

ECCHINSWELL, SYDMONTON AND BISHOPS GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Council 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.

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

For the purposes of this policy, social media is any online platform or app that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum.

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

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook 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

Parish councillors should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Parish councillors should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.

Social Media is a growing and important part of how the Parish communicates with Parishioners and applies to parish councillors and council staff. The Parish encourages parish councillors to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media as part of their duties, but the use of social media will not solely replace existing forms of communication.

Social media uses:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- News stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

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

The parish council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of parish council social media output and they will be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

- The moderator 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.

Parish councillors may contribute to the parish's social media activities, for example by writing for our blogs/ managing a Facebook account/ running an official Twitter account for the Parish or part of the Parish.

Parish councillors must be aware at all times that, while contributing to the parish social media activities, they are representing the parish council. Parish councillors who use social media as part of their role must adhere to the following rules.

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a professional and personal capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Social media in your professional (parish council) life

Parish councillors should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the parish in the public sphere. These safeguards include:

- making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the parish;
- obtaining permission from the parish council before embarking on a public campaign using social media; and
- getting the communication moderator to check the content before it is published.

Any communications that parish councillors make in a professional capacity through social media must not:

- bring the parish/ parish council into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with parishioners, parish councillors or other 3rd parties;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other parish's or groups; or
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content;
- breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing secrets or information owned by the parish;

- giving away confidential information about an person (such as a colleague or parishioner) or organisation; or
- discussing the parish internal workings and/ or future plans that have not been communicated to the public;
- breach copyright, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission;
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something; or
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
 - using social media to bully another individual; or
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive [or links to such content].

Social media in your personal life

The parish recognises that many parish councillors make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the parish, councillors must be aware that they can damage the parish if they are recognised as being one of our parish councillors.

Parish councillors are allowed to say that they work for the parish, which recognises that it is natural for its councillors sometimes to want to discuss their work on social media. However, the councillor's online profile (for example, the name of a blog or a Twitter name) must not contain the parish name.

If parish councillors do discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or the sector in which the parish is operating in), they must include on their profile a statement along the following lines: *"The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the parish."*

Any communications that parish councillors make in a personal capacity through social media must not:

- bring the parish/ parish council into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with parishioners, parish councillors or other 3rd parties;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other parish's or groups; or
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content;
- breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing secrets or information owned by the parish;

- giving away confidential information about an person (such as a colleague or parishioner) or organisation; or
- discussing the parish internal workings and/ or future plans that have not been communicated to the public;
- breach copyright, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission;
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something; or
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
 - using social media to bully another individual; or
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive [or links to such content].

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:

- 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.
- 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

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

The policy sits alongside existing policies (Standing Orders, Code of Conduct and Data Protection Registration) which need to be taken into consideration

Disciplinary action over social media use

All councillors are required to adhere to this policy. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken. NOTE: The

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

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Date approved