

Bomere Heath and District Parish Council

Social Media Policy



Version History			
Version	Date	Detail	Author
V0.1	16 Jan 2018	New draft policy	M Speak
V0.2	25 Jan 2018	Draft amendments proof read	M Speak / C Stockton
V1.0	26 Jan 2018	Final version	M Speak
V1.1	26 Jan 2018	Final version (late amendments)	M Speak / D Harmer
V2	29th Sept 2023	Reviewed and updated	D Harmer
V2.1	11th Oct 2023	Reviewed in PC meeting and amendments made	DH (PC comments)

Contents

Bomere Heath and District Parish Council.....	1
Social Media Policy	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Scope	3
3. Exclusions.....	3
4. Definitions.....	3
5. Personal Safety and Privacy	4
6. Key Principles.....	4
6.1 Personal accountability and responsibility	4
6.2 Access to social media for work purposes.....	5
6.3 Any communications that Councillors make through social media must not:	5
7. Addressing allegations of misuse.....	5
8. Roles and responsibilities	6
9. Further Guidance.....	6
10. Guidelines for the BHDPC (Corporate) Facebook Page (FB)	7
Content Management	7
General	7
Purdah	7
Links and Affiliations	7
Photos and Video.....	8
Events	8
Discussion Board.....	8
Applications	9
Promoting our Facebook Page.....	9
Security Controls.....	9
Becoming a “fan” or “follower” of the site.....	9
Minimising risk to fans.....	10
Policing the site.....	10
Record keeping	10
APPENDIX.....	11
COUNCILLOR GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA	11

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY (revised 10/2023)

1. Introduction

Bomere Heath and District Parish Council (BHDPC) recognises that the Internet provides a unique opportunity to participate in interactive discussions and share information using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, X, and blogs. Councillors are likely to use social media in a private capacity outside of their official duties and they may also be required to use it in an official capacity as part of their role as a BHDPC Councillor.

However, use of social media in both a personal and official capacity can present risks to confidential information and reputation and can jeopardise BHDPC compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks, we expect Councillors to adhere to this policy.

The purpose of this policy is to assist Councillors by providing clear guidance about acceptable behaviour on social media both privately and officially.

Upon the review in 2023, the Parish Council noted that the spirit of this policy is not to impact a councillor's freedom of speech nor prevent challenging other members of local government where appropriate to do so, but to ensure that councillors act appropriately and in accordance with the Codes of Conduct as a Councillor.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors of BHDPC and also applies to any person working on behalf of the BHDPC.

This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes. It also applies whether the social media is accessed using any mode of connecting to the internet.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

3. Exclusions

The social media policy will not apply where there may be other separate, specific Council procedures to address an issue, e.g., *the Confidential Reporting Code*.

(Sept 2023 – no other Policy currently in place)

4. Definitions

Social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other, or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as, but not limited to X, Facebook, Linked-In, internet newsgroups, and chat rooms. Social media also covers blogs and video- and image-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr and any future mediums.

There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. This policy refers to the examples listed, and any new social media which is developed in the future.

5. Personal Safety and Privacy

Councillors need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to service users, as well as people they know in a private capacity.

Councillors should therefore consider this when setting up their online profile particularly in relation to; use of a photograph, providing details of their occupation, employer, and work location.

Councillors should ensure that should there be a conflict of interest, any association is disclosed in a formal manner in line with the code of conduct. For example, when social media connections (that you know informally) are bringing or contesting planning permission.

Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level. Also, if a user's profile is linked to other sites, any changes to their profile will also be updated.

Councillors who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

6. Key Principles

6.1 Personal accountability and responsibility

All Councillors are expected to behave appropriately and responsibly, and it is important that Councillors are aware that posting information on social networking sites in a personal capacity cannot be entirely isolated from their official duties.

Any information published online can be accessed around the world within seconds and will be publicly available for all to see and is not easy to delete/withdraw once published.

When posting online, councillors will consider their public office and follow the codes of conduct for Councillors *the BHDPC* Equality and Diversity policy.

6.2 Access to social media for work purposes

Councillors who use social media as part of their role must adhere to this Policy. Councillors must be aware that they are representing BHDPC when they are contributing to the BHDPC social media activities. Councillors should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about BHDPC in the public domain.

6.3 Any communications that Councillors make through social media must not:

- **Bring BHDPC into disrepute, for example by:**
 - Making defamatory comments.
 - Posting images or links that are inappropriate
- **Breach confidentiality, for example by:**
 - Referring to confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or member of the public) or BHDPC
- **Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual or group of individuals, 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 (such as a member of the Council); or
 - Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.
- **Any other action that impacts on the Councillors ability to do their job, for example by:**
 - Online activity that is incompatible with the position they hold in the Council.
- **Contravene the Council's policies, for example.**
 - The Councillor's Code of Conduct or any relevant policy in place at that time.

The above examples are not a definitive list of the misuse of social media but are examples to illustrate what misuse may look like. The spirit of this policy is not to impact a councillor's freedom of speech nor prevent challenging other members of local government, but to ensure that councillors act appropriately and in accordance with the Codes of Conduct as a Councillor. Councillors are encouraged to talk to their Chairperson or Clerk and seek advice if they are unclear.

7. Addressing allegations of misuse

All Councillors are required to adhere to this policy. Comments made through social media may constitute an act of misconduct or gross misconduct, which could lead to action being taken, if the comments contravene any Policy or Code of Conduct or if they lead to a breakdown in the relationship of mutual trust and confidence.

The Chair of BHDPC should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.

8. Roles and responsibilities

Councillors have a responsibility to:

- Avoid behaviour that may cause an individual to feel the subject of harassment or bullying.
- Familiarise themselves with the Social Media policy.
- Act responsibly when using online media for work and personal use.
- Report instances to their manager, if they are subject to abuse.

The Chair of BHDPC has a responsibility to:

- Familiarise themselves with the Social Media policy.
- Take prompt action to stop any harassment or bullying they become aware of, whether a complaint has been raised or not.
- Ensure staff are aware of the Social Media policy and guidelines.
- Support Councillors who are the subject of abuse through existing practices
- Ensure all complaints/allegations are dealt with fairly and consistently, and in accordance with other policies where appropriate.

9. Further Guidance

A Councillors' Guide to the use of social media is attached in the Appendix.

This policy also works alongside other policies including the Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy, Councillor's Code of Conduct.

10. Guidelines for the BHDPC (Corporate) Facebook Page (FB)

Content Management

General

The designated Admin Group has final approval of all site content and has the right to remove any content deemed inappropriate without notice.

The admin group is:

- Councillor Dan Harmer (FB)
- Councillor Louise Cowley (Chair 2017/18) (Web Site – bomereheath.co.uk)

The corporate page is for corporate content only, not for political use.

Examples of acceptable corporate content are:

- Marketing campaigns
- Consultation documents
- News feed & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates
- Short debates & quick comments on hot topics and relevant news (discussion board)
- Polls and information gathering
- Useful links

Purdah

In the six-week run up to an election – local, general or European – councils have to be very careful not to do or say anything that could be seen in any way to support any political party or candidate. The period is known as purdah. We will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but will monitor and potentially need to remove responses if they are overtly party political.

Links and Affiliations

Only Administrators are allowed to post links to the site.

- Our corporate website
- Partner websites
- 'Useful' links for example local transport sites etc
- Links to other Facebook pages:
 - ❖ 'Local heroes' – target key people
 - ❖ youth groups & senior citizens

- ❖ partner pages
- ❖ Local media e.g., Shropshire Star, Severn FM
- ❖ National organisations

Any Councillor who wishes to place a post on the website or FB should notify a member of the admin group to do so.

We will allow affiliations with other communities and public profiles, but these must be cleared by the Admin Group first.

Photos and Video

- Only Administrators have permission to upload photos and videos. The appropriate permissions must be obtained and retained for all imagery (Consent should be sought for any image to be posted).
- When promoting or using images from a PC involved event, ensure that the organising committee is aware and approves that images are posted on the website.
- It is incumbent on the PC to ensure that signage, detailing the PC's intention to share images online and allow members to withdraw permission both prior to and post publishing.

Events

When creating invitations for new events:

- Do not show the guest list.
- Ensure that settings only allow Administrators permission to upload photos and videos.
- Ensure that settings only allow Administrators permission to upload links.

Discussion Board

- Use plain English at all times.
- All comments placed on the discussion board must receive a response from an Administrator within 48 working hours of posting, unless the comment does not require a response.

Dealing with inappropriate comments:

- The Admin Group will monitor the discussion board (and all site content) and any inappropriate comments will be removed.
- The poster will be sent a message to inform them that their comment has been removed and the reason why.
- They will be warned that if they post further inappropriate comments, they will be removed from the fan base.

Inappropriate comments include, for example:

- Foul language

- Racist or sexist remarks
- Comments of an abusive nature

The public may use the discussion board to debate Council related issues.

- Anti Council comment will not necessarily be considered inappropriate and will be reviewed on an individual basis by the Admin Group. Where appropriate, a response will be posted which will manage the Council's reputation.
- We will not respond to every negative comment, only where it would be best to do so in order to protect the Council's reputation.

Appropriate Discussion Topics:

- All discussions must be used exclusively to conduct 2-way communications **with fans**.
- Discussions can be used to gauge public opinion.
- Discussions can be used as a marketing tool.
- Discussions can be used to enhance the Council's reputation.
- Discussion topics can be started by fans.

Applications

- Only applications that are in line with the council's key objectives and support corporate priorities should be added to the site.
- Only Administrators can add applications to the site.
- Contact the Admin Group if you would like to explore the possibility of developing a new application.

Promoting our Facebook Page

- We must adhere to the Facebook guidelines on 'Promoting your Facebook Page' at all times.

Security Controls

Becoming a "fan" or "follower" of the site

- The site is not invitation only, anyone can apply to be a fan.
- "fans" or "followers" must only be approved by Administrators.
- It is the Administrator's responsibility to check the authenticity and acceptability of the fan by:
 - Visiting their personal page to check that they are 'real' (for example – do they have friends? Is their page active? Does their page contain any suspicious content)
- Membership will be limited PRIMARILY to those living in the Shropshire area. However, exceptions will be allowed for; former residents who now live outside

the area, national organisations, other Councils, applications from those with a professional interest etc.

- Membership is at the discretion of the Administrator group.
- The Admin Group can remove any fan at any time without notice.

Minimising risk to fans

- We will use methods of verification, for example our logo, so that fans can identify our 'official' page against any other Shrewsbury pages individuals may set up.
- Ensure that every 'fan' application is approved by an Administrator.
- Advise 'fans' not to link to anyone they meet on our page unless known to them.
- Advise fans to tell us if someone else tries to link to them through our page.
- We will keep accurate records.
- We will remove users who behave suspiciously.
- We will monitor foul language and abusive behaviour.

Policing the site

The Admin Group will employ a rota system where 1 member of the team will regularly check Facebook to check new content.

They will delete any fans who:

- Continue to behave inappropriately on the site after 2 warnings.
- Are discovered to be operating under false identity.

Record keeping

- The Admin Group will confer and keep a 'list' of any fans that have been removed from the site.
- The blacklist will include a link to the removed fan's profile and will show the date and the reason the fan was removed from the site. The individual(s) concerned will be made aware of the reasons for the exclusion and will be able to make any representations.

APPENDIX

COUNCILLOR GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Councillors must be mindful that any online activities/comments made in a public domain, must be compatible with their position within BHDPC, and safeguard themselves in a professional capacity.
- Protect your own privacy. To ensure that your social network account does not compromise your professional position, ensure that your privacy settings are set correctly.
- Comments made on official duties, within the arena of social media, do not remain private and so can have an effect on or have work-related implications. Therefore, comments made through social media, which you may intend to be “private” may still be in contravention of the Code of Conduct, any Harassment and Bullying Policy and/or the Disciplinary Policy which may be in place.
- Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed making it easy to lose control of. Presume everything you post online will be permanent and can be shared.
- Do not discuss official related issues online, including conversations about service users, complaints, or disparaging remarks about colleagues or the Council. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate. In addition, doing this in the presence of others may be deemed as bullying and/or harassment.
- Do not under any circumstances accept friend requests from a person you believe may conflict with your official duties.
- Be aware that other users may access your profile and if they find the information and/or images it contains offensive, make a complaint about you to BHDPC.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libelous or in breach of copyright legislation.
- When setting up your profile online consider whether it is appropriate and prudent for you to include a photograph, or provide occupation, employer or official capacity details.
- You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. Most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others. You should raise these issues if they relate to your official capacity.
- If you do find inappropriate references and/or images of you posted by a ‘friend’ online, you should contact them and the site to have the material removed.
- If you are very concerned about someone else’s behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concerns. If these are BHDPC related you should inform the BHDPC chairperson.
- Note that phishing emails may be issued to you and clicking on links must be considered in every situation.
 - If you are not expecting an email or an attachment, check with the clerk before opening it.
- Councillors should also act in accordance with the Councillor's Code of Conduct.