

Flax Bourton Parish Council Communications Policy

October 2022

Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice for Communications including the use of Social Media and speaking to the Press. The policy applies to Councillors and Employees of Flax Bourton Parish Council. Social media is a collective term for the ways to create and publish information via the internet.

Flax Bourton Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications, and the Clerk may ask for a preferred channel of communication. 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 Communications Policy will be updated.

Code of Practice

All communications from Flax Bourton Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil respectful and relevant
- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing. Defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Nor contain content copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- Will be moderated by the Clerk to the Parish Council
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

All forms of communication, whether written or verbal, represents the Parish Council and must be communicated in a professional manner. When using all forms of communication, Councillors and Employees must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any communication informative and respectful.

If the communication is the view of the Parish Council, this should generally be delivered by the Clerk from the Flax Bourton Parish Council address. If an individual is expressing a personal opinion on an issue, this must be made clear in the communication.

If expressing or supporting the view of the Parish Council, this must have been a view agreed at a previous Parish Council Meeting. Any communication in advance of matters being debated by the Parish Council at a Council Meeting may constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings. Anyone with concerns about content placed on social media that in anyway denigrates Parish Councillors, employees of the Council or residents should report this to the Clerk of the Council.

Offline and online content should always be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Parish Councillors and Employees should not;

- Present personal opinions as those of the Parish Council
- Post content that is contrary to the decisions made by the Parish Council
- Post controversial or inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online disagreements or hostile communications
- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

All communications to the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, respectful and relevant
- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing. Defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Not contain content copied from elsewhere. For which the enquirer does not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- Will not seek to disseminate any political advertising.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- YouTube
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- Blog sites and forums and other social networking sites.

Social Media should generally be used for the following purposes:

- Distribute Parish Council Agendas, post Minutes and issue dates of meetings
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities
- Announce new information from the Parish Council
- Promote links to news stories on the Flax Bourton Parish Council website
- Advertise Parish Council vacancies
- Share information from other related Council authorities, schools, community groups and charities.

The following will NOT be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation
- Commercial advertisements
- Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event.

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the website and Facebook page. On occasion requests for information may be forwarded to a Councillor(s) for their consideration and response, which will then be directed back via the Clerk to the Council. -

- Facebook: The Parish Council may choose to respond to a comment received, particularly if one response can be considered to address all. The Parish Council may permit local organisations to maintain a presence on its Facebook page, subject to the adherence of the criteria detailed above. The Clerk to the Council reserves the right to remove any information considered in breach of the above. It should be clearly identified that such information and its content is not the direct responsibility of the Parish Council
- Website: The Parish Council's website is an integral part of the Parish Council. Its purpose is to communicate with residents, local clubs, societies and organisations as well as external bodies including North Somerset Council and Local and/or Central Government organisations. The Parish Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant.

Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion, and any items for publication on the website or Facebook should be sent to the Clerk.

The Clerk to the Council and Councillors will treat all information confidentially, securely and sensitively. Failure to observe this may be seen as a breach of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct and dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

Emails: Flax Bourton Parish Council maintains one email address clerk@flaxbourtonparishcouncil.co.uk which is checked regularly. The Clerk to the Council is responsible for dealing with all emails received and will forward to a Councillor(s) or external agency, or respond as appropriate.

Media Policy

If any Councillor or Employee of Flax Bourton Parish Council is approached by the media, please refer to the Clerk of the Parish Council. Councillors or Employees of the Council should not speak to the media without having referred to the Clerk first.