



Burnham Parish Council Communication and Engagement Policy

July 2022

THE PRINCIPLES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS

DO:

1. Be Objective and balanced
2. Be Clear and Concise
3. Remain construction and positive
4. 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. To ensure you are well informed of the factuality of the information
8. Show respect to all, respect should be shown to the authority and employees, Derogatory comments are always wrong.
9. 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, and make it clear that any views that are expressed are of personal view.
2. Slander or discredit any individual
3. Discuss any confidential or sensitive information about the Council, members or staff. Personal information should not be shared without their express permission.
4. Publish anything supporting to be on behalf of the Council that could be deemed to be party-political (Local Government Act 1986, s.2)
5. Breach confidential information or criticise Council policies or personnel.
6. Unless advised by parental guidance, post images of young people on social media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The underlying purpose of this policy is to appropriately delegate the roles and responsibilities within Burnham Parish Council. 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 requirement by increasing regional engagement levels.

2. KEY OBJECTIVES

At all times, the Council should be:

Transparent

To lead and represent the local community, internal stakeholders should acquire a level of honesty and accountability to enforce rules and regulations concerning the public and how they are governed.

Informing

Burnham Parish Council should aim to provide 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

The Council should ensure 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

Burnham Parish Council's effort should constantly 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

All social media channels and media coverage should account for priorities and worries and wishes of the local community. Burnham Parish Council will seek to meet 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 Council's 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.

3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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

4. ATTENDANCE OF THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA AT MEETINGS

- 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. Therefore have the right to attend, film, and document for knowledge and blogging-related purposes.
- If and where necessary, Burnham Parish Council may exclude the public or press following the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 whenever publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest. This arrangement should be used modestly, only where essential.
- Council meetings can be video and audio recorded, streamed, and photographed unless a member of the general public and press are prohibited e.g., a document containing confidential or restricted information, members of the public will be advised to leave the room when sensitive discussions are made.
- Other than any confidential documents, reports, minutes, and agendas will be made available to the public and price-free of charge.
- Members of the public and media press are encouraged to attend Committee and Council meetings to give reasonable opportunity to understand how the Council produces decisions.

5. PRESS COMMUNICATIONS

- 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.
- The Council welcomes the public to debate local parish issues via word-of-mouth discussions, which will also become an additional way to engage with the community.
- The Council's position is as stated in the minutes and formal statements issued by the office of the Council on Council-headed paper.
- Prior to publication to be issued, the Clerk will verify all communications issued on behalf of the whole Council.
- A draft press release can be drawn up by any member of the Council however should be issued by the Clerk to adhere to all principles and statutory requirements; there should be a repetitive style within the Council and monitoring of the press release thoroughly.
- All Councillors may have different views and opinions which may not agree with Burnham Parish Council's position, we acknowledge that as individuals they must be free to voice their views.
- If and when the Council is discussed in the press or other media outlets, they would like to be appointed an opportunity to respond and provide a balanced approach to appropriately inform the public on the Council's current position.
- Those seeking the position of the Council should directly contact the Council office.
- 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.
- In the case of urgent actions being required in the absence of the Clerk, the Assistant Clerk may issue press communication on the Council's behalf, in discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council. The Council or a committee may also authorise official communications – no individual Councillor may issue official communications on behalf of the Council, but may only speak as an Individual.

6. WEBSITE

- For the majority of Burnham residents, visitors, funders, and local groups, the Council's website will be their first point of contact. Therefore, should be regularly updated with accurate and accessible data relevant to the community.
- Councillors may consider contributing to social media feeds, blogs, and news articles however the website editorial control will remain a duty of the Clerk.
- The Council's website should document official government information or any links that should be shared for matters of public interest and the Council do not permit external advertising.

7. SOCIAL MEDIA

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

- 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.
- 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.
- If and when the Council have 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.
- Burnham Parish Council's social media platforms should 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 cannot promote

during any pre-election purdah period or period of high- sensitivity such as by-elections.

- Councillors are responsible for setting up 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.
- The Parish Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council social media channels agreed upon by the Council. The Parish Clerk may officially appoint Councillors 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 account however should comply with this policy and ensuring the 'personal view' disclaimer is in order.

Mentioned below are some additional guidelines for Councillor's to consider for the use of social media 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.
- All tweets/blogs made by Councillors during Council meetings should refer to the discussion taking place currently at the meeting. Engaging in tweeting/blogging about other subjects 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.

8. EMAILS

- All Councillors are allocated email accounts, which must be used for all business-related things for the Council. In best practice, confidential information should not be forwarded from email account to personal account reducing the risk of privacy breaches. Councillors must not give anyone else access to their account.
- Any email correspondence relating to the official business of Burnham Parish Council may be subject to a freedom of information request, subjective to whether it is held in the dedicated Councillor's email account, or their private account. More information can be found here: <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1147/official-information-held-in-private-email-accounts.pdf>
- Councillors should ensure all emails sent regarding Burnham Parish Council's business should register with the principles laid out in the policy.
- Principles should fundamentally always touch upon the Code of Conduct regulations whilst replying to or sending emails, both internally and externally.

9. RECRUITMENT

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

10. PETITIONS

All parishioners are welcome to provide feedback to Burnham Parish Council.

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 what we forecast to do with the petition. We will treat something as a petition, if identified as such or intended to be a petition.

Paper petitions can be delivered to:

The Clerk, Burnham Parish Council, Burnham Park, Windsor Lane, Burnham,
Buckinghamshire, SL1 7HR

How the Council will accept a petition

Petitions submitted to Burnham Parish Council must include:

- Petitions should all be accompanied with contact and address details for the petition organiser.
- The name, address and signature of any person supporting the petition.
- Identifiable signatures, valid addresses, where they live, work and study may take into consideration other signatures by the Council.
- 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 or inappropriate petitions will not be accepted.

If the Council receives any petitions, what will they do?

- 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 Council agenda and this will be advised to the petition organiser.

Full Council 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 decide to activate the petition request, however not reinforcing the action request can result in debate or to the commission for further investigation into the situation (For example passing on to the relevant committee) which will need to result in the Petition organiser being given written confirmation of this decision.

If Burnham Parish Council has no direct control over the petition matter, it can be considered to make representation on behalf of the Burnham community to the relevant body.

11. ADVERTISING

Burnham Parish Council where possible will 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.

Noticeboard Advertising

Burnham Parish Council actively uses four 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:

- All noticeboard material should be placed in an A4 format and must be no larger.
- 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.

Burnham Park and other amenities

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 are at the discretion of Burnham Parish Council.

For the Parish Council to consider granting approval, the following guideless should be adhered to:

- 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, Circus and Fairs.
- Banners placed longer than approved will be removed by Burnham Parish Council and may be destroyed.

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.

Advertisements that may be permitted, and granted permission by the Officers 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 that are **NOT** permitted consists of:

- Profit making event advertisements or businesses and services, however Burnham Parish Council encourage local high street businesses and health and wellbeing promotional activities.

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.

12. BURNHAM PARK HALL

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. 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, and must abide by the principles and statutory requirement above.

13. DOCUMENT HISTORY

Document History

Drafted by Assitant Clerk

14/06/2022

(Version 1)