



# **Bodmin Town Council Social Media and Press Policy**

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**Social Media and Press Policy - BTC - 2.11.22 – VFA 1.0**

Responsible Officer: Community Services Manager/Acting Town Clerk

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## **1. Introduction**

Bodmin Town Council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way it communicates with the public. This includes using all reasonable and cost effective means to improve the way the Council communicates with the local community.

This policy includes guidelines on Councillor and Officer responsibilities when using such channels of communication and the policy applies equally to both Members and Officers.

Bodmin Town Council currently operates two websites, Bodmin Community (primarily based community information and local events) and the Town Council page.

Bodmin Town Council may also operate other social Media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media. Above everything else, Councillors must observe the Council's Code of Conduct whenever they conduct the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which they have been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.

## **2. Definition**

'Social Media' is the term commonly given to all web based tools which allow users to interact with each other in the same way i.e. by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online.

Social media involves any online communities or networks which encourage participation and engagement including email, online social forums, blogs or video/image sharing facilities such examples include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, amongst thousands of others.

## **3. Aims**

Although these platforms provide many new and exciting opportunities, it is important to manage any potential risks associated with Social Media.

These guidelines aim to provide both Members and Officers with information concerning the use of, or development of, any social media application in order to ensure that the maximum potential is achieved from these applications whilst maintaining a safe and professional approach.

It is important to remember that:

- In most cases the information shared is in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. With many applications you do not even need to register to view the content it may only be necessary to register if you wish to participate and publish to the site
- It is easy to respond immediately to messages/comments due to the instant nature of this technology and this could lead to a situation being unintentionally inflamed.

#### **4. Use of Social Media**

The use of Social Media is recognised as an important part of how the Council and its Members communicate with the wider public including promoting the Council's activities, providing updates, news stories and sharing other useful information.

Members and Officers may wish to use their own computers and devices as well as the devices issued by the Council, however it is important to note that these guidelines apply regardless.

Members and Officers must:

- Be aware that at all times whilst contributing to social media activities, you are representing the Council and therefore you are personally responsible for the content you publish to Social Media
- Not publish content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening or obscene in nature
- Never publish or share personal details of others i.e. home addresses/telephone numbers unless given express consent to do so;
- Ensure that any personal or sensitive data is dealt with in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy
- Always use a disclaimer and make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only, and not those of the Council i.e. *"Any views or opinions presented in this email are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Bodmin Town Council."*; and
- Show consideration and respect to all and ensure that the use of Social Media is not damaging to the Council's reputation or credibility

#### **5. Excessive Use of Social Media at Work**

Officers of BTC are permitted to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media from the Council's computers or devices for work purposes and during scheduled breaks; however they should not spend an excessive amount of time using social media sites.

The Council reserves the right to monitor the internet usage of all employees if it considers that an employee has been spending an excessive amount of time using social media for non-work related activity or if an employee has acted in a way which breaches these guidelines.

#### **6. Disciplinary Action in relation to Social Media**

All Members and Officers of the Council are required to adhere to these guidelines and should be aware that a breach of these guidelines could lead to action under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. Serious breaches i.e. incidents of bullying a colleague via social media could constitute gross misconduct.

## **7. Links with Other Policies/Information**

These guidelines aim to provide all Councillors and employees with information concerning the use of any social media application and to help them utilise the tools available, whilst maintaining a safe, professional approach at all times.

This policy links with the Council's E-mail & Internet Policy, Guidance to Members & Officers in respect of using Tablets/Electronic Devices for Meetings and GDPR Policy.

## **8. Review**

Owing to the fast changing nature of information technology, particularly in relation to electronic communication, it is important that these guidelines be reviewed regularly (not less than annually) and amended as necessary based on changes to legislation or evidence taken forward.

# **BODMIN TOWN COUNCIL PRESS AND MEDIA POLICY**

## **1. Clerk and Officers of the Council**

The Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Chair. In the absence of both of these officers enquirers will be referred to the Vice Chair who will act as the spokesperson for the purposes of this element of the policy.

All communications made by the Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. The Clerk is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Clerk the enquirer should be referred to the Chair / Vice Chair or Council as considered appropriate. No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Clerk or the Chair, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

## **2. Councillors**

A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing. A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of the Council. Should the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, then legal advice should be sought before any response is made. When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, Councillors should make clear the capacity, in which they are providing the information. For example: - as

Chairman, as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication) Never use the prefix "Councillor" when writing to the press as an individual or refer to your position on the Council. This implies you are stating Council policy.

A copy of any written material sent to the Press and Media by a Councillor, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Clerk. Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any particular policy, simply state "no comment" and ask the press to contact the Council Office.

Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the council. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public or before the press.

### **3. Dealing with the Press**

When dealing with the Press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following:

- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Town Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.
- Be calm Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous.

### **4. Meetings of Council and Committees**

Facilities will be provided at meetings when requested for the Press to take notes of the proceedings. As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.

### **Alternative Formats**

The Equality Act 2010 – copies of this document in large print (A3 Format) or larger font size, or recorded onto tape as a 'talking book' can be made available for those with sight impairment on request from the Council Office or by telephoning 01208 76616 or e-mailing [admin@bodmin.gov.uk](mailto:admin@bodmin.gov.uk)

The Council can also arrange to provide versions in other languages for staff whose first language is not English.

### **Freedom of Information**

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this Document will be posted on the Council's Website [www.bodmin.gov.uk](http://www.bodmin.gov.uk) and copies of this document will be available for inspection on deposit in the Council Office.