 **Bradley Stoke Town Council**

**Official Social Media Engagement Policy**

**Introduction**

The Town Council recognises the increasing use of Social Media and the advantages gained in the use of such media to engage with the general public and share news of common interest. The Town Council also recognises that the use of such media can be abused with a resultant negative impact which could bring the council into disrepute. This policy sets out the Town Council’s practices to be adopted for the use of social media accounts.

The word ‘official’ in the title of this policy means the policy applies to all social media accounts that are used in the Council’s official name or a name that implies the official name or generally an account under Council’s control. Furthermore, although not strictly controlled by this policy, employees and members are reminded to act mindfully when using any social media in their own names, as views and opinions publicly visible could be misrepresented by the press and public. Additionally, employees should be mindful of ‘impartiality’ when expressing any view or opinion of the Council’s actions/policy decisions, as to express these would be in breach of impartiality and any such action will be addressed under the Managing Employee Performance Policy.

**Policy Statement**

The Bradley Stoke Town Council’s usage of social media is intended to:

***Provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within Bradley Stoke and promote positive thoughts and comments from residents who live within the Town as well as being used as a means of informal engagement with the public, to help the Council gauge public opinion.***

This policy is intended to help employees including officers and staff (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and council members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards and comments on web-articles.

The Members’ Code of Conduct applies to online activity as it would to other written or verbal communications. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Statements published on the Internet are permanent.

Councillors have the same legal responsibilities online as anyone else, where failures to comply with the law may have serious consequences. There are some additional constraints around using social media for electoral campaigning, such as purdah, which apply and prohibit social media accounts being used from making announcements about any new or controversial initiatives which could be seen to be advantageous to any candidates or parties in a forthcoming election. Furthermore, social media accounts will only be used for official none political purposes only, using the same approach to official press releases as defined in the Communication and Media & Publicity policies. Extra care needs to be taken when writing about planning matters where Council should avoid publishing anything that might suggest they do not have an open mind about a matter its being involved in determining.

Individual Town Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address that is used for Council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.

This policy outlines the standards we require employees, volunteers and members to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor use of social media and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

This policy supplements Bradley Stoke Town Council’s, Communication and Media & Publicity policies.

1. **The Scope of the Policy** 
   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 Town Council.
   2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under Bradley Stoke Town Council’s Managing Employee Performance policy and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
2. **Responsibility for Implementation of the Policy** 
   1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
   2. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk are responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.
   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/Deputy Town Clerk.
   4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to The Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk.
3. **Using Social Media Sites in our Name** 
   1. Only the Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk and the Project and Events Officer are permitted to post material on social media in the council’s name and on its behalf.

3.1.1This responsibility may be delegated to other employees on a case by case basis as noted

in 4.2.

1. **Using Social Media** 
   1. Bradley Stoke Town Council recognises the importance of the Internet in shaping public opinion about the Town 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.
   2. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must:
2. have read and understood this policy; and
3. employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from The Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk.
4. **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:

* 1. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people’s perceptions of the council – everything you post must be factually accurate.
  2. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, explicit, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
  3. Any employee, volunteer or member who thinks 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/Deputy Town Clerk (or in the case of the Town Clerk – the Chair of Council).
  4. 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 The Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk (or in the case of the Town Clerk – the Chair of Council).
  5. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
  6. 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.
  7. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
  8. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
  9. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
  10. Don’t discuss employees without their prior approval.
  11. Always consider others’ privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
  12. Do not publish your personal 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 personal contact details. In the event that contact information needs to be published, use your official Council contact details only.

1. **Monitoring use of Social Media Platforms**
   1. Employees should be aware that any use of social media (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 Managing Employee Performance policy
   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.
   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):
2. pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
3. a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
4. material which is offensive or obscene;
5. criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees;
6. confidential information about the council or anyone else
7. any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or
8. 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 Managing Employee Performance policy and, for employees, may result in summary dismissal.

* 1. Where evidence of misuse is found, the Town Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with their Managing Employee Performance policy, 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.
  2. 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 or Deputy Town Clerk.

1. **Practical Application**

7.1 Social Media accounts cannot be monitored 24/7 and the Town Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received but will endeavour to respond in a timely manner. The Town Council will however, endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant personnel as soon as practicably possible.

7.2 Sending a message or post via social media will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Town Council will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through social media channels, but will endeavour to do so. The Town Council’s contact details for formal communications may be found on the Council’s website: [www.bradleystoke.gov.uk](http://www.bradleystoke.gov.uk)

7.3 Although at the discretion of the individual contacting the Council, the Council strongly advise that personal or other private information should not be included in social media posts and messages to the Town Council.

7.4 The Town Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:

* Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site;
* Personal attacks, bullying, insults, or threatening language;
* Potentially libellous or obscene remarks, information or statements that are of a personal, inflammatory, libellous or defamatory nature;
* Plagiarised material or any material deemed to be in violation of any laws, including copyright;
* Private or personal information published without consent;
* Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum;
* Commercial promotions or spam;
* Fake accounts or accounts that are impersonating others.

7.5 The Town Council, at its discretion, reserves the right to block users and will do so for unseemly usage of social media and disregard of, or non-compliance with this policy and wherever a user is in breach of section 7.4.

1. **Fraudulent Accounts**
   1. Wherever it is found that Bradley Stoke Town Council’s name, logo, and identity have been used on a social media platform in order to deceive or attempt to deceive the public; either inadvertently or deliberately. We will endeavour to notify the social media platform of concern, the details of the fraudulent account as soon as reasonably practicable. We will where appropriate, notify to public highlighting this either on our official website and/or our social media platforms.
2. **Security and Access Control**
   1. Access to social media accounts will be controlled by the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk;
      1. This can be delegated to other employees on a case by case basis with an appropriate business case agreed by the Town Clerk.
   2. No elected member of the Council will have direct access to the Council’s social media accounts.
   3. Passwords to social media accounts will be unique, there will not be a single generic password for multiple accounts across different platforms.
   4. All passwords to social media platforms will be changed every 90 days.
   5. Where a social media platform allows, two factor authentication will be used.
   6. Where possible when signing up to social media platforms, separate email accounts will be used that are not linked to an individual employee of the Town Council, and more than employee will have access to this email account, this must include the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.
   7. Official social media accounts are not to be accessed from IT systems/devices that are not Bradley Stoke Town Council’s official IT systems/devices.

9.7.1 A breach of this clause (9.7) requires the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk to be notified and the Chair of Council and the Press Spokesperson to be informed.

9.7.2 This clause (9.7) maybe overruled at the discretion of the Town Clerk in exceptional circumstances (i.e. working from home due to illness or other personal matter), advising the Chair of Council and the Press Spokesperson.

1. **Monitoring and Review of this Policy**
   1. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

**Reviewed by Bradley Stoke Town Council – 17th September 2025**