

Bentworth Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Adopted 7th June 2022

Agenda item 7. a) Minute reference 22.075 a)

Electronic Communications and Social Media Policy

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Electronic Communications and Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

- a. The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice that provides Bentworth Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk, and other social media users with guidance in how to use electronic communications and social media without adversely affecting their or the council's reputation.
- b. Note that the use of social media does and shall not replace other existing forms of communication.
- c. This policy will be reviewed annually.

2. Definitions

- a. This policy covers all forms of electronic communications, social media, and social networking sites, which include (but are not limited to):
 - Parish Council Website
 - Facebook, LinkedIn, Nextdoor
 - Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok, Snapchat
 - YouTube
 - Podcast sites
 - Blogs and discussion forums
 - Email

3. Councillors are Public Figures

- a. The general Code of Conduct adopted by Bentworth Parish Council applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
- b. 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. Individual Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk are responsible for what they post in both a Parish Council and personal capacity.
- c. In particular, councillors must not publish any material, opinion or comment that is illegal or reflects judgement that falls below the standards expected in public office, whether in a personal or council capacity.

4. Acceptable Uses for Social Media

- a. Social media may 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
 - Promote links to news stories or information on the Bentworth Parish Council website
 - Advertise Parish Council vacancies
 - Repeat or share information from partner agencies such as EHDC, HCC, and the Police
 - Post or share information from local organisations such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities that could be of interest to or benefit Bentworth residents

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- Responding to residents' questions on council matters
 - Interacting with residents to understand their views, canvas opinions, and gather ideas
- b. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media that denigrates Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk or members of the public should report them to the Parish Clerk.

5. Using Social Media

5.1. For Council Purposes

- a. When acting in an official capacity, Parish Councillors and the Clerk must use a separate user id reserved for council matters and linked to their council email address.
- b. When using social media Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments polite and respectful. Online content should aim to be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.
- c. The use of a Parish Council e-mail address, logo or other Parish Council identification should only be used in communications connected with Parish Council business.
- d. All council emails should include a disclaimer at the end that states:

The information contained in or attached to this email is intended only for the use of the individual or entity to which it is addressed. If you are not the intended recipient, or a person responsible for delivering it to the intended recipient, you are not authorised to and must not disclose, copy, distribute, or retain this message or any part of it. It may contain information which is confidential and/or covered by legal professional or other privilege under applicable law.

5.2. In a Personal Capacity

- a. Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk should use a disclaimer when using social media to express personal opinions on Parish Council business (or on other subjects where otherwise they risk giving the impression to a reasonable person that they are speaking for the Parish Council). A suitable disclaimer is: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent Bentworth Parish Council's policies or opinions".
- b. 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.

5.3. General Guidelines

- a. When using social media in any capacity, Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk must not:
 - Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
 - Present personal opinions as those 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

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- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
 - Engage in personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications
 - Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
 - Post any information, image or text that infringes the copyright of others as it is an offence to do so and can result in an award of damages against you
 - Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
 - 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
 - Publish individual personal data, such as name, address, and email address 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
 - Publish any material that brings the Parish Council into disrepute
- b. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

Signed: Jane Costigan

Chair Bentworth Parish Council

7th June 2022