BISHOPTON PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL
MEDIA POLICY

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this Policy is to ensure:
• Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of Council-based services through the use of social media
• A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
• That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media
• That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
• That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected
• That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, and engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. website).

This Policy therefore sets out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Middleton St George Parish Councillors and Employees 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 Parish Council has its own website (http://bishoptonvillage.co.uk/)

This policy sits alongside relevant existing polices (e.g. the Communications Policy and the Code of Conduct) which need to be taken into consideration.

In the main, Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

This Policy covers those designated by the Parish Council to post on the website.

The Code of Conduct and Code of Practice is also to be followed by Parish Councillors.

The current Code of Conduct applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
Individual Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Parish Council capacity.

Social media may be used to

- Distribute Parish Council agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Notify residents of the Parish about Planning Applications, and how to respond
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities
- Announce new information from the Parish Council
- Advertise Parish Council vacancies
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other Parish Councillors

Approved and adopted by Bishopton Parish Council on 19th September 2018

General Pitfalls of Social Media to Be Aware Of

Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.

- Groups on specific themes can set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth and ill-informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.

- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be our Friends.

It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

General Code of Practice

When using social media Parish Councillors and Parish Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.
Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish 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 that denigrates Parish Councillors, Parish Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Parish Council.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff **must not**:
- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish the email address of any other Parish Councillor without their written permission
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes the copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libellous
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment

bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

 post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief

 conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

 publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation as doing so is libellous and can result in a court action and a fine for damages

 post copyrighted images or text on social media as it is an offence to do so. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

 publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.

 publish obscene material as it is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The following applies equally to Officers and Members.
This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Middleton St George Parish Council:

• Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
• Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
• Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
• Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
• **Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council.** Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and do not necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions". If unsure, say nothing, or ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.
• Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
• Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees.
Derogatory comments are always wrong.
• Remember that people classified as "friends" have the ability to download and share your information with others.
• Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to your web site or blog and then realizing that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
• Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.

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• Set your profile's security and privacy settings carefully. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to "only friends". "Friends of friends" and "Networks and Friends" open the content to a large group of unknown people.
• Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
• Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations.
• Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Middleton St George Parish Council at risk.
• Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
• If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.
• As a Parish Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.

Bishopton Parish Website

The Council will appoint one or more nominated "Webmasters" to maintain and update the Parish Council website.

Specific Policy related to those persons designated by the Parish Council to post on the website:

• **Use of the Parish Council's website must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor**.

• **Only add statements approved by either Full Council or the Parish Clerk.**

The website will be used to:
- Distribute Parish Council agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities
- Announce new information from the Parish Council
- Advertise Parish Council vacancies
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other Parish Councillors

Responsibilities

The Parish Clerk is the designated main "Webmaster" of the Parish Council Website. No account details may be changed without the permission of the designated main "Webmaster".