



Broomfield Parish Council

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to the Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The Policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish council website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites.
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and to the Clerk and staff of the Council. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council's Broomfield Times will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

In the main, councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters, see further notes below.

The Council will appoint the Clerk as the moderator. The moderator will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring that it complies with the social media policy.

The Moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libelous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the hosts (e.g. Facebook) and also the Council.

Content for posting/publishing may be sent to the Clerk (moderator) by

- Committee Chairs and Parish Council Chair– content relevant to the activities and decisions of the committee/council. Chairs are encouraged to supply brief user-friendly summaries of recent meetings for posting or placing on the website. This can be delegated to another member of the committee or staff if preferred.

- Councillors with particular responsibilities (e.g. libraries, pavements etc) about their area of responsibility
- Any councillor, provided that any information pertaining to a committee or specific area of responsibility is first agreed with the relevant committee chair or councillor with specific responsibility
- Office staff, in connection with their assigned responsibility within the Office team. Again, content should first be agreed by a relevant committee chair or councillor if applicable.

The Clerk as moderator should refuse to post or publish content that does not conform to these guidelines. Any disputes will be referred to the relevant committee or the full council.

The social media may be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Retweeting or 'share' information from partners i.e. police, library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information.
- Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups / clubs / associations / bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors

Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

Emails will be used to distribute information on Council business.

Councillors and social media

Individual Parish Councillors cannot speak for the Council unless explicitly authorised by a resolution made in Council. Councillors may speak as individuals, but care must be taken to ensure that a reasonable person could not assume that they are speaking on behalf of the Council and that their personal social media publications are clearly different from any similar official Council social media.

Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which should not be used for non-council business. The following declaration must be added to a Parish Councillor's email:

'This email is intended for the addressee only and should not be copied or forwarded to any other recipients without the consent of the sender. The content of this message should not be taken as necessarily being the views, opinions, policies or procedures of Broomfield Parish Council and does not give rise to any contract, undertaking or agreement'.

Code of Practice - Guidance when using social media (including email)

All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.

When participating in any online communication;

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.

- Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud". Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasise points.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or beliefs should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the person or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
- Do not post and information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.

Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response. There will not be an immediate response to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council, and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council. The Parish Clerk will be responsible for all final published responses.

If a matter needs further consideration, it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again, the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.

If the Clerk feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Council, or if an urgent response is required, the Clerk will confer with the Chairman or Vice Chairman before posting. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact.

Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.

The moderator will remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk to the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this, and other policies could result in action being taken.

This is an ongoing policy which will be reviewed when relevant.