

<b>Social Media Policy</b>	
Policy Document	BTC/010
Dated:	3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2020
Status:	Adopted
Last Reviewed:	August 2016
Next Review Date	January 2022

## **Social Media Policy**

### **1. What is Social Media**

- 1.1 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.
- 1.2 This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and tablet technology, but may extend in the future. Examples of social media websites include: Social networking – (eg. Facebook) Professional networking (e.g. LinkedIn) Video sharing – (eg. YouTube) Blogs (eg. Wordpress) Micro-blogging (eg. Twitter) etc.

### **2. Policy statement**

- 2.1 This policy is intended to help employees including both full and part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and Members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- 2.2 This policy outlines the standards we require employees, volunteers and Members to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

### **3. The scope of the policy**

- 3.1 All employees, volunteers and Members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.
- 3.2 Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct.

### **4. Responsibility for implementation of the policy**

- 4.1 The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 4.2 The Town Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Councils work.

- 4.3 All employees, volunteers and Members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk.

## **5. Using social media sites in the Council's name**

- 5.1 Only the Town Clerk and any officer acting on behalf of the Town Clerk are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on the Council's behalf.
- 5.2 Members are not permitted to engage in social media activity in the name of the Council. Any Member engagement on social media should be explicit in that comments are those of the individual Councillor, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Council, any Committee of the Council, any other Councillor or any officer of the Council.

## **6. Using social media**

- 6.1 As a Council we recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our Council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and Members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
- 6.2 Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council you must have read and understood this policy and employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior approval to do so from the Town Clerk (unless the use of social media is explicit in an employee's job description).

## **7. Rules for use of social media**

### **7.1 Guidance for Council employees on the use of Council Social Media**

- Officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – e.g. Facebook - and adhere to these at all times
- No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain – i.e. available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, or approved by the Town Clerk (or employee under delegation).
- Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
- Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information
- Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
- Copyright laws must be respected.

- Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
- Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
- Employees must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

## 7.2 All staff and volunteers

7.2.1 Staff and volunteers must not use Social Media accounts in relation to the Council's business.

7.2.2 Any employee or volunteer who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Town Clerk.

## 7.3 Third party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage

7.3.1 Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Bewdley Town Council.

7.3.2 Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

7.3.3 Councillors must be aware that any use of social media in which reference is made to the role as a Councillor, or to Council business (however tenuous) may be deemed to make the whole account and every comment in it a "Council" account and therefore the standards of the Code of Conduct will be applied.

7.3.4 The seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – **selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.**  
**Do....**

- Set appropriate privacy settings for any networking site
- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such views
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a Councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network
- Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriate – if using a Council-provided site or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity

- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection legislation.
- When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification, and do not post or comment on items of relevance to the Council.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council

7.3.5 Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality policies.

7.3.6 Where Councillors choose to use personal accounts for the Council's business, you must make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible a standard disclaimer should be used such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions"

7.3.7 Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a Councillor

7.3.8 Be careful if making 'political' points, and avoid being specific or personal about individuals including other Councillors. **Don't...**

- Comment in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to face contact
- Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes
- Never: Post comments that are in breach of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy or that incites violence or hatred or are obscene or discriminatory

## **8. Monitoring use of social media websites**

8.1 Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (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.

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

- 8.3 In particular a serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the inappropriate material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, may amount to gross misconduct.
- 8.4 Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- 8.5 If you notice any use of social media by other employees, volunteers or Members in breach of this policy please report it to the Town Clerk.

## **9. Monitoring and review of this policy**

- 9.1 The Town Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.