

Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, other legislation which may apply and the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. The Council's financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council's publication scheme.

Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council, Councillors must have read and understood this policy

The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law.

Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's publication scheme.

This policy does not seek to regulate councillors use of social media in their private capacity. Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose confidential information referred to above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums
- Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors and council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

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Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to;

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or Share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Resident queries should be emailed to the clerk or Assistant Clerk

Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, precise, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council. It recommended that Councillors include on their private accounts the following statement; This is my private account – All posts are in my personal capacity.
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

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Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

Bray Parish Council will continue to use its website as the primary source of information about its activities and links to the relevant pages will be used to direct residents to those activities.

Bray Parish Council will also operate a Twitter Account and Facebook Page. Only those named in the Communications Policy will have the authority to upload content except the Assistant Clerk in their absence.

No response will be made to any content posted in response to any BPC posts or tweets.

Reporting of Abuse

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate the Parish Council, parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The Parish Council considers the following to be misuse or abuse of social media;

- personal name calling
- threats to people or property
- controversial or inflammatory remarks
- personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- any information that may be deemed libel
- activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bringing the council into disrepute, including through inaccurate content
- offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

The moderator of the Parish Council social media accounts will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature and which are against the Facebook Community Standards or the Twitter Rules and Policies, by the same token the Parish Council expects moderators of local facebook pages and users of Twitter to also comply with these standards.

In the event that abuse of social media is reported to the Clerk, the local moderator will be asked to remove the objectionable content, if the content is not removed then the account will be reported to Facebook using the report function in the Community Standards.

If physical violence is threatened against Councillors or staff, the police will be informed.

Breach of Policy

Residents with any queries or complaints will be asked to contact the Clerk by email, phone or personal visit to the Parish Office during its published opening hours for a response to their concerns.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

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