



Bishopston Community Council

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

21 May 2024

NB:

This is a non-contractual procedure which will be reviewed and amended from time to time.

Approving committee	Full Council
Date of committee meeting	28 May 2024
Policy version reference	V1.0

Bishopston Community Council

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Introduction

The use of digital and social media now has a clear and compelling impact on all areas of local government, enabling better and more direct contact between the community council and the people and organisations that it serves and works with.

This Social Media Policy aims to describe how the community council will use social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with its residents, local businesses, and the various government (local and central) agencies that it deals with. It sets out what is and is not acceptable usage of social media and complements the general rules in the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Scope

Social media describes a range of websites and online tools which allow people to interact. This includes blogs and postings on a wide range of platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram and Snapchat. Social media is about sharing information and people use social media platforms to give opinions, create interest groups and to build online communities and networks which encourage participation and engagement.

This policy relates to any social media communication published by or on behalf of the Bishopston community council or any individual in their capacity as an employee or councillor.

Key Principles

Any communication is capable of being misinterpreted. The immediacy of social media and the lack of face-to-face contact can magnify any issue. Information and comments made can be broadcast to a large number of people more quickly than other media.

The same rules apply to social media that govern other behaviour as a councillor – but extra care needs to be taken given the immediacy and ease of dissemination. Although social media is conversational in tone, it is recorded, and it is permanent, so content and comment must be accurate, informative, and thought through.

Responsibilities and Accountabilities

The Clerk of the council is responsible for all formal communication between the community council and members of the public and will be responsible for monitoring the council website, Facebook pages and any other Council social media. However, it is understood that there will be times when individual councillors and officers may be communicating on social media.

Procedure

All social media communications from the community council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful, and relevant
- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information, other than required basic contact details

It is not a requirement for councillors to have a personal Facebook or Twitter account or to use other forms of social media to engage with parishioners or otherwise fulfil their role, but increasingly a personal social media presence can provide a useful additional channel for communication with community members.

- Councillors should always spell out clearly whether they are communicating on social media in their capacity as a councillor or as a private individual.
- Councillors are encouraged to create specific social media accounts for their work as councillors, although this remains a personal choice.
- Councillors should ensure that they comply with the Code of Conduct for Councillors whenever they act or appear to act in an official capacity on social media in the same way as with any other form of communication.

Whilst independent communications with community members is important in order to engage and be approachable, the overarching rules are that councillors should not make commitments on behalf of the Council, not bring the Council into disrepute and always respect confidentiality.

Social Media Guidelines

The following general guidelines apply – this is not an exhaustive list:

- Treat others with respect – do not use social media to make personal attacks or indulge in rude, disrespectful or offensive comments.
- Comply with equality laws – do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.
- Never bully or harass anyone – do not say anything, that might be construed as bullying or intimidation. Do not bring the council into disrepute – do not publish anything that could reasonably be perceived as reflecting badly upon or lowering the reputation of you or the council.
- Do not disclose confidential information – do not disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature.
- Consider keeping personal and any council profile on social networking sites separate.
- Check you have the appropriate privacy settings for any private blog or networking site. Be aware that you will be seen as acting in your official capacity if you publish information that you could only have accessed by being a councillor or employee.

Potential Legal Issues

- Libel – if an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation is published, they may consider it as defamatory and consider legal action.

- Copywrite - using images or text on social media from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos), without obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws.
- Data Protection – personal data of individuals must not be published unless you have their express permission. Personal information in an email or personal exchange should not be presumed to imply any consent to pass it on to others.
- Bias and Predetermination – Councillors should not say anything on social media (or indeed anywhere) that suggests they have made up their mind on an issue that is due to be formally decided. While your likely view on a particular application may be well known, you need to be able to show that you attended the committee or hearing prepared to take on board and weigh all the evidence, and were genuinely persuadable to a different view, or the decision may be later challenged as invalid.

Facebook

This policy relates to the creation and management of Facebook accounts by the Bishopston Community Council. The aim of this policy is to set down rules and regulations to ensure proper use of the account. The aim of this policy is to use the Facebook accounts to interact in a stronger way with residents and to use it to advertise events and other projects of the community council.

- Community Council social media will be co-ordinated and managed by the Clerk. No council member will have access to the administration of the social media accounts.
- The accounts will be set up using the Bishopston community council email account
- Only information regarding the community council will be entered. Other events taking place in the community may be promoted.
- The accounts will only link to pages of a local government organisation or organisations/causes relating to the community.
- No extreme religious or extreme political views will be expressed.
- 'Friends ' will not be allowed to post new topics to the Facebook 'wall '. However, friends will be able to comment on wall topics created by the Community Council.
- Posts on the Facebook page will be available for all users of Facebook to see other than those who have been blocked
- The community council's logo will be the profile picture for everyone to see on all pages relating to the BCC main Facebook account.
- Photo Albums will be open for everyone to view.
- Photographs uploaded will not have direct view of any child's face without the prior consent of their guardian.
- The accounts will be maintained by the Clerk who will remove messages which include abusive language, content which may cause offence to a specific group of people eg comments on a person's sexuality, sexist comments, racial comments etc which contain potential libellous comments Any other comment which may cause offence in any way
- If any matters raised are relevant and need to be discussed by the community council then further information will be sought and brought to the relevant council meeting/committee.
- Event dates will usually be created for any community council event taking place. Other events taking place in the community may be promoted.
- People will be encouraged to be 'friends of' and 'follow' the community council.
- If 'friends' or 'followers' abuse the community council's accounts then they will be removed from the friends/followers list and unable to post to the accounts.

Commented [SH1]: Do we have a separate Facebook account for the BCC? If not, should we?

Clerk to consider and confirm

Instances which would involve removal include:

- Posting with abusive language content
- Posting comments which may cause offence to a specific group of people eg comments of a person's sexuality, sexist comments, racial comments etc
- Posting potential libellous comments
- Any other comment which may cause offence in any way
- The account will not be used for playing games, adding applications, or anything of a personal nature. Contravention of this rule could result in disciplinary procedures.
- Private messages will be sent in response to anyone sending an initial private message to the community council accounts. If a 'simple' response does not satisfy the enquiry then the person will be asked to email the council with the request for comment and the office email will be provided. Any posts by 'friends' / 'followers' raising issues/questions/comments that cannot be answered 'simply' will be dealt with separately via email. The community council email address will be provided.