

BRANDON & BYSHOTTLES PARISH COUNCIL
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and staff with an overview of social media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public. It includes guidelines on Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication in their **official** and **personal** capacity. This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Brandon & Byshottles Parish Council. The Council's Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

2. DEFINITION

Social media is the term commonly given to website and other online tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way e.g by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones and other technology, including tablet devices. Brandon & Byshottles Parish Council currently utilises its website and a Facebook account, although other channels may be introduced in future with the approval of the Council. This Policy will apply to any such channels.

3. GUIDANCE ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Only Parish Council Officers are permitted to use the Parish Council Facebook page and website and are responsible for the information posted. The Clerk to the Council will be responsible for authorising use by other officers. Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post on their personal accounts and any comments on the Council's accounts. In the main, Councillors and council officers have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

All Councillors and officers 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. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect serious breaches of this policy by employees. This may include unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.

Volunteers in breach of the policy could result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

Councillors will need to bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code of conduct does not apply. Councillors 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.

A Councillor or council officer's behaviour on any social media site must be consistent with the behaviour required generally.

Any form of communication carries with it the possibility of misunderstanding. Social media is especially vulnerable to this. A comment which would be seen as harmlessly humorous in normal conversation could be seen as seriously offensive on Facebook.

Not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

Councillors and officers should bear in mind the problems which arise from social media:

- What is said is permanently published to the world – once something is online it is nearly impossible to take it back.
- Posts can easily be misinterpreted and taken out of context.
- When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

Council officers and Members should be aware and diligent about internet security. Losing control of a social media account to a hacker could lead to inappropriate comments being published in the Council's name.

The following precautions should be taken when using social media:

- Secure passwords should always be used (generally over eight characters long and using a mix of letters, number and symbols).
- Change passwords regularly, especially if you think it may have been compromised.
- Do not share your password with anyone.
- Avoid clicking on questionable links or replying to any suspicious emails (if you are unsure at all, it is best just to avoid the link/message or seek further advice).
- Do not give out personal information online or enter personal details into any social media surveys (often the surveys are simply a means to obtain personal information).

4. THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Brandon & Byshottles Parish Council runs its social media pages so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Social media accounts will not necessarily be checked daily and posts will not necessarily be responded to. The social media accounts are primarily a tool to pass information on.

Though the Council is keen to hear residents' 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. This can be done by emailing the Council, by contacting a Parish Councillor or by attending a monthly meeting.

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information
- Official social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising
- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions and actions
- Supporting local democracy
- Distribute in whole or part information from council notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings
- Information specifically agreed to be communicated via social media at Council meetings
- Advertising events and activities that Brandon & Byshottles Parish Council has organised or co-organised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
- Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the parish area
- Providing and exchanging information about local services and events
- Support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Gathering local resident's insights
- Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area
- Advertising vacancies
- Re-tweet or share relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Post, retweet or share relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, uniformed organisations and charities
- Link to appropriate websites and other social media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the council's expectations of conduct
- Post other items as the council see fit
- Refer resident queries via social media to the Clerk for wider dissemination to Councillors if required
- not be used to promote any businesses or contractors who may tender for and / or carry out work for the Council, as this could be interpreted as being favourable and unfair.

5. MONITORING

The Parish Clerk will moderate Parish Council social media output and be responsible for overseeing posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

The Parish Clerk, acting as moderator will have authority, without notice or comment, to remove any posts from council social media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (e.g. Facebook) and also to the Parish Clerk for council records.

The Parish Clerk acting as a moderator will also have the authority to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to B&BPC's social media pages.

When participating in online communication, B&BPC will generally allow posts on its social media pages from members of the public that:

- Are responsible and respectful
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, officers and residents
- Are objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Posts may be deleted and the holder of an account banned if a comment or post:
 - Gives out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers.
 - Mentions an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless deemed reasonable (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
 - Makes intentionally false or misleading statements
 - Includes potentially inflammatory, defamatory, libellous or offensive remarks
 - Makes derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including council officers, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
 - Uses language that may be deemed offensive, in particular relating to protected characteristics contained in the Equalities Act 2010.
 - Engages in personal attacks, online fights, and/or hostile communications
 - Includes the publication of photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
 - Includes any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
 - Includes obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
 - Conducts any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

It is ultimately up to the moderator – either acting individually or in consultation - as to whether a post will be deleted and/or an account blocked.

The Parish Clerk will also be responsible for checking the correct security settings are in place on the social media sites used. Councillors may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information however all must ensure they follow this policy.

No social media account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk or full council.

6. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

The Council is responsible for reviewing this policy. This policy will be reviewed periodically, but not more than 4 years after approval or as and when required to ensure it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

APPROVED: 21st March 2025

MINUTE REF: 180

REVIEW: not later than March 2029.