

BILDESTON PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Adopted by the Parish Council on 9th October, 2019

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Bildeston Parish Council recognises the benefits of social media for business and personal use. It is an increasingly popular means of communication and for many is the preferred way of finding out information and contacting organisations.

Social media provides the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience and disseminate information instantaneously. It is expected that Bildeston Parish Council will continue to develop its use of social media. This policy is aimed at supporting employees in using it appropriate and effectively.

2. PURPOSE

The policy provides guidance to employees on the use of social media for both business and personal purposes. It aims to set clear expectations to ensure that employees are able to use social media effectively and without placing themselves where their conduct may be construed as inappropriate.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees. For the purposes of this policy, social media includes the use of all internet based applications. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Social networking (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+)
- Microblogging (Twitter, Tumblr)
- Photo sharing (Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest)
- Video sharing (YouTube, Facebook Live, Periscope, Vimeo)
- E-mail and private messages sent over online channels such as direct messaging via Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees are responsible for their own compliance with this policy and for ensuring that it is consistently applied to protect the privacy, confidentiality, reputation and interest of Bildeston Parish Council.

Any concerns about social media use should be raised with Chair of the Council in the first instance.

5. BUSINESS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The use of social media in a business context is to:

- Promote and publicise activities supported/provided or commissioned by the council to ensure as wide awareness as possible
- Respond to specific questions from the public, businesses and partners
- Clarify or correct any unclear or incorrect statements or views
- Initiate and participate in dialogue with the community relating to council activities and services
- Provide information, advice and guidance (including in emergency situations)
- Promote an approachable image for the council

Any introduction and use of social media activities must have sufficient resource and/or clear notification regarding response expectations.

It should be noted that all information and responses posted as an employee are public statements and count as a council record and evidence of the council's work which may be used as a reference in the future.

Employees must not use any information that they obtain in the course of their work for the council for personal gain or pass it on to others who may use it in such a way.

Employees must not disclose any politically sensitive information such as matters that are being/due to be considered or debated by the council, including matters that could be considered politically controversial. Employees that are in any doubt should check with the Chair or Clerk.

Confidential information that employees may have learned or have access to as part of their job must not be published through social media e.g. personal information about members of the community, contractors, employees, councillors and confidential council related information.

Employees must not use social media to 'spy' on service users covertly, even if their privacy settings allows this.

6. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The line between public, private, personal and professional can become blurred. Employees should be aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their professional role or council's image and reputation.

Even if you do not expressly name the council as your employer on social media, this policy will still apply if a connection with your employment can be reasonably made.

The following activity on social media may result in disciplinary action if it can be connected to you as an employee:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour
- Inappropriate comments or material that may be regarded as discriminatory
- False or misleading statement that could have a negative effect on the council's reputation
- Inciting or supporting the commission of a crime or other unlawful acts

This could include content you share or like as this could suggest that you approve of that content.

You must consider carefully whether you accept 'friend requests' from service users, their families, friends or others e.g. contractors. Accept them only if you are quite sure this will not put you as an employee, in the position of having a real or potentially perceived conflict of interest.

As with business use of social media (5) you should not publish anything that is confidential to the council or use social media to comment on potentially sensitive matters, including (but not restricted to):

- Information about residents of the parish/the community
- Information that is politically or commercially sensitive
- Intellectual property

You should not use council email addresses or other official contact details for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through such media.

7. BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

Employees should always show respect for others when using social media and ensure that their actions do not have a negative impact on the council's reputation.

If employees post something they did not mean to or get a message or response wrong, they should notify the Clerk or Chair as soon as possible and agree remedial action.

If employees feel they have been subjected to cyber-bullying or offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague through any digital communication network they should inform the Clerk or the Chair who will ensure the matter is investigated as appropriate.

If an employee's online activities are reasonably considered to breach this policy, the council may require them to remove content.

Breach of this policy may lead to formal action under the Disciplinary Policy.

8. LAW/LEGISLATION

There are a number of existing laws that can be applied to cases of cyber-bullying and on-line harassment which could constitute a criminal offence, including:

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- The Malicious Communications Act 1988
- The Communications Act 2003 (s127)
- The Defamation Act 2013

Version No	Reviewed by	Notes/Comments	Date	Date Review Due
1	Council	Version 1 of this policy in line with the ACAS code of practice.	9 th October, 2019	September, 2022