

Brixworth Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Adopted July 2022



The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council officers and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. How Social Media will be used by the Parish Council**
- 3. Who is covered by this policy?**
- 4. Code of Practice**
- 5. Managing Social Media Accounts**
- 6. Press/Media Channels**

1. Introduction

Social Media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including Social Media sites and other sites that are centered on user interaction.

This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council Officers make appropriate decisions about the use of Social Media, and to outline Brixworth Parish Council's position on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using BPC's Social Media sites.

It includes standards and guidelines for Councillors and Council Officers to observe when using Social Media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy.

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

- Brixworth Parish Council website
- Facebook, Instagram, and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro-blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Brixworth Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Over time Brixworth Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements. This policy may be amended at any time.

2. How Social Media will be used by the Council

Social Media may be used for:

- a. Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions, and actions
- b. Supporting local democracy
- c. Distribute in whole or part information from council notices, agendas, approved minutes, and dates of meetings
- d. Information specifically agreed to be communicated via Social Media at Council meetings
- e. Advertising events and activities that Brixworth Parish Council has organised or co- organised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
- f. Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- g. Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the Brixworth area
- h. Providing and exchanging information about local services and events
- i. Gathering residents' insights
- j. Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area
- k. Advertising BPC vacancies
- l. Re-tweet or share relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, NHS etc.
- m. Post, retweet or share relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as

information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, Scouts/Guides, and charities

- n. Link to appropriate websites and other Social Media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the council's expectations of conduct
- o. Post other items as the council see fit
- p. Refer resident queries via Social Media to the Clerk for wider dissemination to Councillors if required

Councillors and Officers should be aware that not all communication through Social Media requires a response, although an acknowledgement may be made if appropriate.

Brixworth 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.

Though BPC is keen to hear residents' views, it will not be able to take comments made on its Social Media accounts as official comments or complaints. To manage the messages received, residents will be asked – if necessary – to forward their comments to BPC. This can be done by emailing the Parish Clerk or completing an official feedback form found on our website. Auto reply messaging will be used on our Social Media pages where possible, to this effect.

Three or more members of the Media and Comms Committee will be required to authorise posts that do not originate from an authorised source. Equally, announcements from the Council including Council Meetings will not require authorisation to post.

Who is covered by this policy?

The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors and Council Officers.

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.

Individual Parish Councillors and Council Officers are responsible for what they post, both in a council and personal capacity.

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.

The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of 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 a Councillor or Officer.

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

3. Code of Practice

When using Social Media channels in direct connection to local council matters, Councillors and Officers must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Councillors and Officers should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

When participating in online communication, Councillors and Officers must:

- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative, and balanced
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, Officers, and residents
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on Social Media sites is an offence so Councillors and Officers must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council, and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms

- Be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate
- Remember that communications on the internet are permanent and public
- 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

Parish councillors and Council Officers must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on Social Media, including home address and telephone numbers
- Use an individual's name in Social Media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
- Present personal opinions as that of Brixworth Parish Council. If a Councillor or Officer blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as a Councillor or Council Officer, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content in relation to local parish issues, or content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Make 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. Language that may be deemed offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any Social Media site
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. The sentiment and emotion within written text is open to interpretation by the individual reader. Negative comments should be politely acknowledged, and the author directed to our official channels to formalize any official complaint
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post 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)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

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, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on Social Media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council Officers or residents should report them to the Parish Clerk for referral to the Chairman of the Media and Communications Committee and/or the Council as required.

The behaviour required in the Councillors Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply.

4. Managing Social Media Accounts

The Parish Clerk will be responsible for monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy. The

Administrative Assistant will be responsible for posting content on the council website and Social Media pages.

Councillors and Council Officers should be mindful when sharing posts onto any Social Media account that is not solely controlled by Brixworth Parish Council. Content shared and discussions/comments arising from such posts onto another Social Media Account may not be under our control or governed by our acceptable use policy.

This policy will run alongside our Social Media acceptable use policy. This policy will govern and set clear expectations of how the public interact with our Social Media in terms of both behaviour and allowed content.

The Parish Clerk or any Councillor also 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 (i.e., Facebook) and to the Parish Clerk for council records.

The Parish Clerk or any Councillor acting as a moderator will also have the authority to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to BPC's Social Media pages.

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.

5. Press/Media Channels

An unusual or extraordinary localised event may trigger an active interest, including direct contact, from the Press and other Media channels. Under no situation can any member of the Council engage with any press/media channels without approval from the full council. Any requests for information or formal comment should be referred to West Northants Council and reported immediately to the Parish Clerk.

We reserve the right to temporarily suspend any or all our Social Media Accounts, without notice, should a localised extraordinary event occur.

This policy will be reviewed on a bi-annual basis. Next review due July 2024