

BETLEY, BALTERLEY AND WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media Policy

1. The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

Introduction

2. Social Media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including Social Media sites and other sites centred on user interaction. This policy is intended to help Parish Councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of Social Media, and to outline Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council's position on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council's Social Media sites.

It includes standards and guidelines for Parish Councillors to observe when using Social Media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy.

3. This policy covers all forms of Social Media and social networking sites. These include (but are not limited to):
 - a. The Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council website.
 - b. Facebook, Instagram, and other social networking sites.
 - c. X (formerly Twitter) and other micro-blogging sites.
 - d. YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites.
 - e. LinkedIn.
 - f. Blogs and discussion forums.

Note: The Parish Council does not use TikTok

4. This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Over time, Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur, this policy can be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

How Social Media will be used by the Council

5. Social Media may be used for:
 - a. Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions, and actions Supporting local democracy.
 - b. Distributing in whole or part information from Council notices, agendas, approved minutes, and dates of meetings.

- c. Information specifically agreed to be communicated via Social Media at Council meetings.
 - d. Advertising events and activities that Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council has organised or co-organised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
 - e. Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area.
 - f. Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill area.
 - g. Providing and exchanging information about local services and events.
 - h. Gathering residents' insights.
 - i. Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area.
 - j. Advertising Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council's vacancies.
 - k. Re-posting or sharing relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, NHS etc.
 - l. Posting, re-posting or sharing relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, Scouts/Guides, and charities.
 - m. Linking posts to appropriate websites and other Social Media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the council's expectations of conduct.
 - n. Posting other items as the council see fit.
 - o. Referring resident queries via Social Media to the Parish Clerk for wider dissemination to Parish Councillors if required.
6. Parish Councillors should be aware that not all communication through Social Media requires a response, although an acknowledgement may be made if appropriate.
 7. Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council runs its Social Media page so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Social Media accounts will not necessarily be checked daily, and posts will not necessarily be responded to.
 8. Though Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council is keen to hear residents' views, it will not be able to take comments made on its Social Media accounts as official requests, comments or complaints. To manage the messages received, residents will be asked – if necessary – to forward their comments to Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council. This can be done by emailing the Parish Clerk at betley.balterley.wrinehill@gmail.com
 9. The Parish Councillors responsible for Social Media can seek approval or advice on posts when necessary.

Who is covered by this policy?

10. The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors.
11. All Parish Councillors 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.
12. Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post.
13. In the main, Parish Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. This may include

unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive comments by a Parish Councillor or the Parish Clerk.

Code of Practice

14. When using Social Media channels in direct connection to local council matters, Parish Councillors 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.
15. Parish Councillors should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face, and they must expect to answer any questions relating to their posts.
16. When participating in online communication, Parish Councillors must:
 - a. Be objective and accurate, concentrating on facts or explanation or both
 - b. Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative, and balanced.
 - c. Respect the privacy of other Parish Councillors, employees, and residents.
 - d. Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending, sarcastic or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points.
 - e. Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on Social Media sites is an offence so Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
 - f. Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council, and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
 - g. Remember that communications on the internet are permanent and public.
 - h. Be aware that their profile as a Councillor means Members of the Public and other Councillors may assume that they are acting in an official capacity when posting, blogging or networking.
17. Parish Councillors must not:
 - a. Give out the personal data of others on Social Media, including home address and telephone numbers.
 - b. Use an individual's name in Social Media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation).
 - c. Present personal opinions as that of Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council.
 - d. If a Parish Councillor blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in their role as a Parish Councillor or the Parish Clerk, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
 - e. Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council.

- f. Make false or misleading statements.
 - g. Post personal or political content in relation to local parish issues, or content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
 - h. Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, or offensive comments about any person including the Parish Clerk, Parish Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses, and agencies the Council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief must not be published on any Social Media site.
 - i. Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. The sentiment and emotion within written text is open to interpretation by the individual reader. Negative comments should be politely acknowledged, and the author directed to our official channels to formalize any official complaint.
 - j. Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
 - k. Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action).
 - l. Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence).
 - m. Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
 - n. Bring Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity .
18. Parish 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, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.
19. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on Social Media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk or residents should report them to the Parish Clerk for referral to the Chair and/or the Council/Monitoring Officer as required.
20. The behaviour required in the Parish Councillor's Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
21. Parish Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply.

Managing Social Media Accounts

22. Parish Councillors should be mindful when sharing posts on any Social Media account that is not solely controlled by Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council. Content shared and discussions/comments arising from such posts on another Social Media account may not be under Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council's control or governed by its acceptable use policy.
23. This policy will govern and set clear expectations of how the public interact with our Social Media in terms of both behaviour and allowed content. The Parish Councillor

acting as moderator will have authority, without notice or comment, to remove any posts from Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council Social Media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (i.e., Facebook) and to the Parish Clerk for council records.

24. The Parish Councillor acting as a moderator will also have the authority to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council 's Social Media pages.
25. Passwords for the Council's social media accounts should be kept confidential. Parish Councillors must take particular care where a computer, or other device, is used by more than one person in a household. Any Parish Councillor who is unsure about security should raise the issue with the Parish Clerk who will check the security arrangements or obtain advice from a specialist
26. Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council reserves the right to temporarily suspend any or all of its Social Media accounts, without notice, should a localised extraordinary event occur.