



Heybridge Parish Council

Internal Procedure and Protocol Blogging and Social Networking Policy for Parish Councillors

1. All Members are required to act in accordance with the Member Code of Conduct whilst acting in their official capacity.
2. Blogging and Social Networking are effective methods for councillors to interact with parishioners. Used effectively, they can engage those who would not normally have access to local councillors. However, it is not always clear whether such activities are covered by the Code of Conduct. The purpose of this guide is to assist Members in complying with the Code and ensuring that the use of online media is well received.
3. 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.
4. 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 any form of social media, such activity will be caught by the Code.
5. Councillors must bear in mind that if they have a private blog, website, or social media pages and refer to Parish Council business on them, they will be viewed as acting in their official capacity.
6. To make sure you comply with the Code of Conduct, you are requested to observe the following:

Do:

- set appropriate privacy setting for any blog or social networking site
- keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on your blog or social networking pages and remove them as soon as possible to avoid the perception that you condone such views
- be aware that as a councillor, the more likely it is you will be seen as acting in your official capacity when you blog or network
- ensure you use council facilities (including email) appropriately; and be aware that any posts you make using council facilities will be viewed as being made in your official capacity

- 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

Don't:

- Blog in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
- Use council facilities for personal or political blogs and social networking pages

When the Code may apply

7. Bear in mind the Code when you blog or use social networking sites. You should pay particular attention to the following paragraphs of the Code:

- Disrespect
- Bullying
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Disrepute
- Misuse of authority resources

8. It is difficult to give definitive advice on the application of the Code 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 or not it might be covered by the Code.

9. Ethical use of online social media is not limited to what is covered in the Code. Councillors are encouraged to respect the Ten General Principles of Public Life, which can be found at section 23.21 of the Constitution.

10. The Parish Council is invited to endorse this policy embodying the above principles.

Laurie Wiebe
Clerk
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