

BURSTALL PARISH COUNCIL

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION and SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

Burstall Parish Council (the Council) understands that the use of digital and electronic communication enables it to interact in a manner that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works and serves.

The Council has a website and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Should the Council add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

2. Communications from the Parish Council

Communications from the Council are expected to meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- if official business, it will be monitored by the Clerk as the Proper Officer.

Parish Council Website:

Occasionally, the Parish Council may direct those contacting the Council to its website to see the required information if it is the public domain.

The website can be found at <https://burstall-pc.gov.uk/>

Parish Council Email:

The Clerk to the Council has their own email address – clerk@burstall-pc.gov.uk The email account is monitored during the Clerk's working hours; the Council aims to reply to all emails as soon as is practically possible.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to all members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Please note that the Clerk works part-time so will respond as soon as practically possible. The Council may not respond to every comment it receives particularly if it is experiencing a heavy workload or the comment is for information purposes only.

Emails sent to the Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

SMS (texting):

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate between themselves at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Internal Communication and Access to Information within the Parish Council:

The Parish Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working, and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Parish Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in all their work on behalf of the Council.

Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) covers meetings and proceedings of local authorities. Previously, paragraph 4(2)(b) required principal and parish councils to send summonses to attend meetings by post to members' home addresses, or under paragraph 4(4), by post to an alternative address specified. In practice, this covered all papers to be considered at meetings, not just the agenda. Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 amended Schedule 12 of the LGA 1972 to allow local authorities to send their members' summonses to attend meetings, including agendas and related papers to meetings electronically. The Council has amended its own Standing Orders to allow authorising of the use of electronic communication. Occasionally, electronic communication may include attachments, such as a meeting agenda or papers, or a web-link enabling a parish councillor to view meeting papers.

As increased information becomes available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Parish Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (At the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should be careful only to 'cc' essential recipients on emails and avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option (whilst ensuring that the people who need to know the information are copied in) and ensure that email trails are removed.

Social Media:

To ensure that all discussions on pages set up by the Council are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the guidelines listed below should be followed:

- be considerate and respectful of others
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive
- share freely and be generous, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where due
- stay on topic
- differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Parish Council members and staff, will not be permitted.

Communications from the Parish Council will:

- be civil, polite and relevant
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere for which the Council does not own the copyright
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Communications to the Parish Council are expected to:

- be civil, polite and relevant
- not contain content that is unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially abusive

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- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright
- not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.