

## **Item 5 – To discuss Challenges and Solutions in Sharing Council Communications on Community Social Media Platforms**

### **Purpose of the Report**

To inform Members of the limitations currently experienced when using third-party community-run social media platforms to disseminate official Parish Council communications, and to consider strategies to improve direct engagement with residents.

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### **Action**

**Members are asked to read the information below and to:**

- 1. Note the challenges described in this report**
  - 2. Support efforts to expand direct engagement initiatives and reduce dependency on third-party moderation;**
  - 3. Consider mailshots where appropriate**
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### **Background**

Windlesham Parish Council seeks to ensure that residents are informed and engaged on matters affecting the local community. While the Council maintains its own website and social media channels, it has historically relied on third-party community pages, such as local Facebook groups, to amplify its messaging and reach a wider audience.

However, some administrators of these community-run platforms have expressed concerns about the Council's posts being interpreted as political or promotional in nature. This has resulted in:

- Posts made by the Parish Council being removed;
- Comments being restricted or moderated unfairly;
- In at least one instance, the Council's account being temporarily suspended from posting.

These actions hinder the Council's ability to ensure accurate and timely information reaches residents.

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### **Key Issues**

#### **1. Perceived Political Nature of Council Posts**

Despite the Council being non-political in operation, some community group administrators view Council posts as political or promotional, especially when they relate to matters like local governance reviews, elections, or budget consultations.

2. **Inconsistent Moderation Practices**

As these platforms are privately moderated, there is no consistency in how Council posts are handled. What is permitted in one group may be deleted in another, leading to fragmented communication.

3. **Reputational Risk and Misinformation**

In the absence of direct Council updates, residents may rely on second-hand or speculative information. This increases the risk of misinformation and undermines public trust in Council decisions.

4. **Impact on Community Awareness**

The Council's ability to inform residents on consultations, local services, planning matters, and community projects is diluted when it cannot access these widely used digital platforms.

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**Options for Consideration**

- **Increase Promotion of Council-Owned Channels**

Encourage residents to follow official communication channels, including the Council's website, Facebook page, and newsletter. Use QR codes and consistent branding across public spaces.

- **Expand Direct Engagement Initiatives**

Consider launching regular drop-in sessions, e-bulletins, or other methods of communication to bypass reliance on third-party platforms.

- **Consider mailshots where appropriate**

In instances where time-sensitive information must be disseminated (e.g., consultations, major service changes), the Council may consider using direct mail as a supplementary communication method. This will be a costlier method of communication and indicative quotes have been requested and will be provided at the meeting.

Members should note that the remaining budget for 2025-26 is £8,200.

## Item 6: Review and Amendment of the Communications Strategy and Media Policy

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### Action

Members are asked to read the information below and decide either to:

- a) **Adopt the proposed amendment as presented.**  
or
  - b) **Amend and adopt the proposed wording.**  
or
  - c) **Reject the proposed amendment**
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### Background

The Council currently uses various communication platforms to engage with residents, including email, telephone, its website, and social media. Whilst social media is a valuable tool for engagement, there is growing concern about the nature of some comments and the expectation that the Council must respond to messages or comments posted via these platforms.

Best practice guidance from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) suggests that public expectations regarding responses must be managed, and that formal channels of communication should be clearly defined and promoted.

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## Proposed Amendment to the Communications Strategy and Media Policy

### Status of Social Media Communications

The Council welcomes public engagement across a range of platforms; however, posts or messages from members of the public via social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram) shall **not** be regarded as official correspondence.

The Council is **not obliged** to respond to any such messages. Residents wishing to contact the Parish Council formally must do so by:

- Emailing the Parish Clerk at [clerk@windleshampc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@windleshampc.gov.uk)
- Submitting a written letter to:  
*The Council Office, The Avenue, Lightwater, GU18 5RG*
- Using the online contact form on the Council's official website:  
[www.windleshampc.gov.uk](http://www.windleshampc.gov.uk)

### House Rules for Social Media Engagement

All users engaging with the Council via social media must comply with both the respective platform's Terms of Use and the following conditions:

- You are wholly responsible for any content you post, including shared material.

- Posts considered inappropriate by the Council may be removed in part or in full.
- The Council will report and remove any social media accounts misusing Windlesham Parish Council branding or imagery without permission.

The Council reserves the right to hide or remove posts, comments, or private messages that contain:

- Graphic, sensitive, or offensive imagery
- Abusive or obscene content
- Discriminatory language or conduct
- Misinformation, disinformation, or malinformation
- Off-topic or irrelevant comments
- Public mentions of Council staff by name
- Derogatory or accusatory remarks about individual Officers or Councillors
- Private or personal information about staff or Councillors irrelevant to their role
- Intellectual property infringement
- Content in breach of legal or regulatory obligations
- Spam, trolling, or persistent disruptive behaviour

Before any content is removed, the Council may take screenshots of the material and retain it in line with the Council's privacy policy to justify the moderation action.

Repeat violations may lead to the user being blocked or reported to the platform provider. A private warning message will typically be issued before such action is taken, explaining the breach and potential next steps.

The Council also reserves the right to challenge or correct inaccurate or misleading public information, including escalating complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) where necessary.

Users who witness a post they believe violates these rules are encouraged to report it directly through the platform's moderation tools.

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### **Rationale for Amendment**

This amendment is proposed to:

- Safeguard Officer time and ensure official correspondence is handled through accessible and monitored channels.
- Avoid miscommunication due to social media algorithms or platform limitations.
- Meet statutory duties for formal correspondence logging and retention under public sector governance requirements.