## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY/PROTOCOLS FOR CHILTERN AND SOUTH BUCKS DISTRICT COUNCILS – staff

### 1. What is social media?

1.1 'Social media' is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other in various ways, through sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. It involves building online communities or networks, which encourages participation, dialogue and involvement. There are too many social media sites to list but some of the more popular examples are Facebook (social network), Twitter (microblogging), YouTube (content sharing), Flickr, MySpace and LinkedIn.

### 2. What the policy is about

2.1 This policy covers all individuals working at all levels and grades, including senior managers, officers, directors, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, homeworkers, part-time and fixed-term employees, casual and agency staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

2.2 This policy is intended to help staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The Internet is a fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances. However, the principles set out in this document should always be followed.

2.3 Social media provides a number of benefits in which Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council staff may wish to participate. However, when someone clearly identifies their association with Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Councils and/or discusses their work, they are expected to behave appropriately when using social media, and in ways that are consistent with both of the Council's values and policies.

2.4 This policy sets out the principles and standards which Chiltern and/or South Bucks staff are expected to observe when using social media, and 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.

2.5 The intention of this guidance is not to stop Chiltern and/or South Bucks staff from conducting legitimate activities on the Internet through social media, but serves to flag-up those areas in which conflicts can arise.

2.6 This policy supplements the Chiltern District Council 'Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email' which can be found on the intranet within the Information Technology – Policies section http://cdc-intranet/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=148 and supplements the South Bucks District Council 'Acceptable Use Policy' which can be found on the intranet in the Information Management section http://sbdcnet/service_areas/director_of_resources/information_management/default.asp *NB – work is currently taking place on producing a joint Acceptable Use Policy for both councils.*

2.7 This policy supplements both Councils' Data Protection policies.

2.8 It is important that staff are aware that whilst the law regarding the use of social media is currently very fluid, contravention of the advice within this policy could result in

disciplinary or civil action or even prosecution. This applies whether the equipment being used when the policy is breached is council owned or personal property.

2.9 Breach of this policy may be dealt with under the relevant Council's Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

## 3. Why use social media?

3.1 Rather than waiting for a resident / group to approach the council, social media offers the opportunity of being able to connect with the community, listen to what people are saying and engage with them on an equal footing focusing on two-way communications rather than simply delivering messages which we currently focus on via press releases, various newsletters and refuse and recycling email alerts.

3.2 Social media provides further opportunities for councils to communicate with residents, which can lead to:

- Better informed residents.

- Greater involvement with customers.

- Create a new dialogue between residents and the council.

- Better knowledge of our customers and communities.

- Easier access to hard to reach groups like the younger population of Chiltern and South Bucks

## 4. Pros and cons of social media

4.1 Many of the positives have been mentioned above but to add to that social media is:

- Real-time, you could send a message out about a bin collection cancellation and potentially contact thousands in seconds
- Engaging
- Direct
- Free (except officer time)
- Paperless
- Delivered straight to the person who prefers to receive messages electronically

**Cons and potential risks**

- Reputational damage to the council as a result of misuse
- Once information is posted on a social media site it is in the public domain
- Once posted, a message is difficult to remove
- Possibly very time consuming
- Potential legal action against the council or individuals as a result of the posting of unsuitable or restricted content
- Breaches of the Code of Practice for publicity (e.g. 'Purdah' period before an election)

## 5. Examples of messages that social media could be used for (not exhaustive)

**Corporate**
News

Emergency messages
Consultations

**Elections**
Don't lose your vote – deadline alerts
Apply for a postal vote / proxy
Election announcements
Annual canvas messages

**Community Safety**
Timely safety messages e.g. Halloween, Guy Fawkes, and White Ribbon Day
Alert messages – there has been a spate of number plate thefts in your area here's how to
prevent it happening to you.
CSI newsletter is out now
Neighbourhood Watch information / alerts
Campaign message – Bright idea – leave a light on

**Waste**
Promote new services / sites
Bin collection date changes
Bad weather
Recycling messages

**Community**
Promote community events (CDC, SBDC and external events)

**Housing**
Promotion of services e.g. repair grants, HomeChoice

**Planning**
Alerts about planning applications

**Licensing**
Alerts about premises licensing applications

**Personnel**
Job alerts

**Council Tax**
Fraud messages – report benefit cheats
Alerts of local cases of fraud – people claiming to be from Council Tax asking for account
details

**Environmental Health**
Promotion of services
Safety messages – Fireworks, food hygiene

**Buckinghamshire County Council**
Forward on BCC messages which affect Chiltern and South Bucks residents.

**Thames Valley Police**
Forward on TVP messages which affect Chiltern and South Bucks residents.


## 6. Basic Principles of using social media

6.1 The public must be able to trust the integrity of the services at both Chiltern District
and South Bucks District Councils. Our residents need to be confident that the outside

activities of our staff do not undermine each of the Council's reputation and that decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any commercial or personal interests.

6.2 To this end when identified as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks staff member people:

- Should not engage in activities on the Internet which might bring Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Councils into disrepute;
- Should not use the Internet in any way to attack or abuse colleagues;
- Should not post derogatory or offensive comments on the Internet;
- Should not advocate support for a particular political party;
- Should not express views for or against any policy which is a matter of current party political debate;
- Should not advocate any particular position on an issue of current public controversy or debate

6.3 Any online activities associated with work for Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council should be discussed and approved in advance by a senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

## 7. Social Networking Sites

7.1 Social networking sites provide a great way for people to maintain contact with friends, family and customers. However, through the open nature of such sites, it is also possible for third parties to collate vast amounts of information.

7.2 All Chiltern and South Bucks staff should be mindful of the information they disclose on social networking sites. Where they associate themselves with Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council (through providing work details or joining a Chiltern or South Bucks network) they should act in a manner which does not bring Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council into disrepute.

7.3 When a staff member is contacted by the press about posts on their social networking site that relate to Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Councils they should talk to their senior manager (principal officer or head of service) before responding. The press offices at either Council must be consulted with regard to all press contact.

## 8. Political activities on social networking sites

8.1 When staff are using personal social media accounts they are free to engage in political activity unless their post is politically restricted e.g. press officers. However, when they identify themselves as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks staff member on these sites they must make clear what their position is in their work details and state that their views are their own. When using the council's social media accounts staff should not express personal or political views.

## 9. Consideration towards other members of staff when using social networking sites

9.1 Social networking sites allow photographs, videos and comments to be shared with thousands of other users. However, it may not be appropriate to share work-related information in this way.

9.2 For example, there may be an expectation that photographs taken at a private Chiltern or South Bucks event will not appear publicly on the Internet, both from those present and perhaps those not at the event. Staff should be considerate to their colleagues in such

circumstance and should not post information when they have been asked not to. They should also remove information about a colleague if that colleague asks them to do so, immediately.

9.3 Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about Chiltern and/or South Bucks colleagues on the Internet. This may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a disciplinary offence.

## 10. Blogging and Microblogging

10.1 There will be staff who use their personal blogs, and increasingly their microblogs like *Twitter*. This guidance note is not intended to restrict this, as long as confidential information is not revealed.

10.2 Blogs, microblogs or other personal websites which do not identify the blogger as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council employee, do not discuss Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council business and are purely about personal matters would normally fall outside this guidance. However, best practice would be to not mention or refer to a Member or member of staff of either Council in any capacity.

10.3 Staff members who already have a personal blog, microblog or website which indicates in any way that they work at Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

10.4 Similarly, staff members who want to start blogging or microblogging, and wish to say that they work for Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council, should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

10.5 If a blog makes it clear that the author works for Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council, it should include a simple and visible disclaimer such as "these are my personal views and not those of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council".

10.6 Unless there are specific concerns about the nature of their role staff members are free to talk about content on their blogs or microblogs. If in doubt, staff members should consult their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

10.7 Personal blogs, microblogs and websites should not reveal confidential information about Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council. This might include aspects of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council policy or details of internal Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council discussions. If in doubt about what might be confidential, staff members should consult their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

10.8 Personal blogs, microblogs and websites should not be used to attack or abuse colleagues. Staff members should respect the privacy and the feelings of others at all times. Best practice would be to not mention or refer to a Member or member of staff of either Council in any capacity.

10.9 Staff should remember that if they break the law on a blog or microblog (for example by posting something defamatory), they will be personally responsible.

10.10 If a staff member thinks something on their blog, microblog or website gives rise to concerns about a conflict of interest, and in particular concerns about impartiality or confidentiality, this must be discussed with their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

10.11 If a staff member is offered payment to produce a blog or microblog for a third party this could constitute a conflict of interest and must be discussed with their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

10.12 When a staff member is contacted by the press about posts on their blog or tweets on their microblog that relate to Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council they should talk to their senior manager (principal officer or head of service) before responding. The press offices at the relevant Council must be consulted with regard to all press matters.

10.13 Staff members are allowed to update their personal blog or microblog from a Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council computer at work, under the relevant 'Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email'.

## 11. Guidance for Managers on Blogging and Microblogging

11.1 Under this guidance note, managers in each area will decide what is appropriate.

11.2 They should not adopt an unnecessarily restrictive approach. Managers should ensure that any special instructions on blogging or microblogging are reasonable and explained clearly to staff.

11.3 Managers should bear in mind concerns about impartiality, confidentiality, conflicts of interest or commercial sensitivity. In some cases individuals may be dealing with matters which are so sensitive that rules may have to be set on what they can and cannot talk about on their personal blog or microblog.

11.4 Managers should ensure that all staff who will be using social media on behalf of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council are suitably trained to ensure they use it effectively and appropriately (style, tone, language, use of images, 'hash-tagging')

## 12. Third party sites

12.1 It should be clear to users whether a site is a Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council page or a "personal" page.

12.2 The overall parameters, purpose and benchmarks of any project should be discussed with the relevant senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

12.3 Before a site/profile/page is launched, what level of engagement is required, what resources will be needed to achieve it and over what time-frame needs to be agreed with your senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

12.4 You should check online "friends" before approving them and review their comments regularly once approved.

12.5 We should not give users the impression that a particular site will have a longer life than is planned. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to "hand over" a Chiltern or South Bucks page to an online community.

12.6 Any proposal to use a chat room, message board, microblog or social networking site to find contributors must be referred to the relevant senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

12.7 When forwarding or "retweeting" messages, care should be taken that it does not appear that Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council is endorsing a particular opinion.

12.8 Sites aimed at teens should be suitable for that audience. If in doubt, the 'Home Office Task Force Good Practice Guidance on Social Networking' may be consulted.

12.9 Staff should be sensitive to the minimum age requirements on different social networking sites. This is often set at age 13.

12.10 Advertisements on Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council-branded social networking pages should be monitored to check that they are appropriate.

12.11 Before uploading Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council material onto a social networking site, you should make sure that you are aware of, and comfortable with, the site's own terms and conditions.

12.12 The closure or mothballing of a site should be carefully managed to ensure that it does not remain Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council-branded but neglected.

12.13 Managers can consult the relevant 'Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email' for further detail.

## 13. Open Access Online Encyclopaedias

13.1 In the course of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council work, staff may find errors in online encyclopaedias. If staff members edit online encyclopaedias at work the source of the correction will be recorded as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council IP addresses. The intervention may therefore look as if it comes from the Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council themselves. Chiltern and South Bucks staff should therefore act in a manner that does not bring Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council into disrepute and should not post derogatory or offensive comments on any online encyclopaedias.

13.2 When correcting errors about Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council, staff should be transparent about who they are. They should never remove criticism of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council. Instead, the Council should respond to legitimate criticism. Staff should not remove derogatory or offensive comments but must report them to the relevant senior manager (principal officer or head of service) for them to take action.

13.3 Before editing an online encyclopaedia entry about Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council, or any entry which might be deemed a conflict of interest, Chiltern and South Bucks District Council staff should consult the house rules of the site concerned and, if necessary, ask permission from the relevant wikieditor. They may also need to seek advice from their senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

## 14. Process for issuing social media messages

14.1 Requests for corporate social media messages (news items, emergency information) will still be sent to the communications team, who will issue these through the main Council social media accounts. All press releases will be automatically sent out via Twitter.

14.2 Messages which relate directly to a service will be issued by the relevant service social media 'editor'.

14.3 When needed other authority information can also be re-issued, or re-tweeted, e.g. Thames Valley Police messages.

## 15. Style of social media messages

15.1 Many of the social media sites are intended to be fun, as well as informative. Updates are to be as frequent as possible – social media lives or dies by the quality and quantity of updates.

15.2 The style of postings should follow that of the Council's corporate style guidelines, although some abbreviations, for reasons of space may be needed.

15.3 Text speak should be avoided, for example we should always spell out 'you' and not use 'u'.

15.4 Postings to the Chiltern District Council social media sites are seen as representative of the Council and its views. Therefore postings about personal or party political content are not permitted.

15.5 Pictures can be added, where the picture adds value to the posting. Hyperlinks to items on websites for further information can also be included, which can help with the character limitations (for Twitter that is 140 characters).

## 16. Requests for specific service social media accounts

16.1 New social media accounts associated with the Council should only be created following agreement by Management Team to allow a uniformed approach and style.

16.2 The accounts will be the responsibility of the service area in terms of content management and appropriate usage.

## 17. Monitoring use of social media

17.1 Staff should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under the relevant Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

17.2 Senior managers (principal officer or head of service) reserve the right to restrict or prevent access to certain social media sites if they consider personal use to be excessive.

17.3 Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us. It may also cause embarrassment to us and our customers/residents.

17.4 In particular uploading, posting or forwarding a link to any of the following types of material on social media, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):

a) pornographic material (writing, films, pictures, video clips)

b) a false or defamatory statement about any person or organisation

c) material which is offensive, obscene, criminal discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Councils, their customers/residents or their staff

d) confidential information about the Councils or any of its staff or customers/residents (which staff do not have express authority to disseminate)

e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for the member of staff or the Councils); or

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 relevant Council's Disciplinary Procedure and is likely to result in summary dismissal.

17.5 Where evidence of misuse if found the relevant senior manager (principal officer/head of service) may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the relevant Council's Disciplinary 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.

17.6 If a member of staff notices any use of social media by other staff or Members in breach of this policy they should report it to their senior manager (principal officer/head of service).

17.7 Monthly monitoring reports will be provided to Management Team by the Head of Business Support but the handling of any misuse or abuse of the social media accounts will be the responsibility of the relevant senior manager (principal officer or head of service).

17.8 In addition the Communications Team will monitor social media comments about the Council on a weekly basis, and more often if the level of activity in social media becomes significant, for example due to high profile events or incidents.

## 18. How social media will be used at South Bucks District Council (from July 2013)

18.1 All requests for social media messages are currently sent to the communications team, who issue these through the main Council social media webpages and respond to messages.

18.2 To bring the two Council's policies into line the communications team at South Bucks will continue to issue corporate messages, news items and emergency information via social media. All press releases will continue to be automatically considered for issuing via Social Media.

18.3 Messages which relate directly to a service will be issued by the relevant service social media 'editor' as referred to in *'How social media will be used at Chiltern District Council' point 19.2 below.*

18.4 When needed other authority information will also be re-issued, or re-tweeted, e.g. Thames Valley Police messages by either the relevant service or the communications team.

18.5 The process of using social media including training and identification of suitable 'editors' (recommendation from senior manager or head of service), style of messages, requests for specific service social media accounts and monitoring will the same as for Chiltern District Council and vice-versa.

## 19. How social media will be used at Chiltern District Council (from July 2013)

19.1 On a trial basis Facebook and Twitter accounts will be set up for four services (waste, community, community safety, democratic services). This is in addition to the @ChilternCouncil Twitter account which is managed by the communications team. If new social media tools rise in popularity, Management Team will consider setting up new social media sites on a case by case basis.

19.2 Each service area will need to identify who in the team will be the social media 'editors' (ideally two per service) and this network of people will operate in the same style as the web editors with the communications team being the 'managing editor'. Each 'editor' will be required to undertake social media training and to sign that they have agreed to the social media policy before they are given access to the social media accounts.

## 20. Review of the use social media at Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils

20.1 The Principal Officer for Policy, Performance and Communications will report back to Management Team every six months with details on the how effective social media is being for both Council's business.

20.2 Any other issues relating to the use of social media during the preceding six months will be dealt with by the appropriate senior manager (principal officer or head of service) using the relevant Council policies i.e. the 'Social Media Policy', the 'Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email' and/or the 'Disciplinary Policy' in the first instance.

**ENDS**