



## **BUDE-STRATTON TOWN COUNCIL**

### **Social Media Policy for Town Council Employees and Councillors**

## **1. Policy Statement**

This policy outlines the Town Council's guidelines for the appropriate use of social media platforms by both staff members and councillors. It is designed to maintain the Council's reputation, integrity, and professionalism while facilitating engagement with constituents, partners, and the public through online channels. The policy also outlines the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

## **2. Scope**

This policy applies to all individuals working at all levels within the Town Council, including elected and co-opted councillors, the Clerk to the Council, employees, and volunteers.

## **3. Rules for Using Social Media**

### **a. Responsible Engagement**

All members, including staff and councillors, must engage on social media in a manner that reflects the Council's values. They should ensure that their online activities promote a positive image of the Council and its services.

Members must adhere to the Code of Conduct and be guided by the Civility and Respect pledge at all times when engaging on social media.

### **b. Representational Clarity**

When using social media, individuals must make it clear whether they are speaking in their personal capacity or as representatives of the Council. They should refrain from giving the impression that personal opinions reflect official Council stances. Councillors, being elected members, should note that online comments may be seen as reflecting Council views even with disclaimers. Therefore, caution is advised for Councillors' online comments.

### **c. Representation and Accountability**

Designated employees may be tasked with representing the Council through the management of social media accounts or engaging in online discussions. Employees engaged in such activities are expected to follow the guidelines outlined in this social media policy. They should act responsibly to safeguard and uphold the Council's reputation while interacting on digital platforms.

### **d. Respectful and Constructive Communication**

All interactions on social media platforms must be respectful, constructive, and free from derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, or offensive language. Engaging in personal attacks or hostile behaviour is prohibited.

**e. Transparency and Disclosure**

When participating in online discussion, individuals must disclose their affiliation with the Town Council if their statements are related to Council matters. They should avoid making false or misleading statements and ensure that personal opinions are clearly distinguished from official positions.

**f. Privacy and Confidentiality**

Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of colleagues, constituents, and Council matters is crucial. Sharing personal or sensitive information without proper consent is not allowed. The Council's confidentiality policy and data protection policy must be followed.

**g. Legal and Ethical Compliance**

Individuals should adhere to all laws, and regulations, including copyright and libel laws, when posting content on social media. Content that violates these laws should not be shared.

**h. Professionalism and Professional Conduct**

Maintaining professionalism in online interactions is essential. Individuals should avoid using offensive language, making controversial remarks, or engaging in online conflicts. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public.

**i. Proper use of Council Facilities**

Council-provided websites, blog sites, and social media accounts are to be used for official Council purposes only. Council facilities may not be used for personal and political blogs.

**j. Social Media Moderation**

The Town Council may appoint designated individuals to monitor and moderate official social media pages. Content that is inflammatory, defamatory, or libelous will be removed without notice.

**k. Handling Concerns and Council Matters**

If a matter raised on social media goes beyond the scope of resolution by a designated employee and it necessitates the involvement of the Council, it should be raised in the appropriate meeting. Any decisions and responses endorsed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

## **I. Use of Personal Data**

At times, we may use photographs, videos, audio, personal stories and names on social media platforms or in other online activities. Before sharing any personal information, consent must be obtained from the individual involved. This includes obtaining consent from employees, fellow councillors and others, even when sharing on personal social media accounts. To assist employees representing the Council and Councillors, a consent form will be provided. This form will specify which personal details individuals are comfortable sharing and those they wish to keep private. Any personal details not covered by the consent form will require separate specific consent to be obtained.

## **m. Breaches of Policy**

A breach of this policy by an employee may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. Disciplinary action may be taken in respect of unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments. A breach of this policy by a Member may be dealt with under the Code of Conduct procedure. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken. Any breach of this policy by the Council may be referred to a relevant body for investigation.

## **n. Reporting Concerns**

Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk. If a complaint is made this must be raised with the Clerk in the first instance.

## **o. Review and Accountability**

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. All members, including staff and councillors, are responsible for adhering to these guidelines and contributing to a positive online environment.

## **4. Review**

This policy shall be reviewed on an annual basis.