Upton Parish Council
Facebook Moderation Policy

August 2026

1. Purpose

Upton Parish Council uses Facebook to share news, events and updates with residents. As a public body, the Council is accountable for what appears on its page and for how it responds to residents - including those with strong or negative views.

The Council does not continuously monitor Facebook and cannot guarantee a response to every comment or message. The page is not monitored outside normal office hours or on bank holidays.

This policy sets out a simple, consistent process for managing comments and messages on the page. It exists to:

- Reduce risk to the Council.
- Protect the Clerk and page administrators by providing a consistent framework for moderation decisions.
- Ensure every resident is treated fairly and consistently, regardless of who is monitoring the page on any given day.

This policy will be published on the Council's website. A link to the policy will be on the Council's Facebook page, and a summary version ('House Rules') will be pinned as a Featured Post so residents can see the ground rules before they comment.

As a public authority, the Council recognises the importance of freedom of expression and will not remove comments simply because they are critical or unpopular. Moderation decisions will be proportionate, consistent and based on this policy.

2. Decision framework: respond, acknowledge, ignore, escalate, delete

Every comment or message on the page falls into one of five categories. This framework is designed so any admin can make a quick, confident call - and know when to hand something to the Clerk instead of deciding alone.

Action	What it means	When to use it	Who does it
Respond	Post a public reply on the thread, in the Council's voice.	Genuine questions about council services, events or factual matters. Positive engagement or factual discussion that benefits the wider community.	Any admin. Keep it factual, brief and courteous. Where the reply attributes responsibility to another organisation (e.g. Highways, a developer, a management company), **verify the facts with the Clerk before posting** - publicly naming the wrong organisation is a risk in itself.
Acknowledge	A short holding reply confirming the comment has been seen, without engaging in debate.	Valid concerns that need looking into before a full answer can be given, e.g. “Thanks for flagging - we're looking into this and will update this thread.” Where a fuller answer already exists or is pending, point to it instead, e.g. “We've put a full explanation of this on our website” or “We'll be discussing this at our next meeting - members of the public are welcome to attend.” Facebook should not be used to pre-empt or replace the Council's formal decision-making process.	Any admin. Escalate to the Clerk for the substantive follow-up.
Ignore	No public reply. The comment stays visible unless it breaches House Rules.	Opinions, grumbles or one-off negative comments that don't require a council response and aren't abusive.	No action needed - note in the log if a pattern emerges.
Escalate	Pause and refer to the Clerk (and Chair, if	Legal, safeguarding or reputational risk; posts that could create public safety concerns or spread significant	Admin flags to the Clerk immediately. No public reply until agreed.

Action	What it means	When to use it	Who does it
	serious) before any public reply or moderation action.	misinformation that is demonstrably false and likely to cause harm; contentious local issues; anything mentioning a named individual, ongoing planning matter, or threat of complaint.	
Delete	Remove or hide the comment.	Once escalated to and confirmed by the Clerk, where the comment cannot be dealt with via Respond, Acknowledge or Ignore - usually because it breaches House Rules. May include blocking the commenter in serious or repeat cases (see Section 5).	Clerk, or an admin acting on the Clerk's instruction. Log the action per Section 6.

General principle: if in doubt, escalate. It is always better to pause and check than to post something publicly that the Council later needs to walk back.

3. Complaints, negative feedback, and contentious threads

Parish councils regularly deal with residents who are frustrated - about planning decisions, bins, potholes, dog fouling or council spending. Most of this is normal and doesn't need special handling. This section covers the situations that do.

General negative feedback

- Genuine criticism, even if blunt, is not a breach of House Rules and should not be deleted - a valid criticism doesn't stop being valid because it's unwelcome.
- Use Acknowledge for anything that needs a considered answer. Don't be drawn into back-and-forth in the comments.
- Where a factual correction is needed, keep it short, polite and evidence-based. Don't argue. Signpost back to the UPC website when more detail or context is required.

Complaints

- Formal complaints belong in the Council's normal complaints process, not the comments section. The standard response is to direct the resident to that process, e.g. “We take this seriously - please contact the Clerk on clerk@upton-pc.gov.uk so this can be looked into properly.”
- Don't attempt to resolve or discuss the substance of a complaint publicly, even if the answer seems obvious.

Contentious threads - when not to engage publicly

Some topics are best not debated in the comments at all, however reasonable the Council's position. These include:

- Live planning applications or matters where the Council is currently considering or commenting on an application, or ongoing legal matters - legal proceedings, disputes with contractors, or matters that could prejudice a decision.
- Anything naming or clearly identifying a named individual (resident, staff member or councillor) - the Council should never confirm, deny or discuss an individual's circumstances in a public comment, even to correct the record. Where a comment publicly names or identifies an individual, that person may also have the right under UK data protection law (GDPR) to request its removal, separate from the Council's own discretion to remove it under this policy. Any such request should be escalated to the Clerk immediately.
- Topics with strong opposing factions - politically sensitive local issues where any public comment risks being read as the Council taking sides.
- Allegations of wrongdoing or defamatory claims made by a commenter - anything that could expose the Council, an individual or a business to legal risk.

In these cases the right move is a neutral holding line (or no public reply at all) and an escalation to the Clerk. A suggested holding line:

"Thank you for your comment. This isn't something we're able to discuss on Facebook, but please contact the Clerk directly on clerk@upton-pc.gov.uk."

Where a comment naming an individual is removed, it can help to leave a short public note in its place - *"This comment has been removed as it breaches our House Rules"* - rather than deleting it without explanation. This keeps moderation visible and consistent without repeating or drawing further attention to the content itself. This does not apply to spam or scam comments, which can simply be deleted.

---

4. Automated reply (Messenger auto-response)

A simple auto-response on Messenger is recommended, so residents know not to expect an immediate reply.

Approved wording:

"Thanks for your message. Upton Parish Council is run by elected councillors, who volunteer their time and expertise free of charge, and one part-time Clerk, so we are unable to reply to DMs. For urgent matters, please contact the Clerk directly on clerk@upton-pc.gov.uk. For emergencies, always contact the emergency services."

---

5. What can and cannot be moderated

As a public body, the Council needs to be careful about removing content or restricting who can comment. Over-moderation is a reputational risk in its own right - residents notice when comments disappear, and it can look like the Council is silencing criticism.

Can be removed or hidden

- Abusive, threatening or harassing language directed at any individual.
- Discriminatory content (racist, sexist or otherwise targeting a protected characteristic).
- Spam, scams and clearly commercial or promotional content unrelated to council business.
- Content that is defamatory or that discloses private information about an identifiable individual.
- Comments that name or clearly identify individual council officers may be hidden or removed where the identification is unnecessary, discloses personal information, makes allegations about the individual, invites personal targeting, or creates a risk of harassment, abuse, defamation, data protection breach, or unfair intrusion into the officer's private or employment matters. Criticism of council decisions or services should be directed at the Council, not at individual officers.
- Illegal content of any kind.

Cannot be removed just because it's negative

- Fair criticism of the Council, a councillor acting in their public role, or a council decision.
- Comments that are simply unwelcome, awkward or embarrassing.
- Disagreement expressed in reasonable terms, even if strongly worded.

Banning or restricting users

- Blocking a resident is a significant step and should only happen after repeated, clear breaches of House Rules (e.g. abuse or harassment), not after a single heated comment.
- Where possible, hide, remove or delete the specific breaching comment first, rather than blocking the person outright.
- Any decision to block a user should be agreed with the Clerk and logged (who, why, when and what was posted) in case it's challenged later.

Facebook does not support switching off comments for the whole page - moderation has to happen post by post. Council does support restricting comments in the following exceptional circumstances:

Can be restricted

- if advised by the Police or other public authority.
- if post relates to a major incident, crime or crime prevention matter.

6. Roles and escalation

- Day-to-day monitoring and first-line responses (Respond / Acknowledge / Ignore decisions): page admins (designated councillors).
- Escalation point for anything flagged Escalate, formal complaints, or content requiring removal/blocking: the Clerk.
- Final decision on anything with legal, safeguarding or significant reputational implications: the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair.

A simple moderation log will record significant moderation decisions (including hidden or removed comments and blocked users), together with the reason for the action.

---

7. House Rules - Featured Post

📌 Welcome to Upton Parish Council's Facebook page.

We're glad you're here. A few house rules to keep this a useful space for the whole community:

- ✓ Be respectful - disagreement is fine, personal attacks aren't.
- ✓ Keep it relevant - this page is for Upton news, events and updates.
- ✓ No abuse, harassment or discriminatory language - comments breaching this will be removed.
- ✓ For complaints or urgent matters, please contact the Clerk directly on clerk@upton-pc.gov.uk rather than posting here.
- ✓ We can't discuss individual cases, live legal matters or planning applications in the comments - but we're happy to point you to the right process.

Comments that breach these House Rules may be hidden or removed. Repeat or serious breaches may result in users being blocked. Our full moderation policy is on our website.