

BRASTED PARISH COUNCIL

Policy on Social Media and Use of IT

Reviewed & adopted: 13 May 2024

Section 1 of this policy sets out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff, volunteers and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Section 2 sets out the correct use of the council's computers, and the internet and email systems. It demonstrates how the organisation will comply with the Computers Misuse Act 1990 and how it will protect its systems and the data on them.

SECTION 1 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is used here as a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include, but are not limited to:

Parish Council Website
Facebook, Instagram and other social networking sites
Twitter and other micro blogging sites
YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
LinkedIn
Blogs and discussion forums
Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors, volunteers and council staff and also to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors, volunteers and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

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

Social media may be used to

Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings

Advertise events and activities

Publish good news stories

Advertise vacancies

Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.

Announce new information

Post or share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors

Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) parish councillors, volunteers and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

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

Parish councillors, volunteers and council staff must not:

hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms

present personal opinions as those of the council

present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council

post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the 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 photographs or videos of minors without parental permission

post any information that infringes the copyright of others

post any information that may be deemed libel

post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment

bring the 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

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

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

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the 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 sites that denigrate parish councillors, volunteers, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content by councillors, employees or volunteers, that is contrary to this and other policies, could result in action being taken by the Council. The Clerk will have authority to remove from council social media pages any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

SECTION 2 ACCEPTABLE USE OF COMPUTERS & INTERNET USAGE

The council's laptop and Chromebooks are important to its operation and the council therefore wishes to clarify how they should be used. We also wish to protect our staff and volunteers from the possible consequences of misuse. Having such a policy in place helps to protect both the council and the staff. Staff and councillors will be aware that browsing certain sites or downloading certain files is prohibited and that the policy must be adhered to or there could be serious repercussions.

Acceptable use of Parish Council owned laptops & Chromebooks

The council's computers are for work use only. In order to protect work laptops & Chromebooks from risks of data exchange, there must be no exchange of data or programs between the council's computers and employees' or councillors' own computers without prior written approval from the Clerk or in the case of the Clerk from the Chair or Vice Chair of the Council.

All users are expected to adhere to the Computer Misuse Act 1990. Users are not allowed to gain or attempt to gain unauthorised access to any computer program or data held in a computer or undertake an unauthorised modification of a computer.

Computer, email and internet usage

This Policy applies to all who have access to computers and the internet to be used in the performance of their work. Use of the internet is permitted and encouraged where such use supports the goals and objectives of the council. Staff and Councillors must adhere to the policies concerning computer, email and internet usage. Violation of these policies could result in disciplinary and/or legal action leading up to and including termination of employment. Staff may also be held personally liable for damages caused by any violations of this policy. All staff are required to acknowledge receipt and confirm that they have understood and agree to abide by the rules hereunder.

1. Council staff are expected to use the internet responsibly and productively and limit it to job-related activities only. Internet access is limited to job-related activities only and personal use is not permitted

2. Job-related activities include research and educational tasks that may be found via the internet that would help in an employee's role
3. All internet data that is composed, transmitted and/or received by the Council's computers is considered to belong to the Council and is recognized as part of its official data. It is therefore subject to disclosure for legal reasons or to other appropriate third parties
4. Emails sent via the council email system should not contain content that is deemed to be offensive. This includes, though is not restricted to, the use of vulgar or harassing language/images

Unacceptable use of the internet includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images on the Internet or via the Council email service
2. Using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy
3. Stealing, using, or disclosing someone else's password without authorization
4. Downloading, copying or pirating software and electronic files that are copyrighted or without authorization
5. Sharing confidential material, trade secrets, or proprietary information outside of the council
6. Hacking into unauthorized websites
7. Sending or posting information that is defamatory to the council, its services, colleagues or residents.
8. Introducing malicious software onto the council network and/or jeopardizing the security of the council's electronic communications systems
9. Sending or posting chain letters, solicitations, or advertisements not related to council purposes or activities
10. Passing off personal views as representing those of the council

If staff or councillors are unsure about what constitutes acceptable internet usage, then they should ask their supervisor or the Clerk for further guidance and clarification

User compliance

Councillors, volunteers and employees will abide by this Policy on Social Media and Use of IT and should understand that any violation of this policy may result in them being censured or disciplinary and/or appropriate legal action being taken