

Policy

Social Media Policy

This Procedure is a document that sets out the organization’s approved and agreed practices. Any deviation must be discussed with the originating author.

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1. DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

Purpose of document:	The purpose of this policy is to provide Councillors and staff an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use.
Dissemination:	This policy will be disseminated to all staff and council members and be made available on the parish website for organizations wishing to submit an application under the Community Grant Scheme.
Implementation:	This document will be accessible via the parish council website and is applicable to all staff and council members.
Review:	This document will be reviewed in 2027 unless there are significant changes in legislation or practice in which case it will be reviewed earlier.
Documents replaced or superseded by this document:	
This document supports (enter Standards and Legislation:	Data Protection Act 1998 Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003
Key related documents:	Nil
Financial Implications:	This document has no financial implications for the Billingham Parish Council.
Key word search	social, media, Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, blogs, podcasts, WhatsApp, microblogs, image sharing

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3. Introduction

a. Social media has great potential to help the Council reach individuals and communities and encourage collaboration and discussion across different groups. However, the inappropriate or ill-considered use of social media also has the potential to damage both individual's and the Council's reputations. Councillors and Council Staff have a corporate professional image to uphold and how they individually conduct themselves online impacts this image.

b. Social media is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way ie by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and technology such as i-Pads. Examples of social media and networking include:

- i. Social Networking eg Facebook, X and LinkedIn.
- ii. Social Bookmarking eg. Pinterest, Flipboard and Digg
- iii. Social News and Discussion forums eg Digg, Reddit, Quora
- iv. Media Sharing eg Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and Snapchat
- v. Microblogging eg X and Facebook.
- vi. Blog comments and forums eg Tumblr, Medium
- vii. Social review Sites eg TripAdvisor, Yelp, FourSquare

c. The feature that all these tools, websites and services have in common is that they facilitate conversations and online interactions between groups of people.

d. All existing organisational policies apply when using websites and social media e.g. data protection, raising concerns/whistle blower's policy and procedure, grievance policy, disciplinary and members code of conduct.

4. Approved Council Social Media

a. Billingham Parish council has two approved social media sites:

- i. Billingham Parish Council website.
- ii. Billingham Parish Council Facebook page.

5. Using Council Social media

- a. All Councillors and Council Staff 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 of the Council policies.
- b. The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of the Council. All Councillors and Council staff shall ensure that:
 - i. They are familiar with the terms of use on third party websites eg. Facebook and adhere to these at all times.
 - ii. No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain ie. available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, etc.
 - iii. Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
 - iv. They are mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval / deletion.
 - v. Copyright laws must be respected.
 - vi. Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
 - vii. Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval. When referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
 - viii. They do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
 - ix. They remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.
- c. Elected Members (Councillors) are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view.

6. Responsibilities

- a. The Parish Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Facebook site and Council Website feed and any other Social Media channels agreed by the Council. Councillors may be officially appointed from time to time by the Council to assist the Parish

Clerk to disseminate information on the Council's social media during busy times or when the Clerk is absent. However, all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk.

7. Third party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage

a. Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of the Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If you use Social Media in your official capacity as a councillor, you should always be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

b. When using third party and individual Social media Councillors and Council Staff should:

- i. Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site.
- ii. Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such views.
- iii. Be aware that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network.
- iv. Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriate – if using a Council-provided blog site or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity.
- v. Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a councillor.
- vi. Be careful if making 'political' points and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.

c. When using third party and individual Social media Councillors and Council Staff should not:

- i. Blog in haste.
- ii. Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to-face contact.
- iii. Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes.

8. Guidance for Councillors Social Media and Meetings

a. Below are some extra guidelines for councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:

- i. Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings and must not interrupt or distract anyone taking part.
- ii. Councillor's correspondence during Council meetings should only refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting.
- iii. It is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members.
- iv. Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.