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**Burnham Parish Council Communications, IT and Engagement Policy**

**July 2025**

**THE PRINCIPLES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS**

**DO:**

1. Be objective and balanced.
2. Be clear and concise.
3. Remain construction and positive.
4. Show respect for equality and diversity.
5. Take into consideration the long-term reputation of the Council.
6. Abide by the members’ Code of Conduct.
7. Ensure you are well informed of the factuality of the information.
8. Show respect to all: members of the public, employees, and fellow councillors, and avoid any personal attacks.
9. Use professional language.
10. Write assuming all communication – from a private email to posts on social media - are of public record.

**DO NOT:**

1. Talk on behalf of the Council unless you have full authority to do so, making it clear that any views that are expressed are your personal view.
2. Slander or discredit any individual.
3. Discuss any personal, confidential or sensitive information about the Council, Councillors, staff, or members of the public.
4. Publish anything representing to be on behalf of the Council that could be deemed to be party-political (Local Government Act 1986, s.2).
5. Public any information using anyone else’s account.
6. Discuss any information that you have been learnt in confidence, including in parts of meetings where the public and press are excluded.
7. Criticise council policies or personnel.
8. Unless advised by parental guidance, post images of young people on social media.
9. Get drawn into prolonged engagement with negative comments.
10. Publish any content that breaches copyright laws.

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17. **INTRODUCTION** 
    1. The underlying purpose of this policy is to appropriately delegate the roles and responsibilities for communications, engagement and IT within Burnham Parish Council; and to meet the new regulatory requirement to have an IT policy in place for 2025-26. This policy will also provide the necessary instruction to handle external communications, e.g., effective social media use, public engagement, and media communication across all media channels owned by Burnham Parish Council. The Council will actively seek to meet the minimum requirements by increasing engagement levels.
18. **KEY OBJECTIVES** 
    1. At all times, the Council should be:

**Transparent**

Showing a level of honesty and accountability that meets and exceeds the legal transparency requirements.

**Informing**

Providing accessible information to the local community but also hard to reach individuals e.g., young people, the elderly, and individuals with special requirements, to ensure easy to access information and clear understanding. The Council is required to rely upon information that beneficiaries would identify to be deemed important and communicate efficiently at the right time, in the right way.

**Considering**

Ensuring that they are constantly driving new initiatives by developing community engagement with ongoing partnerships to enhance Burnham’s overall image. Burnham Parish Council should ensure all community concerns are taken into consideration and use initiative to bring forward ideas and concerns.

**Empowering**

Having a constant focus on improving the local area in which the community resides. The Council will use a wide range of techniques to maximise public involvement and residential engagement to dispute concerns, views, and ideas with the council. Resident’s views play an integral role in the decision-making process therefore should have the opportunity to be heard at any point of the process.

**Engaging**

Prioritising the priorities, worries, wishes and needs of the local community across all social media channels and media coverage. Burnham Parish Council will seek to meet and exceed minimum requirements on social media platforms and traditional media coverage channels. Burnham Parish will strategically align Facebook engagement with exclusivity and experiment with new content to boost following and algorithms to drive engagement. The Councils Instagram account will promote the support of local businesses, and ongoing issues e.g., Secondary school, health consciousness posters, Covid recovery, internal maintenance tips, and general mental health issues). The Council's Instagram can also promote relevant updates on facility improvements which can reinforce overall engagement levels.

1. **THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK** 
   1. In terms of general legislation and common law, guidance and law specifically to local authority communications include:

* Local Government Act 1986 s.2
* Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
* The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
* Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
* Local Government Transparency Code 2015

1. **ATTENDANCE OF THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA AT MEETINGS**
   1. Members of the public and media press are encouraged to attend Committee and Council meetings to give them the opportunity to understand how the Council produces decisions.
   2. Following the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 Act, members of the public and the press have the statutory right of attending Council meetings and inspecting local documents handled by authorities.
   3. In accordance with the legislation, Burnham Parish Council’s Standing Orders states that

*3(m) Subject to standing order 3(n), a person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To “report” means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later or to report or to provide oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present. Where a meeting is being recorded, the Chair should be informed and they will inform the meeting*

*3(n)A person present at a meeting may not provide an oral report or oral commentary about a meeting as it takes place without permission.*

* 1. If and where necessary, Burnham Parish Council may exclude the public or press The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, by resolution when confidential business is being considered or there are other special reasons and publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest. This provision should only be used where necessary, and the reason for the exclusion shall be stated in the minutes.
  2. Other than any confidential documents, reports, minutes, and agendas will be made available to the public and price-free of charge; and will be placed on the Council’s website.

1. **PRESS COMMUNICATIONS**
   1. Burnham Parish Council constantly seeks to develop more authentic and transparent debates that coincide with our corporate decisions based on consensus among Councillors, which is considered to be fundamental.
   2. The Council, or a committee within its area of responsibility, may also authorise official communications, including press releases.
   3. Under the Council’s scheme of delegation, the Parish Clerk has the authority to *‘authorise the issue of press releases on any Council activity, where they relate to previous decisions or established policy of the Council, or fall within delegated authority, and do not require a new opinion to be taken by the Council or its committees.’* This authority includes designating which Councillors as appropriate are quoted in such releases and listed as contacts for further comment.
   4. The Council’s position is as stated in the minutes and formal statements issued by the Council office.
   5. A draft press release can be drawn up by any member of the Council however may only be issued by the Clerk to adhere to all principles and statutory requirements; there should be a consistent style within the Council and monitoring of all presse release.
   6. All Councillors may have different views and opinions which may not agree with Burnham Parish Council’s position. The Council acknowledges that as individuals they must be free to voice their views, including in the media, provided it is clear that these are personal views and not those of the Council.
   7. Those seeking the position of the Council should directly contact the Council office.
   8. Legal advice should be sought before any comment is made on any issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings or disciplinary proceedings of either employees or members.
   9. In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Clerk, another officer delegated by the Clerk for this purpose may issue press communication on the Council’s behalf, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council.
2. **WEBSITE**
   1. The Council’s website must use a gov.uk website.
   2. For the majority of Burnham residents, visitors, funders, and local groups, the Council’s website will be their first point of contact. Therefore, it should be regularly updated with accurate and accessible data relevant to the community.
   3. Under the scheme of delegation, the Parish Clerk has the authority to exercise *‘editorial control of the Council’s website and social media content, where they relate to previous decisions or established policy of the Council, or fall within delegated authority, and do not require a new opinion to be taken by the Council or its committees.*
   4. In practice the Clerk delegates day to day control of the website to the Assistant Clerk or to another staff member as appropriate, and they work together ensure appropriate content.
   5. Councillors may consider contributing to social media feeds, blogs, and news articles. However the website editorial control will remain a duty of the Clerk.
   6. The Council’s website should document official government information or any links that should be shared for matters of public interest. The Council do not permit external paid advertising on the website.
3. **SOCIAL MEDIA**

In terms of this policy, Applications and Social media cover sites including but not restricted, to Facebook, X, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, Blogs and LinkedIn, discussion forums, and any sites established after the creation of this policy where the Council could be represented.

* 1. The Council recognises social media channels to be an effective communication and engagement tool. Appropriate protocols need to be followed to ensure the use of social media as a part of a wider communication mix and that the use of it does not expose the Council, preventing confidentially issues, breaches of data protection legislation, reputational damage, and security and exposure risks.
  2. Social media etiquette should be regularly enforced as social media outlets are considered public domain, therefore officers must ensure reliability and confidence with the nature of the information published. Once published, content may risk being manipulated without consent, used for a different context, and further distribution which can tarnish the Council’s image.
  3. If and when the Council needs to respond to negative, inaccurate issues or unforeseen circumstances, members should directly contact the Clerk so that the situation can be managed efficiently and responsibility minimise negative, inaccurate or inappropriately publicity.
  4. Burnham Parish Council’s social media platforms must not be used for party-political purposes or specific party-political campaigning. Although Officers may promote Councillor’s social media accounts for Council issues they must exercise due caution and regard to guidance during any pre-election period or period of high- sensitivity such as by-elections.
  5. Councillors are responsible for setting up individual social media accounts using any of the tools available, and should ensure they are identified as personal and do not imply that they reflect Burnham Parish’s view. At all times, Councillors should provide a professional image and do not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments made with a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.
  6. The Parish Clerk is the designated ‘Council’ owner of the Council social media channels; and shall determine which of the available channels the council shall use at any given time. The Parish Clerk may officially appoint Councillors and/or officers to assist the Clerk to disseminate information. However, they must ensure to follow policy protocols. Account details must not be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk. Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their owns account however should comply with this policy, ensuring that the ‘personal view’ disclaimer is in order.
  7. Mentioned below are some additional guidelines for Councillor’s to consider for the use of social media, including during meetings:
* Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings to ensure environmentally friendly and effective communication. Handheld devices and laptop devices are perceived to improve communication during Council meetings however all devices should ensure all electronic devices are turned to ‘mute’ to prevent communication interruptions or distractions.
* Councillors should not make social media posts, including on personal accounts, during Council meetings except where they directly relate to the subject under discussion, as this will give the public and other attendees at the meetings the impression that they are not engaging properly.
* All Councillors have the responsibility to undertake Council business professionally therefore it is not appropriate for attending members to utilise social media for purpose of teasing or insulting other members. Burnham residents expect debate and to be informed about Council issues and to reduce the number of petty arguments.
* In instances of breaking the law using social media (e.g. posting on social media leading to defamation), Councillors will personally be held responsible.

1. **CORRESPONDENCE**
   1. Under the scheme of delegation, the Parish Clerk has the authority to respond *“to any correspondence requiring or requesting information, where they relate to previous decisions or established policy of the Council, or fall within delegated authority, and do not require a new opinion to be taken by the Council or its committees.”.* Thisresponsibility may be delegated to other officers as appropriate.
   2. The Council, or a committee within its area of responsibility, may also authorise official communications, including correspondence.
   3. Routine or operational correspondence will be signed by the Clerk, or by another officer delegated by them for this purpose.
   4. Where correspondence from the Council is more political in nature, for example if the Council has taken a formal position against a proposal or action by government or another authority, it will generally be appropriate for the correspondence to be signed by the Chair of the Council, once agreed with the Clerk.
   5. Correspondence on ceremonial matters, such as letters thanks to councillors or of condolence, may be signed by both Chair and Clerk on behalf of the whole Council.
   6. The Council, or a committee within its area of responsibility, may also authorise official communications, including press releases.
   7. It is the general policy of the Council not to consider or respond to anonymous correspondence, unless the nature of the correspondence is such as to raise an issue of such magnitude that is cannot be legally or reasonably ignored.
2. **EMAILS**
   1. All Councillors and Parish Office staff are allocated official gov.uk email accounts, which must be used for all business-related matters for the Council. In best practice, confidential information should not be forwarded from email account to personal account reducing the risk of privacy breaches.
   2. Access to official email accounts must not be given to other persons, and where a shared device is used reasonable steps must be taken to ensure the security and confidentiality of the account.
   3. Where an account is tied to a particular post, such as the Clerk, Finance Manager etc, any member of staff leaving post must ensure that any sensitive correspondence which it is not appropriate and necessary for their successor to have access to is deleted.
   4. Any email correspondence relating to the official business of Burnham Parish Council may be subject to a freedom of information request, regardless of whether it is held in the dedicated Councillor’s email account, or their private account.
   5. Councillors should ensure all emails sent regarding Burnham Parish Council’s business should register with the principles laid out in the policy.
   6. Councillors should fundamentally always follow the Councillor Code of Conduct regulations whilst replying to or sending emails, both internally and externally.
   7. All Council emails must be retained for an appropriate period in accordance with the Council’s data retention policy. Staff and Councillors should not delete emails related to official Council business unless authorised.
   8. Councillors and staff should use a clear email signature that includes their name, position and Council name.
   9. During periods of absence, an appropriate out-of-office message should be activated on Council email accounts, providing alternative contact details where applicable.
   10. Councillors and staff must remain vigilant to suspicious emails. Any suspected phishing attempt, suspicious attachment, or email from an unverified source should be reported to the Clerk or IT Contractor immediately and must not be opened or forwarded.
   11. Staff and Councillors must use discretion when sending bulk emails, ensuring that personal email addresses are not exposed inappropriately. When sending to multiple external recipients who are not part of an open forum, the ‘bcc’ (blind carbon copy’) field should be used, so that recipients do not see each other’s email addresses.
   12. The Clerk, working with the Hall General Manager, shall ensure that the email accounts for Burnham Park Hall are compliant with any regulatory requirements.
3. **RECRUITMENT**

* The Parish Council may use internet searches as part of its recruitment process. In these circumstances the Parish Council will act in accordance with its equal opportunities and data protection obligations protecting both parties.

1. **PETITIONS** 
   1. All parishioners are welcome to provide feedback to Burnham Parish Council.
   2. Burnham Parish Council recognises that petitions enable people to voice their opinions and concerns to the council therefore all presented petitions will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days. An acknowledgement will be sent out to explain what we plan to do with the petition. We will treat something as a petition if identified as such or intended to be a petition.
   3. Paper petitions can be delivered to: The Clerk, Burnham Parish Council, Burnham Park, Windsor Lane, Burnham, Buckinghamshire, SL1 7HR
   4. Petitions submitted to Burnham Parish Council must include:

* Contact and address details for the petition organiser.
* The name, address and signature of any person supporting the petition.
* An accurate and reliable statement covering the subject of the petition. This should state what action the petitioners wish the Parish Council to consider.

Any afflicting, abusive, anonymous or inappropriate petitions will not be accepted.

* 1. If the Council receives any petitions:
* An acknowledgement will be sent out to the petition organiser within 10 business working days. It will let them know what we plan to do in the mind of the petition and when they will hear from us.
* The petition will be placed on the next appropriate Council or Committee agenda and this will be advised to the petition organiser.
  1. Meetings procedure

At the meeting, the petition organiser will be provided with three minutes to present at the meeting which will be discussed by Councillors. Councillors may commission further investigation into the situation before reaching any decision as to action (for example by passing on to the relevant committee, or asking the Clerk to investigate). The Petition organiser will be given written confirmation of this decision.

If Burnham Parish Council has no direct control over the petition matter, it may resolve to make representations on behalf of the Burnham community to the relevant body.

1. **ADVERTISING**
   1. Burnham Parish Council will where possible approve charitable and not-for-profit organisations advertisements across its social media channels particularly those promoting physical and mental health, wellbeing activities and other fitness-related events in the Parish. Any commercial business advertising that does not align with the guidelines is not permissible unless it is to be displayed somewhere, owned and maintained by Burnham Parish Council which gives the council ownership for the final advertising decision.
   2. Burnham Parish Council actively uses its noticeboards in Burnham; these are locked and are intended generally for Parish Council specific information. Consideration may be given to notices pertaining to activities of interest or important information if there is sufficient space. The following guidelines should be adhered to:

* The material should be dated and relevant.
* Information related to events will be removed within a week of the event date.
* Materials promoting direct fundraising, appeals and collections will not be displayed.
* Posters and leaflets that are not time-restricted will be removed after three weeks.
* There can be no guarantee provided on how long the length of time the information will be on display.
* Material of a political nature will not be permitted.
  1. All Advertisements (signs, banners and signage) will require permission to be placed in or on Burnham parks/ playgrounds, Burnham Park Hall, street furniture, George Pitcher Memorial Ground, public toilets and other local amenities. Therefore, any illegal banner displayed will be removed and destroyed as all signage is displayed at the discretion of Burnham Parish Council.

The Clerk has the authority to grant approval, and will adhere to the following guidelines:

* Banners and notices of a political matter are not permitted.
* Banners and signs that uphold the right to be displayed should either be a regular and group activity advertisement held at Burnham Parish at a regular date and time open to the public, such as fitness classes and other sport-related activities or where Burnham Parish Council has authorised the use of Burnham Park for a ‘for profit’ event such as social events, circuses and fairs.
* Banners placed longer than approved will be removed by Burnham Parish Council and may be destroyed.
  1. Banners that are permitted to remain placed should be kept in optimum condition by the owners, fixing and maintenance should be temporary whilst the removal of the banner. If damage occurs in the removal process, The owner is liable to make good of any damaged property owned by Burnham Parish Council. Burnham Parish Council reserves the right to remove banners that it does not believe to be safe or of an acceptable condition.
  2. Advertisements that may be permitted, and granted permission by the Clerk, or another designated officer of Burnham Parish Council:
* Burnham Parish Council events or services
* Not-for-profit organisations and charity events promoting health, fitness and wellbeing activities in the Parish.
* Promotion of High Street business to encourage local businesses and people in the local area.

Advertisements of profit-making event advertisements or businesses and services will only be approved where appropriate payment is agreed.

* 1. **Obtaining permission**

All permissions must be sought before placing any notices on Council property (priority will be given to charities and not-for-profit organisations). If Officers at Burnham Parish Council grant permission, once permission times are completed, the Council will remove all advertisements.

* 1. The person placing the banner is responsible for checking and obtaining any necessary advertising consents from Buckinghamshire Council.

1. **BURNHAM PARK HALL** 
   1. As a commercial enterprise, and host of community events, the Hall will have its own media and online presence, under editorial control of the General Manager.
   2. The Hall Manager has delegated authority to manage *‘all Halls advertising, promotion, and communication, including website updates and maintenance; social media interaction; press releases; and event promotion. All communications shall be in accordance with any Council communication or community engagement strategies or policies.’*
   3. The branding will be kept separate from that of the Parish Council, although Councillors may contribute towards publicity surrounding community events. No Burnham Park Hall publicity should refer or comment on Council policy, except insofar as it is complying with a relevant policy, and must abide by the principles and statutory requirements above.
   4. The Clerk, working with the Hall General Manager, shall ensure that the website and social email accounts for Burnham Park Hall are compliant with any regulatory requirements.
2. **IT policy**
   1. All statements above that may include the use of electronic devices form part of the Council’s IT policy.
   2. In particular, as stated above, the Council will comply with the regulatory requirements to use gov.uk website and email address.
   3. Furthermore, sections 6, 7 and 9 above state the obligations of staff and councillors with respect to the Council website, social media and email respectively.
   4. Councillors and staff must further ensure that any ICT equipment issued by the Council is used primarily for Council purposes, and that any casual personal use is legal, appropriate, and in keeping with the values of the Council. For the avoidance of doubt, the viewing of explicit images, or extreme or offensive content on Council issued devices is not permitted.
   5. Councillors and staff must also ensure that Council issued devices are kept secure and not accessed by other persons.
   6. Where Councillors and Staff use personal electronic devices for Council business, this is done at their own risk, and they must ensure that confidential or sensitive information is sufficiently secure.
   7. Councillors and staff must also take reasonable steps against cyber-attack, and in particular

* Ensure that operating and antivirus software is regularly updated.
* Ensure that passwords are strong, and kept secure – at least 8 characters in length, containing a mix of alpha and numeric characters, with at least one digit, one upper case letter and one symbol character (e.g. @ # $ % & \*).
* Avoid visiting suspicious websites and be wary of clicking on links or opening attachments in emails, especially those from unknown sources.
* Lock their screen when leaving their computer to prevent unauthorized access.
* Regularly back up their important data to prevent data loss due to malware or hardware failure.
* Avoid plugging USB drives into their computer unless they know their source and have scanned them for malware.
* Not use any pirated software
* Be cautious when using public Wi-Fi outside of Council premises, as it may be unencrypted and expose data.
* Report any concerns regarding security to the Clerk immediately, or in their absence directly to the Council’s IT Contractor.
  1. The Clerk shall satisfy themselves that the security and backup arrangements in place with the Council’s IT contractor are sufficient.
  2. Councillors and staff must handle personal data in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data must not be stored unnecessarily or longer than needed, and must be securely deleted or destroyed when no longer required.
  3. Any use of third-party cloud storage or digital services for Council business must be approved by the Clerk to ensure compliance with data protection laws and the Council's data governance requirements.
  4. When accessing Council systems remotely, Councillors and staff must use secure methods (e.g., VPN, encrypted connections) and ensure that devices used meet the Council's security standards, particularly in terms of antivirus protection and system updates.
  5. All electronic data and devices must be securely wiped prior to disposal or transfer. The Clerk is responsible for ensuring secure and environmentally sound disposal of Council-issued electronic devices and storage media.
  6. In the event of a suspected security breach, data loss, or unauthorised access, staff and Councillors must report the incident to the Clerk immediately, or in their absence directly to the Council’s IT contractor. The Clerk shall investigate and, if appropriate, escalate the matter to the Council’s IT contractor and/or the Information Commissioner's Office.

1. **CYBER INSURANCE**

15.1 The Clerk shall make recommendations to the council regarding the level of Cyber-insurance appropriate to the Council’s risk, and this shall be considered annually along with the Council’s other insurances.

1. **DOCUMENT HISTORY**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Version ID** | **Description of Change** | **Version Sponsor** | | **Policy Owner** | **Version Creation Date** | **Version Approval Date** | **Next Review Date** |
| 1.0 | New model document | Assistant Parish Clerk | | Full Council | 14/06/2022 | July 2022 | July 2022 |
| 2.0 | Updated document following review, and incorporating requirement for an IT policy | Parish Clerk | | Full Council, via P&R | 26/06/2025 | N/A | N/A |
| 2.01 | Updated draft | | Parish Clerk | Full Council, via P&R | 14/07/2025 | 21/07/2025 | July 2028 |