

# Taunton Deane Borough Council

## Full Council – 9 December 2014

### Proposed Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol

#### Report of the Assistant Chief Executive

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mark Edwards)

#### **Executive Summary**

This report provides a background and rationale for the Council to adopt a Social Media Policy and a Recording of Meetings Protocol and recommends that the two documents are adopted and that arrangements are made to commence audio recordings of Council and Committee meetings open to the public and that details are obtained in regard to the possibility of all such meetings being filmed and streamed live on the internet.

#### **1. Background Information**

- 1.1 The Council already operates within a world where the use of Social Media is growing and becoming an increasingly significant way of communicating with individuals and organisations.
- 1.2 The Council uses a Twitter account and currently has approximately 800 Twitter followers which are growing at approximately 100 per month.
- 1.3 In addition, some individual Councillors and members of staff already have their own Twitter accounts and Facebook pages and no doubt going forward this trend will be on the increase as Social Media continues to evolve.
- 1.4 Against this background Southwest Audit Partnership has recommended that the Councils should have an approved Social Media Policy to provide guidance for Councillors and staff and minimise the risk of exposing the Authority to reputational damage. It should be emphasised that such a Policy is not about controlling what people do as individuals but rather providing a framework for them to make informed and balanced choices.
- 1.5 In the light of this advice, Officers have looked at the practice elsewhere including liaising with the Local Government Association and external specialists and drafted a Social Media Policy - attached as Appendix A to the report.
- 1.6 The draft Policy documents were considered at the meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 28 October, 2014 when it was agreed to ask that the Assistant Chief Executive tidy up the draft documentation to ensure a

distinction between Policy and best practice. It felt that there were too many appendices in the report received and this could lead to confusion.

The Council are therefore requested to consider adopting the Social Media Policy as set out in the appendix. If the policy is adopted, Guidelines on how to use social media effectively and an easy to read summary policy document will be produced to assist councillors and employees to operate safely within the policy requirements.

- 1.7 On a related matter, the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 have made it a requirement for Councils to allow any member of the public to take photographs, film and audio record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings
- 1.8 In the light of these developments the Somerset Monitoring Officers' Group have prepared a draft protocol which is to be considered for adoption by all the Local Authorities in Somerset – attached at Appendix B to this report.
- 1.9 The draft protocol was also considered at the meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2014 when in addition to supporting the adoption of a clear protocol, the Committee recommended that Council support proposals to ensure that audio recordings of all public meetings of Taunton Deane Borough Council take effect from 1 January 2015 and are made available to the public via the internet or through whatever other appropriate means.
- 1.10 The Council have already agreed – and allocated funding - to update the microphone loop system and this is in hand to be introduced within two to three months. If the Council did wish to proceed with audio recording the public part of its meetings then all that would be required would be to purchase a small recording device that was compatible with the new system at an estimated cost of up to £200 which could be found from existing budgets.
- 1.11 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee also asked the Assistant Chief Executive to produce a report to Corporate Scrutiny on how to upgrade the recording to a full visual one for all meetings for streaming immediately (with the costings) for introduction later in 2015 and requested that a training programme for Members be introduced as soon as possible to improve the techniques of public speaking to ensure that the audio recordings are clear and as articulate as possible to assist those members of the public in understanding the subject matter and follow the debates with relative ease.

## **2. Legal Comments**

- 2.1 The adoption of a Social Media Policy reduces the risk of corporate social media accounts being misused and becoming the possible source of litigation claims. In addition the adoption of a Recording of Meetings Protocol would also ensure that the Council meets its legal obligations under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 and by audio recording its

meetings the council would ensure that it has a comprehensive and accurate record of the proceedings.

### **3. Links to Corporate Aims**

- 3.1 This report has no direct links to Corporate Aims although the adoption of the proposed social media policy and recording of meetings protocol should underpin good governance arrangements.

### **4. Environmental and Community Safety Implications**

- 4.1 This report has no environmental and community safety implications.

### **5. Equalities Impact**

- 5.1 The adoption of a social media policy should enhance the ability to manage issues and minimise the risk of material on Council Social Media Accounts that could potentially put the Council at a reputational risk for breaching any aspect of the Equalities Act.

### **6. Risk Management**

- 6.1 The adoption of the suggested policy and protocol should minimise the risks of Corporate Social Media Accounts would be misused, and regulated and reduce the likelihood of the Authority being exposed to reputational damage.

### **7. Partnership Implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct Partnership Implications associated with this report.

### **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 The Council adopts the Social Media Policy, with or without amendments, as set out in Appendix A to this report;
- 8.2 That Council adopts the Recording of Meetings Protocol, with or without amendments, as set out in Appendix B to this report;
- 8.3 That Council supports the introduction of audio recording of all for all Council and Committee meetings which are open to the press and public to coincide with the installation of a new microphone system to take effect from 1 January, 2015 or as soon as possible thereafter; and
- 8.4 That Council notes the request by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to receive a report on the practicalities and costs of introducing visual recordings of meetings and supports the Committee's request for training to be provided for members in relation to the recording of meetings protocol and the use of social media.

## APPENDIX A



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Taunton TA1 1HE

# Social media policy and guidelines

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Last updated: September 2014.

For more information about Taunton Deane services visit:

[www.tauntondeane.gov.uk](http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk)

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# 1 Introduction to this document

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## Social media policy and guidelines

The purpose of this social media policy and guidelines is to equip and enable Taunton Deane Borough Council staff and Councillors to interact and communicate safely and lawfully online.

It applies to everyone who works for and behalf of the council, including contractors, and has been designed to guide you through what you can expect from the councils. It outlines what our policies are, what we expect from you and where to get more information.

You are required to observe these guidelines when having an online conversation about the council – either personally or on behalf of the council.

We trust our staff and Councillors and encourage you to be responsible and not bring the organisation into disrepute.

It's important to avoid ambiguity. For example, if you have a LinkedIn profile stating you work for Taunton Deane Borough Council or represent a council ward, any views you share as status updates or discussions, could be seen to represent the council rather than your own view. Be mindful of that fact and act accordingly.

Remember that only designated spokespeople are permitted to communicate officially on behalf of the council.

Contact the Media and Communications Officer with any queries.

## 2 What is social media?

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Social media is the term commonly given to Internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content.

As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks and encouraging participation and engagement.

Taunton Deane Borough Council enables and encourages the effective use of social media to support the work we do and things we care about.

This includes Taunton Dean Borough Council's core values of:

- **Integrity** – we will be honest, do what's right and stick to it
- **Fairness** – we will consistently treat everyone as an equal, respecting their individual needs and abilities
- **Respect** – we will always show respect for everyone
- **Trust** – we will show trust and confidence in our staff and customers

It is important that you are also aware of our ICT Security Policy:

<http://portal/sites/personnel/web%20part%20pages/EmployeeHandbook.aspx> which covers the security and safekeeping of equipment and facilities and HR policies and guidance:

<http://portal/sites/personnel/web%20part%20pages/EmployeeHandbook.aspx> regarding conduct, equality and diversity, harassment and bullying at work.

## 2.1 Which media matter?

Social media is always evolving and is now commonplace not only for individuals to have personal social media accounts but organisations too.

Interacting with audiences and stakeholders through various social media channels is a rewarding part of building a brand online and highlighting the work that we do.

Organisations and their staff use corporate and/or official social media accounts to share ideas, offer first-hand comment, and build relationships.

This policy and guidelines cover all social media including and not limited to:

- Blogs
- Community sites
- Facebook
- Flickr
- Forums
- Google+
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Ning
- Pinterest
- Snapchat
- Social bookmarking sites (e.g. Diigo, StumbleUpon)
- Texts
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Wikipedia
- Videos

- YouTube

It also includes your actions on social media e.g. liking, pinning, retweeting, direct messaging and commenting.

Effective use of social media will play an increasing role in our communication and engagement work allowing us, as organisations and individually, to develop networks of influence and participate in digital discussions.

With that in mind, it's important that everyone knows what to expect from us and what we expect from you.

### **3 What you can expect from us**

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Taunton Deane Borough Council uses a number of approved social media accounts and platforms.

We use them to interact with residents and businesses, the press and interested parties. However, the primary channel for communication remains email and telephone and the organisation continues to encourage residents and businesses to log any feedback or complaints via those methods.

If you have any queries about our social media accounts please contact Debbie Rundle, Media and Communications Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council: 01823 356407 extension 2212.

Or email Debbie: [D.Rundle@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:D.Rundle@tauntondeane.gov.uk).

#### **3.1 Our official social media presence includes:**

##### **Twitter:**

@TDBC: <https://www.twitter.com/TDBC>

##### **Other ad-hoc accounts**

Taunton Deane Borough Council has specified accounts on Twitter for different purposes:

@somerfest <http://www.twitter.com/somerfest>

@tauntonbusiness: <http://www.twitter.com/tauntonbusiness>

@tauntonmayor: <http://www.twitter.com/tauntonmayor>

@tauntonTIC: <http://www.twitter.com/tauntonTIC>

There are also some dormant accounts:



**YouTube:**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/OurSomerset>

### **3.2 Creating new accounts:**

Taunton Deane Borough Council has certain criteria that have to be met before official social media accounts can be approved and used.

Employees are not permitted to create social profiles bearing council names without express permission from the Media and Communications Officer.

New accounts will be considered by the Media and Communications Officer on a case-by-case basis, and any business case needs to include the following information:

1. Overall purpose for the account
2. How it links with our business strategy
3. Who will resource the account on a daily basis
4. Who will be the named person responsible for the account and the related security e.g. safe storage of passwords and access information.

### **3.3 Storing passwords**

Official social accounts relating Taunton Deane Borough Council are managed centrally by the Media and Communications Officer. This includes storing passwords and profile information.

If you have been accepted for approval to create a social media profile on behalf of the company, your password must be kept in a central place for business continuity purposes. The Media and Communications Officer will advise you on the correct procedure should your business case for a profile be accepted.

## **4 Guidelines – what we expect from you**

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Social media guidelines – what we expect from you:

### **Expected and accepted behaviours**

The following principles are the basis of our social media policy and guidelines.

If you are unclear about any aspect of them, talk to your line manager, HR or the Communications team.

#### **4.1 Be honest about who you are**

Best practice is always to be honest about who you are without giving out detailed personal information.

Be sure to identify yourself as working for or representing the council if the conversation is about our business or our sector. Not only is this the ethical thing to do, but in some countries, such as the USA, there may be legal personal liability if you don't.

#### **4.2 Make it clear your opinions are your own**

Unless you are authorised by the Communications team, you cannot speak on behalf of the council. Do not portray yourself as a spokesperson, even in an unofficial capacity, on any issues relating to Taunton Deane Borough Council.

You can state that you work for or represent the organisation in your personal profiles, but make it clear that your opinions are your own.

To make it clear what your relationship is with the organisation, you can include the fact you work for Taunton Deane council in your biography, or that you represent one of the council's wards.

#### **4.3 Share only public information**

It is good business practice for organisations and individuals to keep certain information and topics confidential. Share only public information when speaking about Taunton Deane Borough Council, or the public sector.

Protect your colleagues by refraining from sharing their personal information or any conversations or statements unless you have their written permission to do so.

Do not bring anyone into an online conversation without their prior permission. To do so could cause misunderstanding, violate commercial contracts or confidentiality agreements or damage a relationship. Respect confidentiality and do not disclose non-public council information or the private information of others.

#### **4.4 Be aware that what you say is permanent**

Assume that everyone will be reading every post, no matter how secure or obscure the site may seem.

Therefore, consider everything you post to the Internet to be the same as making it public. Don't forget that search engines mean it is impossible to 'take anything back' so remember your posts are both public and permanent.

#### **4.5 Be respectful of everyone and mind your manners**

Treat everyone, including yourself, with respect. Acknowledge difference of opinion and avoid posting anything that could be seen as offensive, threatening, bullying, derogatory, demeaning, abusive or inappropriate.

Withdraw from any discussions that go off the topic or become disrespectful. This includes criticising or arguing with residents, businesses or staff. Remember that people can form an opinion about the council based on your behaviour.

#### **4.6 Keep safe online**

Ensure that you choose your privacy and security settings on social networks carefully. This is important to control what information you share and who can see your updates and images. Most sites have detailed explanations to guide you through choosing what is right for you.

Be aware that 'private' is not always private – see point 4.4 above.

#### **4.7 Same laws and rules apply**

Always remember to adhere to our existing policies when participating online as a Taunton Deane Borough Council employee or Councillor when discussing our business.

Due to the nature of digital communications, ensure you respect intellectual property (e.g. trademarks, image ownership and copyright), stock exchange regulations and financial disclosure.

You are free to publish and comment via social media in accordance with the policies below and advice in these guidelines, which are applicable to all staff, contractors and consultants.

- HR policies and guidance regarding staff conduct, equality and diversity, harassment and bullying at work
- <http://portal/sites/personnel/web%20part%20pages/EmployeeHandbook.aspx>

Contact: Fiona Wills [f.wills@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:f.wills@tauntondeane.gov.uk)

- ICT policy and guidance regarding the use of technology, computers, email and the internet

<http://portal/sites/personnel/web%20part%20pages/EmployeeHandbook.aspx>

Contact: Fiona Kirkham f.kirkham@tauntondeane.gov.uk

- Policies and guidance regarding the confidentiality, privacy and the protection of data applying to our staff, residents, and commercial and financial information that is not in the public domain
- <http://portal/sites/personnel/web%20part%20pages/EmployeeHandbook.aspx>

Contact: Fiona Kirkham f.kirkham@tauntondeane.gov.uk

- Copyright and intellectual property guidance
- <http://portal/sites/personnel/web%20part%20pages/EmployeeHandbook.aspx>

Contact: Fiona Kirkham  
Councillor Code of Conduct  
(LINK)

Contact: Bruce Lang bdlang@westsomerset.gov.uk

## 4.8 The need for an official response

Sometimes there may be a need for an official response from the council via social media. If you spot a potential issue, bring it to the attention of the Media and Communications Officer before it reaches a crisis. Act sooner rather than later, to stop the issue escalating.

The Communications team monitors social media on behalf of both organisations. However, we all have a duty to protect our reputation, so please do flag any issues you spot.

## 4.9 When in doubt, ask

If you find yourself in a situation where you are unsure what the appropriate response is on social media, pause to decide whether you should refrain, ask a colleague, your line manager or the Media and Communications Officer for advice.

## 5 Guidelines at a glance

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1. Be honest about who you are
2. Make it clear that your opinions are your own
3. Share only public information
4. Be aware that what you post is public and permanent

5. Mind your manners: be respectful of everyone
6. Keep safe online and review security settings
7. Remember the same laws and rules apply
8. Sometimes an official response will be needed
9. When in doubt, pause or ask.

## **6 Expected and accepted behaviours**

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### **If you're a manager**

If you are a manager, familiarise yourself with this document and be prepared to answer questions from your team.

### **If you're an employee**

Ensure you have read these guidelines thoroughly and discuss any queries with your line manager, HR or the Communications team.

Breaching Taunton Deane Borough Council policies and guidance may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

### **If you're a Councillor**

Familiarise yourself with this document and read the accompanying guidance for members appended to this policy. Acting without regard to this policy and guidance may result in a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

## **7 Responsibilities**

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### **Overall responsibility for this policy**

Every Taunton Deane Borough Council staff member and Councillor has a responsibility to adhere to these guidelines.

The Communications team will monitor, review and escalate issues, however, all employees and councillors are encouraged to raise any concerns, queries or questions they have relating to social media use.

### **Updating these guidelines**

These guidelines will be updated annually according to the needs of the organisation, and your input and feedback is welcomed.

### **Contacts**

Debbie Rundle, Media and Communications Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council: 01823 356407 extension 2212.  
Email Debbie: D.Rundle@tauntondeane.gov.uk.

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## APPENDIX B

### Taunton Deane Borough Council Recording Protocol: Third Party Recording of Committees, Boards and Panels:

In accordance with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 recording is allowed at all formal meetings of the authority to enable those not present to see or hear the proceedings either as they take place (or later) and to enable the reporting of those proceedings.

In this Protocol references to:

- 'Recording' covers any means used to record the proceedings including filming, auto-recording and the use of photography.
- 'Reporting' covers the reporting of the business of the meeting via any social media.
- 'Council meetings' covers all formal Full Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings which are open to the press and public to attend and other meetings as agreed at the time by the Council.

Accordingly:

1. Recording and reporting of Council meetings is permitted subject to the requirements set out below.
2. Those wishing to record proceedings should, as a courtesy, inform the chair (or clerk) of the committee of their intentions prior to the beginning of the meeting.
3. Where the Council is notified in advance of an intention to record, the Chairman at the start of the meeting will announce that the meeting or part of it may be recorded by a third party and will ask if any member of the public objects to being recorded. If objections are raised, then the person responsible for the recording must take all reasonable steps to ensure that an individual request not to be recorded is complied with.
4. Recordings may only be taken from the area designated for the public and:
  - Recording devices must be in silent mode
  - No flash or additional lighting is permitted
  - Recordings must be taken from one fixed position and must not obstruct others from observing proceedings.
5. If a meeting includes the consideration of exempt or confidential business then recording must cease prior to the consideration of such business and the recording equipment must be removed from the meeting room for the duration of the consideration of such business. If the person doing the recording is not present then the clerk shall remove the equipment from the meeting room for the consideration of confidential or exempt business.

6. Any person can provide a written commentary during the course of a meeting that falls under this Protocol. Oral commentaries are not permitted within the meeting room during the course of the meeting.

7. The Chairman can require recording to be stopped where:

- The requirements of section 3 above are not met by the person doing the recording
- The press and public are excluded from the meeting due to the nature of (exempt or confidential) business being discussed
- There is public disturbance or a suspension/adjournment of a meeting
- The recording has become disruptive or distracting to the good order and conduct of the meeting
- Where it is considered that continuing the recording might infringe the rights of an individual or intimidate them.

### Rules for use of Recordings by Third Parties

A The law applies to any information recorded and transmitted including the laws on defamation, public order, Human Rights and Data Protection and intellectual property rights. Freedom of speech within the law should also be exercised with personal and social responsibility.

B. Any published recording should be accompanied by a statement of when and where the recording was made, the context of the discussion, and a clear identification of the main speakers and their role or title.

C. Those making recordings must not edit the recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or comments made by attendees. In particular there should be no internal editing of published extracts; recordings may start at any point and end at any point but the material between those points must be complete.

D Those making recordings will be responsible for any breaches of the law resulting from their use of recorded material. The Council takes no responsibility for any recording carried out by a third party or its subsequent use.