbot for service users), make this clear to the public.
 - Compliance: Breaking this policy—especially the RED rules—may lead to disciplinary action.
- end-

Parish Clerk, Proper Officer & Responsible Financial Officer Mrs Lisa Stevens, CiLCA, c/o 9 The Limes, Kempsey, Worcs, WR5 3LG. Tel: 01905 820956 / 07950256363

Email: parishclerk@severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk

Website: www.severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk

Requests for this information in other languages
/audio/large print will be reasonably considered.



View our new parish council website via the Q R Code above
or at

<https://severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk/>

Our parish council logo shows the Panorama Tower at Severn Stoke, offering views of the surrounding countryside to the public.
Image recreated with permission of the National Trust.

APPENDIX 1 - Example email signatures - Text in blue indicates the condensed version to be used when replying to an existing chain of communication. The box borders below are for indicative purposes only as a visual aid of the text to be included. Nb the box border does not need to be included in emails.

Clerk email signature:

Mrs Lisa Stevens, CiLCA - Parish Clerk, Proper Officer & Responsible Financial Officer
for Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council
on behalf of Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Councillors
07950256363 / 01905 820956
c/o 9 The Limes, Kempsey, Worcester, WR5 3LG
parishclerk@severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk
<https://severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk>
Social Media: 'Parish Councillors SevernStoke Croome'

Office hours

This parish clerk works limited hours each week and endeavours to read and respond as required to emails as soon as possible. If your email is for information only you may not receive an acknowledgement. If your email is urgent, please phone the parish clerk on the number above.

Notices

This email may contain privileged and/or confidential information. If you receive this in error, please notify the sender immediately and do not use or disclose contents to any other. Information about how this Parish Council processes personal data can be found in our Privacy Notices on [our website](#). The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) advises (section 7) that a local authority does not generally need to have the express consent of an individual to disclose their personal information to an elected member, as long as the information is necessary to respond to a request/enquiry. This parish council considers that section 11 is also applicable (relating to limiting the sharing of personal information to that required to carry out duties).

Councillor email signature:

Councillor XXX XXX
Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council
Chair Mr Richard Hill. Clerk & RFO Mrs Lisa Stevens, CiLCA
c/o 9 The Limes, Kempsey, Worcester, WR5 3LG
07950256363 / 01905 820956
parishclerk@severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk
<https://severnstokeandcroomedabitot-pc.gov.uk>
Social Media: 'Parish Councillors SevernStoke Croome'

Disclaimer and Confidentiality Notice

This email may contain privileged and/or confidential information. If you receive this in error, please notify the sender immediately and do not use, or disclose its content to any other party. Any views or opinions expressed are those of the author and do not represent those of Severn Stoke and Croome d'Abitot Parish Council.

Data protection and recording

Information about how this parish council processes personal data can be found in our Privacy Notices on our website. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) advises (section 7) that a local authority does not generally need to have the express consent of an individual to disclose their personal information to an elected member, as long as the information is necessary to respond to a request/enquiry. This parish council considers that section 11 is also applicable (relating to limiting the sharing of personal information to that required to carry out duties). Please note that it is your responsibility to scan this message for viruses.