



BISHOPSTOKE PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

**This Social Media Policy was adopted
at the Council meeting on 10th September 2024**

D Wheal

Clerk to Bishopstoke Parish Council

BISHOPSTOKE PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Amendment Sheet

Amendment No.	Date Incorporated	Subject
----------------------	--------------------------	----------------

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1 Introduction

- 1.1** This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council Officers make appropriate decisions about the use of social media which includes (but is not limited to): blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, comments on web-articles; and the use of services such as YouTube, X (formally known as Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and other relevant social media providers.

The Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:

- providing and exchanging information about services;
- delivering positive news stories about the council;
- delivering specific messages aligned with the Council's Mission Statement;
- supporting local democracy;
- gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships;
- promoting cultural events or tourism for the area;
- supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience; and
- creating internal communications and learning and development.

- 1.2** This policy outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors and Officers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

1.3 Related Council Policies and Documents

- Code of Conduct
- Financial Regulations
- Document Retention Policy
- Communications Policy
- Standing Orders
- Complaints Procedure
- Civility & Respect Pledge

- 1.4** The Council has a corporate presence on the web and via email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the Parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications and will regularly review which communications methods are best suited to its purposes. The use of these methods is covered in the Communications Policy.

- 1.5** This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2 Who is covered by this policy

- 2.1** This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all other employees and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

3 Compliance

- 3.1** All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
- 3.2** Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
- 3.3** Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct (and the Civility and Respect Pledge) shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.
- 3.4** It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

4 Rules for using social media

- 4.1** Councillors and Staff are permitted to create accounts on social media using their official Council email address. Use of these accounts must be limited to Council business only. Both Councillors and Staff are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for Council business.
- 4.2** Councillors and Staff must not allow their interactions online to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments.
- 4.3** Councillors and Staff must never post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and subject to a custodial sentence).
- 4.4** Councillors and Staff must never conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- 4.5** Posts must not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- 4.6** If Councillors and Staff use social media in a personal capacity, and not in their Council role, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

- 4.7** The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk for Council records.
- 4.8** Council Officers will maintain and update the Parish Council Website. The website may be used to:
- Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Post good news stories
 - Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
 - Advertise vacancies
 - Retweet or 'share' information from partners i. e. Police, Library, District Council, etc.
 - Announce new information appropriate to the Council.
 - Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
 - Post other items as the Council see fit.
- 4.9** When participating in online communication Councillors and Staff must;
- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council.
 - Never give out personal data of others on social media, including home addresses and telephone numbers
 - Never use an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless replying to that individual or having been given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation).
 - Never make false or misleading statements.
 - Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council.
 - Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
 - Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." i.e. use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points.
 - Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
 - Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.

- Not post comments that you would not be prepared make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright.
- Spell and grammar check everything.

4.10 Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderator(s) and/or Council as required.

4.11 Bishopstoke Parish Council runs its social media pages so that it can pass information on to residents. The sites 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.

4.12 Though BPC is keen to hear resident's views, it will not be able to take comments made on its social media accounts as official comments, particularly on planning applications. In order to manage the messages received, residents will be asked – if necessary – to forward their comments to the Council by emailing the Parish Clerk or attending one of the Council Meetings.

5 Managing Social Media Accounts

5.1 The Parish Clerk or any Officer acting as moderator will also have the authority to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to Bishopstoke Parish Council's social media pages.

5.2 Passwords for the Council's social media accounts should be kept confidential. Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk must take particular care where a computer, or other device, is used by more than one person in a household. Any Parish Councillor who is unsure about security should raise the issue with the Parish Clerk who will check the security arrangements or obtain advice from a specialist.

5.3 No Social Media account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk or Full Council.

5.4 Bishopstoke Parish Council reserves the right to suspend any or all of its Social Media accounts, without notice, should a localised extraordinary event occur.

5.5 All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.

6 Review of policy

- 6.1** This policy may be amended at any time and will be reviewed at least once per Council cycle.

7 Social Media use in Meetings

- 7.1** Councillors and Staff are permitted to use social media during meetings for the purposes of keeping residents informed of the proceedings.
- 7.2** The use of handheld devices is intended to improve communications and awareness of Council activities during meetings, not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. All devices should be set to silence.
- 7.3** All such communications during meetings must refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting and must be respectful at all times. To do otherwise demonstrates to the public that one is not engaging properly in the meeting and risks bringing the Council into disrepute.