



## **Boroughbridge Town Council**

### **Media and Social Media Policy**

#### **1. Policy statement**

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help employees including clerks, RFOs, Executive Officers, part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as X, Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards we require employees, councillors and volunteers 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.

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

- 2.1. All employees, volunteers and councillors are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of our council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary and Grievance Policy and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal. Breach of this policy by councillors may be dealt with under our Code of Conduct Policy.

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

- 3.1. The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Town Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.
- 3.3. All employees, volunteers and councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. With the exception of the clerk, any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk. Any breach of this policy by the clerk should be reported to the Chairman.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

#### **4. Using social media sites in our name**

- 4.1. The clerks, in partnership with the IT & Social Media working group will post material on a social media website in the council's name and on our behalf, when appropriate.

#### **5. Using social media**

- 5.1. 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

councillors joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

- 5.2. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must:
- a) have read and understood this policy and
  - b) employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from The Council.

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

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- 6.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- 6.2. Any employee (with the exception of the clerk), volunteer or councillor 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 clerk. The clerk will then report this to the Chairman of the Council. If the clerk is in this position it should be reported to the Chairman of the Council.
- 6.3. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with clerk.
- 6.4. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 6.5. Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 6.6. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 6.7. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- 6.8. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- 6.9. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.10. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- 6.11. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 6.12. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

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

- 7.1. 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 and Grievance Policy.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.
- 7.3. In particular a serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
  - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature)

- b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation
- c) material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees
- d) confidential information about the council or anyone else
- e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council)
- f) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary and Grievance Policy or the Complaints Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

- 7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary and Grievance Policy or the Complaints 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.
- 7.5. If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy, please report it to the Town Clerk.

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

- 8.1. The Town Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually in partnership with the IT & Social Media working group to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

## **9. MEDIA POLICY**

### **9.1. Introduction**

Boroughbridge Town Council's relationship with the community is vital to its work and the decisions it takes. An open and constructive dialogue is a key requirement for influencing and developing services, identifying attitudes and measuring satisfaction.

Effective media relations are an important factor in establishing a good relationship between the Town Council and the community. Since members of the public generally rely on the media for local information and news, it is important for the Town Council to present information about its activities and aspirations in a consistent way.

This document sets out the framework for Town Council Members and employees to follow in contacting the media and informing the public about the Town Council's activities, the decisions it takes and the services it provides.

### **9.2. The Media**

The term 'media' encompasses many different means of communicating a message to a wider audience, and includes broadcast media, the Internet, and a wide range of printed media, including local newspapers, magazines, local broadcasters and posters.

The general principle is that the Town Council Office will act as the Press Office. Any official contact with the media concerning the Town Council's policies, decisions and services is to be initiated through this office.

Press releases and statements will be prepared by the clerk in consultation with the chair and other members as required and will normally be restricted to matters that have been

debated and agreed by the Town Council.

Members who are approached by the media should refer to the Council Office to ensure consistency. Members can, as long as they make it clear that it is a personal opinion, state their view on a matter. However, members should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Town Council into disrepute and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct. The requirement of the Data Protection Act 1998 must be adhered to at all times.

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request and the media are encouraged to attend council meetings and the council should make appropriate space available. The Openness of LG Bodies Regulation 2014 became law on 6 August 2014, allowing filming, photography and/or recording of council proceedings by the public or press. The chairman of the meeting should ask if any person intends to do any of these so that councillors are aware. This should be a constant agenda item on all council or committee meetings. No oral report or running verbal commentary is permitted during the meeting.

### **9.3. Notice Boards and Website**

Public notice is required of Town Council meetings and its committee meetings. The LGA1972 requires that at least 3 clear working days' notice be given and that the notice must be fixed in some conspicuous place in the locality (notice boards)

The Town Council's website should be updated regularly by the council office with copies of minutes, agendas and policies, information useful to residents and information that is required by law.