

Bures St Mary Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Adopted Date: November 2022 Reviewed: November 2024

Next Review due: November 2025

1. Introduction

Employees' and councillors' use of social media in both a personal and business capacity can present risks to our confidential information and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks, we expect employees and councillors to adhere to this policy.

The purpose of this policy is to assist employees and councillors by providing clear guidance about acceptable behaviour on social media both at work and out of work.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees and councillors of Bures St Mary Parish Council.

This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes. It also applies whether the social media is accessed using Parish Council IT equipment, or equipment belonging to employees or councillors.

3. Definitions

Social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other, or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In, internet newsgroups and chat rooms.

Social media also covers blogs and video and image sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. This policy refers to the examples listed and any new social media which is developed in the future.

4. Using social media sites in the name of Bures St Mary Parish Council.

All posts on behalf of the Parish Council must go via the Clerk, who will provide guidance as necessary.

Councillors' authority to post will be withdrawn during a defined period before local council elections in order to comply with legislation (Purdah).

5. Personal Safety and Privacy

Employees and councillors need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to residents as well as people they know in a private capacity.

Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level.

Employees and councillors who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

6. Key Principles

Employees and councillors must not:

- use the Cllr or Councillor title on personal social media
- present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council
- bring the Parish Council into disrepute or cause embarrassment, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council
- disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk
- post comments about employees or councillors without their prior approval
- upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent. This includes use of an individual's name or contact details without written permission to do so; publishing photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others including any link to a third-party website without checking that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- post, forward or link to controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks, engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications as this may constitute bullying or harassment and will bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

- conduct any online activity that is against regulation or law e.g., may be deemed libellous or that constitutes a criminal offence.

Examples of good practice:

- Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Parish Council.
- Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g., politics and religion.
- Offer routes to enable resolution of concerns and complaints.

The above examples are not a definitive list but are examples to illustrate what misuse and good practice may look like.

Councillors must avoid posting views in advance of a decision to be debated by the Council or a Committee meeting, that may constitute predetermination or bias. The Localism Act 2011 states that councillors must not have "had or appeared to have had a closed mind (to any extent) when making the decision".

7. Addressing allegations of misuse

Any employee or councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by an employee or councillor onto a social media website should inform the Clerk or Chairman of the Parish Council who should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.

For councillors, complaints will be dealt with following the Council's Complaints Policy. For employees, complaints will be dealt with following the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.