

**Broadclyst Parish Council
Social Media Policy**

Adopted: 3 November 2025

Next Review: May 2026 or earlier if required

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the Council's expectations and standards for the use of social media by Councillors, staff, volunteers, and those engaging with the Council. It supports the Council's wider communications strategy and aligns with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, the Broadclyst Neighbourhood Plan, and the Parish Council Strategy.

Social media is a collective term used to describe tools and platforms that enable users to create and share content online. This includes websites, blogs, forums, and social networking sites.

This policy covers the use of social media in both official Council capacity and personal capacity where reference is made to Council roles or Council matters.

It supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other Council policies, especially the Media Communications Policy and Code of Conduct.

2. Core Principles

All social media communications connected with the Council must:

- Be accurate, fair, balanced, and timely
- Be civil, respectful, and suitable for a broad audience
- Use plain language suitable for a target reading age of 10
- Be politically neutral and non-partisan
- Not contain material that could reasonably be seen as inflammatory, biased, misleading, or propagandist
- Promote inclusivity, community cohesion, and constructive public dialogue
- Reflect the strategic aims of the Parish Council and the Broadclyst Neighbourhood Plan

3. Purpose of Social Media Use

Social media may be used to:

- Share Council notices, agendas, minutes, and meeting dates
- Promote Council-led or supported events and activities
- Disseminate information relevant to residents (e.g. public health, community safety)
- Support community resilience, cohesion, and neighbourliness
- Encourage engagement with local democracy
- Celebrate community achievements and local history
- Advertise Council job vacancies
- Share relevant content from partner agencies, such as EDDC, Devon County Council, police, schools, and charities
- Signpost to consultation opportunities, services, and local events

NB: Social media will be used to broadcast information. Comments received will not be treated as formal correspondence and cannot be considered in planning or policy matters. Residents will be encouraged to contact the Clerk or attend meetings to submit formal representations.

4. Who Is Covered by This Policy

This policy applies to:

- Elected and co-opted Councillors
- Employees of the Parish Council
- Volunteers acting on behalf of the Council
- Contractors or third-party representatives with access to Council-managed platforms

All individuals are responsible for their online behaviour and must ensure they:

- Comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct
- Do not act in a way that could damage the Council's reputation
- Clearly distinguish between personal opinion and Council policy
- Do not claim to represent the Council in a personal capacity

5. Standards of Conduct and Code of Practice

Councillors and staff must:

- Be respectful, polite, and informative
- Avoid capital letters, aggressive punctuation, or any tone that could be perceived as hostile
- Check spelling and grammar
- Disclose their identity and role when posting in an official capacity
- Obtain permission before sharing photos or video of individuals or groups
- Follow copyright and data protection legislation
- Be clear and accurate when quoting Council policy

Councillors and staff must not:

- Share political opinions or content under Council branding
- Post anything that could be seen as inflammatory, libellous, or offensive
- Share personal or confidential data about others
- Post false or misleading information
- Use Council logos or identities in personal online activity
- Share images of children without parental consent
- Participate in or encourage online arguments, hostility, or harassment
- Publish anything that violates UK law or may bring the Council into disrepute

6. Managing Social Media Accounts

- The Parish Clerk is the primary administrator and moderator of all Council-managed social media accounts
- No account name, password, or settings may be changed without approval of the Clerk or Full Council
- Moderators may include designated Councillors, under the Clerk's supervision
- The Clerk or a moderator has the authority to:
 - Remove posts that breach this policy
 - Block users who repeatedly breach acceptable standards
 - Report content to platform providers if necessary

7. Public Engagement and Moderation Guidelines

The Council welcomes public engagement and will generally allow posts from residents that:

- Are responsible and respectful
- Are on-topic and constructive
- Avoid naming individuals unless in a professional, factual capacity

Posts may be deleted and accounts blocked if they:

- Contain personal data or confidential information
- Include false, misleading, or inflammatory statements
- Are offensive, discriminatory, or harassing
- Violate copyright or publish inappropriate images
- Promote political, commercial, or unlawful activity
- Breach UK law or platform terms of service

Decisions to remove content or block users are made at the moderators' discretion, in accordance with this policy.

8. Elections and Pre-Election Periods

During the period between the publication of a notice of election and polling day:

- The Council will not issue or share content that could be perceived as supporting a candidate or political party
- Publicity will be factual only
- Social media activity will be limited to essential service updates and statutory notices
- No photographs, quotes, or profiles of current Councillors will be published during this time

9. Security and Access Control

- The Clerk is responsible for the security of all Council social media accounts
- Passwords must be stored securely and shared only with authorised persons
- Two-factor authentication should be used where available
- Personal accounts must not be used to manage official pages

10. Policy Enforcement

Breaches of this policy may result in:

- **For staff** – disciplinary action under the Council's HR procedures
- **For Councillors** – referral to the Monitoring Officer under the Code of Conduct
- **For volunteers or third parties** – withdrawal of access to Council systems or services

Concerns about content or conduct should be reported to the Parish Clerk.

11. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier if required due to changes in legislation, Council structure, or communication channels.

Next scheduled review: May 2026

12. Version Control Table

Version	Date Adopted	Approved By	Summary of Changes	Review Date
1.0	May 2023	Full Council	Initial adoption	May 2024
2.0	Nov 25	Full Council	Aligned with Council Communications Policy; added Core Principles, Pre-election guidance, and clarity on moderation	May 2026