



Boarhunt Parish Council Policies & Procedures

Social Media Policy

Policy review date April 2024 / Next review date – April 2025

This policy applies to all Councillors, employees and representatives of Boarhunt Parish Council and is intended to help them to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media.

- Social media is defined as all online activity.
- The social media policy applies at all times on personal equipment and equipment owned by the parish council.
- Boarhunt Parish Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of: -
Providing and exchanging information about services Supporting local democracy Gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships Promoting cultural events or tourism for the area Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience Creating internal communications, learning and development
- This policy outlines the standards the Council requires councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy. This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Anti-Harassment Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct, and such like.
- Due to potential significant consequences of not doing so, care should be taken to ensure all the policies are adhered to.

The scope of this policy

- The Council has a corporate presence on the web and the use of email alongside Facebook. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers.
- When these changes occur this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements that it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in, and visit the Parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.
- We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them. All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
- Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments by the employee. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken. Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Last review date

Next review date

- Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate.
- Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

Rules for using social media.

- Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any online platforms to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details. If staff or councillors use online platforms personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council. All staff and councillors must ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided online platform, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs or comments. The Council has appointed the Parish Clerk as the moderator. The moderator will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) and the Chair for Council records. It should be noted that it is very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages which may outweigh the value gained.

The social media sites may be used to: -

- Post notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertise events and activities of local groups
- Post good news stories Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Advertise vacancies Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, library, district council etc.
- Announce new information appropriate to the Council Post of share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups.
- Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses. All online media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

- The social media sites may not be used to advertise the goods or services of local businesses. However, where a local business is providing or supporting a service which is for the benefit of the community, this may be added by the moderator if it is considered appropriate.
- The Parish Council takes no responsibility for the service being offered and engagement with the service provider is solely at the risk of the user.

When participating in online communication, staff and councillors must: -

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
- Never made false or misleading statements Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
- They must protect the good reputation of the Council Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion, or belief should not be published on any social media site
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face. Never give out personal detail of others such as contact details
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or video from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents.
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright.
- Spell and grammar check everything

Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through online social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council, it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. Again the 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the Clerk direct.

Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderator and/or Council as required.

The Policy will be reviewed annually.