



Bollington

TOWN COUNCIL

Bollington Town Hall
Wellington Road, Bollington, Cheshire SK10 5JR
Email: clerk@bollington-tc.gov.uk
www.bollington-tc.gov.uk
Tel: 01625 572985

Communications and Community Engagement Policy

This policy was adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 3rd October 2023.

This version of the Communications and Community Engagement Policy supersedes any previous versions.

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Communication	4
3. Telephone etiquette	4
4. Council Social Media.....	5
5. Mayor’s Social Media	5
6. Use of Email.....	5
7. Use of the Internet.....	6
8. Consultations	6
9. Statements to the Media	7
10. Community Engagement	7
11. Publicity Protocol	8
11.1. The Law.....	8
11.2. Official Council Press Releases	8
11.3. Interviews	9
11.4. Media Activity Ahead of Meetings	9
11.5. Pre-election period	9
11.6. Correcting Inaccurate Reporting.....	9
Annex 1 - Using Social Media Sites - Employees	10
1. Policy statement	10
2. The scope of the policy.....	10
3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy	10
4. Using social media sites in the name of the council	10
5. Monitoring use of social media sites.....	11
Annex 2 - Social Media Policy for Town Councillors	12
1. Background.....	12
2. Introduction	12
3. Derogatory comments	15
4. Use of Social Media During and after Council Meetings	15

Table 1 Document Version Control

Version	Date	Initials	Comment
00.01_2022	20/09/22	HW	Review. Added community engagement and media statements
01.00_2022	18/10/22	HW	Approved by Personnel, Policy & Governance Committee on 27/09/22. Adopted by Full Council on 18/10/22.
02.00_2023	07/02/23	HW	Updated from Personnel, Policy & Governance Committee 11/01/23 (minute reference PPG 02/23), approved at Full Council 07/02/23.
02.01_2023	10/07/2023	JM & HW	Review and updates and to combine with Publicity Policy
03.00_2023	03/10/2023	HW	Adopted by Full Council 03/10/23.

Date of next review – Quarter 2 2025

1. Introduction

This policy sets out how the council will manage its communications (including use of social media), consultations and community engagement.

It covers communications undertaken by staff and Councillors of the Council and sets out the restrictive use of the Town Council's electronic equipment, namely, computers and telephones.

The Town Council reserves the right to monitor telephone, email and internet usage in accordance with the law, in particular the latest Data Protection Act 2018 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

2. Communication

One of the responsibilities of a transparent council is to communicate with the local community and this can be accomplished using the following methods:

- A regular newsletter delivered to all households, available at the Town Hall and other community buildings.
- Articles in other local publications such as Bollington Live!
- Interviews with the local radio station – Canalside Radio
- The council's website
- Social media
- Leaflets, letters or banners, as appropriate
- Posters in council noticeboards
- Accessible Town Hall open weekdays 9.30am – 2.30pm
- Consultations.

The council will also communicate with other organisations whose activities have an impact on the town and its people such as Cheshire East Council, the police, local schools, other neighbouring town and parish councils and community groups.

3. Telephone etiquette

All employees must follow the procedure outlined below when using the Council's telephone:

- Answer all calls by stating the name of the Town Council,
- Be polite at all times,
- Do not be rude or abrupt to callers,
- Do not use offensive language,
- Do not swear,
- Check the telephone frequently for messages from callers and respond in a timely manner.

Employees may make and receive personal calls as long as they are brief and infrequent. This applies to calls on the Council's land line or employees' personal mobile phones.

4. Council Social Media

The Council uses social media as a form of communication. Social media posts will be non-political, non-controversial and used to provide information about the Council as well as events, activities and information of relevance to residents of Bollington.

The administration of the Council's social media platforms including posting content and responding to queries will only be performed by Council office staff.

The Clerk will approve social media posts, and in their absence the Town Manager.

Within office hours, staff will endeavour to respond to queries relating to council business or requests for information that is relevant to Bollington. There will be no engagement with controversial or incendiary posts. Abusive text will not be tolerated and may be deleted.

To ensure a response outside office hours, residents should contact the staff using the methods shown on the website's "Contact Us" page.

Detail on personal use of social media for staff and Councillors can be found in the Annexes.

Posts will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.

5. Mayor's Social Media

The Town Mayor's Facebook page is used to engage with the community on events and activities the Mayor attends or supports. The Mayor may choose to post his/her own updates but all posts will be non-political and non-controversial.

Posts will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.

6. Use of Email

The council provides all staff and Councillors with an e-mail account as a vital tool to fulfil the council's objectives and to enable them to communicate effectively with other personnel, both within the council and externally. All employees and Councillors must follow the procedure outlined below when sending and receiving emails on behalf of the Town Council:

- All emails relating to Council Business must be sent using the Council email account provided and by the authorised user of that account.
- Council email accounts are not to be used for personal email communications.
- Only agreed email signatures may be used.
- Devices used for Council business must be protected by dual authentication.
- Be aware that agreements made by email may have the same status as letters or formal contracts. Seek Council guidance before making any agreement by email.
- All messages must use appropriate business language.
- A waiver clause will be included as standard at the end of each email message.
- No message should be sent, either internally or externally, which contains illegal, offensive, obscene, racist or abusive material (for example, pornography) or libellous, defamatory or discriminatory material, or material which may bring

the Council into disrepute. You are responsible for emails you send. Emails could be used as evidence in a tribunal or other court proceedings.

- Email messages cannot be guaranteed to be private and secure: do not send confidential, sensitive or personal data via email unless approved by Council. Remember that any message you send could potentially be forwarded to others by the recipient.
- Only attachments from a trusted source may be downloaded.
- Do not send external emails to multiple recipients without using the Blind Carbon Copy function.
- Where a mailing is received by multiple recipients' question whether a 'reply to all' is appropriate.
- Ensure when forwarding messages that there is nothing in the entire email chain that should not be passed on to a third party, or that would breach confidentiality or personal data protection.

If you are aware of any abuses of this policy, they should be reported to the Town Clerk. If you are uncertain about any aspects of this policy and how it applies to you, please discuss with the Town Clerk.

7. Use of the Internet

Where Staff and Councillors are provided with computer hardware and portable devices by the Council the use of these devices is strictly limited to Council Business.

Sites should not be accessed if they are likely to contain illegal or offensive material, for example, pornography, or material that may be considered obscene or abusive.

Downloading of video, music files, games, software files and other computer programs - for non-work-related purposes - is strictly prohibited. These types of files consume large quantities of storage space on the system (and can slow it down considerably) and may violate copyright laws.

Councillors and Staff must abide by the rules put into place under the Council's **Information Security Policy** both in the use of Council devices and when using their own devices for Council Business.

8. Consultations

Consultation with the community is often needed when the council requires the opinions of the community on a project or idea, it may involve the whole community or a specific group and may take the form of but shouldn't be limited to:

- Questionnaires or surveys (online and/or postal)
- Letters or leaflets, e-mails or social media
- Public meetings
- Workshops or focus groups
- Exhibitions or stalls at events

The council will publicise consultations as widely as possible, using the communication methods listed and will include a clear deadline for any community participation and for

the publication of results. The council may also support other local organisations by promoting their consultations.

Consultation responses will be retained as per the Data Retention Policy.

9. Statements to the Media

Press releases promoting council activity will be issued under the direction of the Town Clerk. Press releases will focus on the work of the Council or the work of the Mayor but will not promote individual Councillors.

All requests for statements received by staff shall be referred to the Clerk.

Councillors may make statements to the media on issues in the community but must ensure they communicate the capacity in which they comment e.g. individually, on behalf of a group, as Chair of a committee etc.

Councillors issuing a press release must make it clear that is not issued on behalf of the Council unless agreement has been sought by the Clerk. Councillors should send a copy of their press release to the Clerk for information.

10. Community Engagement

Not everyone wants to be involved but it is important that the council provides as many opportunities as possible for the public to access information and services as well as discuss their ideas and concerns. Bollington Town Council will:

- Promote the Annual Town Assembly to which all residents are encouraged to attend. The meeting will include but not be limited to Councillors providing an update on the previous twelve months and answering the public's questions. A speaker may be invited to talk on a topic relevant to the community.
- Produce an Annual Report for publication in the Council newsletter.
- Produce a minimum of two Council newsletters a year for delivery to each Bollington household and for publishing on the Council website.
- Post regularly on the Council's social media to share information and news, promote local organisations and events.
- Organise public meetings, as appropriate, to provide information and receive feedback on any issues.
- Maintain and publicise an accessible Town Hall for the public to engage with staff and Councillors in person, via e-mail, telephone or online forms via the website.
- Continue to allocate time at council, committee and working group meetings for members of the public to speak.
- Appoint Councillors to community organisation committees when requested.
- Continue to arrange visits to local primary schools by Councillors to talk to pupils about the work of the council and to answer questions.
- Promote the role of Mayor's Youth Consort which is open to young people from the town, aged 13 – 18 years and is a means of engaging with young people and encouraging an interest in civic life.
- Support Councillors who wish to hold surgeries to allow those who may feel unable to speak at at council or public meeting the opportunity to have their say.
- Support regular Ward Walks which give residents the opportunity to see their Councillors in a less formal setting and in their street and may encourage them to reach out.

- Facilitate a Youth Council.
- Liaise with the local policing team.
- Deliver council events such as an annual Christmas Fayre and Carols Around the Tree as well as other events that commemorate a national occasion.
- Demonstrate support to community groups through visits from the Town Mayor – a visit from the Mayor can help to raise the profile of a local group.
- Support community events. Events attract many people including those who would not normally attend council events. They promote a sense of community spirit and identity which may in turn encourage engagement with the council.

11. Publicity Protocol

11.1. The Law

This protocol reflects the guidance contained in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 (as amended) and the Council must have regard to it and follow its provisions. The protocol should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct.

The Publicity Code is grouped into seven principles that publicity by local authorities should follow. It should:

- Be lawful,
- Be cost-effective,
- Be objective,
- Be even-handed,
- Be appropriate,
- Have regard to equality and diversity,
- Be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

This protocol will also explain how Bollington Town Council will help achieve the following objectives:

- Share and celebrate success,
- Give information about policies, services and events, and about the democratic process so that people feel more informed about the Council's work,
- Handle negative issues clearly and decisively.

11.2. Official Council Press Releases

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Council to identify worthy news items as early as possible. The Town Clerk must be consulted before any press or media release on behalf of the Town Council and any such release should be made by the Town Clerk.

An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole; it will be written by a member of staff and issued by the Town Clerk. It is non-party political and may include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s).

Official Council press releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a web-based record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Council.

News releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Councillors, or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.

11.3. Interviews

Staff should never give their opinion on specific Council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key messages. Their role is to provide expertise and factual knowledge only, in support of the Council's approved and agreed policies.

11.4. Media Activity Ahead of Meetings

The media may pick up stories from agendas and reports ahead of meetings. All agendas are published on the Bollington Town Council website.

The media is welcome to attend meetings. During meetings Councillors and staff should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture, rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what can be a complex issue or report.

11.5. Pre-election period

In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself (formally known as Purdah) all proactive publicity about candidates or other politicians is halted. This applies to local, national or European elections. Conversely, Council business and the publicity associated with, can and should continue.

During this period, Council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Councillors or groups of Councillors. This is to make sure that no individual Councillors or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity.

The Mayor may continue to attend engagements but without publicity. The Mayor should not attend engagements that could be seen to promote them as an individual Councillor or for political party gain.

11.6. Correcting Inaccurate Reporting

Should the media publish something inaccurate about the Council, a quick decision needs to be taken by the Town Hall staff on any action necessary to correct it.

This could be a letter, email, a post on social media or news release, or in exceptional circumstances to take legal advice. It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain. Each case must be judged individually.

Occasionally the Council will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by accepting responsibility, apologising, and stating how we are going to learn from the error or put it right.

Annex 1 - Using Social Media Sites - Employees

1. Policy statement

This section of the policy is intended to help employees make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as social networking websites, forums, message boards, blogs or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

This policy outlines the standards the Council requires employees to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which your use of social media will be monitored and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

All employees are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.

Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.

All employees should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk.

Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in the name of the council

The Clerk and office staff are permitted to post material on a social media platform in the name of the Council and on its behalf in accordance with the rules and scope of this policy.

The Town Council's own social media sites should only be used to pass on useful information and to share news which may be of interest. It can promote local organisations and events., create engagement and generate feedback.

No Council employee will engage in debate on topics or issues relating to the Town Council or offer their personal view either on the Council's social media or any other social media sites.

Commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information must not be posted.

Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.

Before you include a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.

Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.

If you are not sure if your comments are appropriate do not post them until you have checked with the Clerk.

5. Monitoring use of social media sites

Employees should be aware that any use of social media sites (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Misuse of social media sites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council.

Annex 2 - Social Media Policy for Town Councillors

1. Background

The purpose of the protocol is to ensure that Councillors make use of social media effectively whilst avoiding potential accusations that they may be breaching the Council's Code of Conduct. It is also designed to ensure that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected and that the Council is not subject to legal challenge because of information posted on social networking sites or blogs.

As you are known locally as a Town Councillor, great care should always be given when posting to social media sites or blogging as a private individual so as not to damage the reputation of the Council or undermine its decisions.

2. Introduction

This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct, and the Town Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

This protocol applies to you as a Member of this Council when you are acting or purporting to act in your role as a Councillor and you have a responsibility to comply with the provisions of this protocol. The protocol should be read in conjunction with Bollington Town Council's Code of Conduct

You need to bear in mind the Code of Conduct when you blog, use social networking sites or any other digital content publication service. You should pay particular attention to the following:

- Disrespect to other Councillors or members of the public,
- Bullying of anyone,
- Disclosure of confidential Council information,
- Bringing the Council into Disrepute,
- Misuse of Council resources.

It is difficult to give definitive advice on the application of the Code of Conduct, as each blog and social networking page is different. The content of a blog or other social networking tool and the circumstances surrounding its creation will determine whether it might be covered by the Code of Conduct.

There are, however, some general rules that Councillors should bear in mind when deciding on whether to publish content:

1. Only publish what you would say verbally in public, even in an informal discussion, when representing the Council.
2. Only publish what you could defend in court if asked to do so.

Ethical use of online social media is not limited to what is covered in the Code of Conduct. Councillors are encouraged to respect the Seven Principles of Public Life as set out in section 28(1) of the Localism Act:

1. Selflessness
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
2. Integrity
Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
3. Objectivity
Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
4. Accountability
Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
5. Openness
Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
6. Honesty
Holders of public office should be truthful.
7. Leadership
Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

While your conduct may not be a breach of the Code it may still be viewed as less than exemplary and attract adverse publicity for your office and the Council.

Application it is not always clear whether such activities are covered by the Code of Conduct. This guide is intended to assist Councillors in complying with the Code and ensuring that the use of online media is well received. You should think about what you say and how you say it, in just the same way as you must when making statements in person or in writing. You will also need to think about whether you are seen to be or give the impression that you are acting in your official capacity as a Councillor.

If you do give the impression that you are acting in your official capacity whilst blogging or using social media, such activity may be subject to the Code of Conduct. Individual Councillors are permitted to write their own official blogs as Members of Bollington Town Council but in these they must conform to the protocols of the Council. If you have a private blog you must bear in mind that if you refer to council business in it, you may be viewed as acting in your official capacity. To make sure you comply with the Code of Conduct, you are requested to observe the following guidelines:

You should:

- a. Consider whether you need to set appropriate privacy settings for your blog or networking site – especially if you have a private, non-political blog.
- b. Keep an eye out for defamatory, untrue or obscene posts from others on your blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid the perception that you condone such views and to prevent any potential libel action being taken against you.
- c. Act to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination,
 - Promote equality of opportunity,
 - Promote equality of access,
 - Demonstrate that we value diversity, and
 - Promote good relations between diverse communities.
- d. Treat service users, employees, other Councillors contractors and members of the public with respect and dignity and according to the framework set out in legislation. The Town Council recognises that there are groups and individuals in society who are disadvantaged and discriminated against. You should ensure that no one is treated less fairly on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender identity, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/ belief, sexual orientation, or on any other grounds, as set out in legislation.
- e. Be aware that even when posting as a private individual on personal social media sites or blogging, you are known locally to be a Town Councillor and you could be seen to be acting in your official capacity.
- f. Be careful about being 'friends' with service users who are vulnerable adults or children, as this could be regarded as a safeguarding issue.
- g. Ensure you use Council facilities appropriately; and be aware that any posts you make using Council facilities will be viewed as being made in your official capacity and/ or an inappropriate use of Council resources.
- h. Be aware that by publishing information that you could not have accessed without your position as a Councillor, you will be seen as acting in your official capacity.
- i. If making political points, be careful about being too specific or personal if referring to individuals. An attack on individuals may be seen as disrespectful, whereas general comments about another party or genuine political expression is less likely to be viewed as disrespect.
- j. Consider that English Law allows actions for libel to be brought in the High Court for any published statements alleged to defame a named or identifiable individual or individuals. Blogging, social media and other forms of digital content publication are covered by the libel laws.

You should not:

- a. blog in haste,
- b. place images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission,
- c. post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face,

- d. use council facilities for personal or party-political blogs,
- e. refer in a blog to any information identified by the Council as confidential or exempt,
- f. disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone or information acquired by you which you believe or are aware is of a confidential nature,
- g. publish personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission to do so,
- h. disclose a personal view contrary to a Council or Committee resolution,
- i. give the impression that you are expressing the views of the Council where it is not appropriate to do so,
- j. use online accounts and digital publishing services associated with a specific council office if you no longer hold that office, or during the pre-election period,
- k. if you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, publish anything on your blog that might suggest you do not have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining.

3. Derogatory comments

On occasion, Councillors might find themselves the subject of offensive or defamatory remarks on other people's blogs or networking sites. The following approach is advised in such circumstances, and applies equally to any form of publication:

- Pursue a policy of indifference to such remarks, but if you do wish to respond, do not be tempted into retaliation because you may risk breaching the Code. You could ask the blog owner/person making the remarks to remove them from the site.
- If the person making the comments is a local authority, town or parish Councillor, discuss the situation with the Monitoring Officer. It might be the case that the person has breached the Code of Conduct by making remarks, and it could be appropriate to make a complaint to the Standards Committee.
- Aside from any possible breaches of the Code of Conduct, the matter is usually deemed private between yourself and the individual. The Council cannot provide legal assistance for pursuit of a claim through the civil courts, but you may decide that you wish to take independent legal advice.

4. Use of Social Media During and after Council Meetings

Members are permitted to use social media for the reporting of proceedings of public Council meetings. If Members wish to use social media during meetings, they should seek the consent of the Chair who will make it clear to any members of the public attending that this activity has been authorised. Members will need to consider whether using social media may distract them from participating and understanding information that is being shared at the meeting prior to a decision being made.

Councillors should however switch their mobile phone or other equipment to silent mode, so that no disruption is caused to proceedings. The Chair of the relevant meeting will have absolute discretion to prevent the use of social media if such use is not in keeping with this protocol in their view or if the use is deemed to be disrupting the meeting.

Councillors or staff wishing to film meetings will need to seek permission by resolution of the Council or committee and have provided at least 24 hours' notice to the Mayor or Committee Chair.