

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY/PROTOCOLS FOR CHILTERN AND SOUTH BUCKS DISTRICT COUNCILS - Members

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 Social media provides a number of benefits in which Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council Members 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.

2.2 This policy/protocol guidance note sets out the principles which Chiltern and/or South Bucks Members are expected to follow when using social media including blogs, microblogs like *Twitter* and other personal webspace. It applies to all Members, regardless to status or position.

2.3 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.

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

2.5 It is important that Members 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 (under the Members Code of Conduct), civil action or even prosecution. This applies whether the equipment being used when the policy is breached is council owned or personal property.

2.6 Members should also be aware that if they use social media in a libellous or defamatory fashion the Councils would not be able to defend their actions as it would be deemed their personal responsibility.

2.7 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.

2.8 This policy supplements both Councils' Data Protection policies.

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.

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

- Better informed residents.
- Greater involvement with customers.
- Create a new dialogue between residents and Members.
- 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
- 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 it's 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. Basic Principles of using social media

5.1 The public must be able to trust the integrity of the Members of both Chiltern District and South Bucks District Councils. Our residents need to be confident that the outside activities of Members do not undermine either of the Council's reputations and that decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any commercial or personal interests.

5.2 To this end when identified as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks 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 unless making it clear that the views expressed are their own;
- Should not express views for or against any policy which is a matter of current party political debate unless making it clear that the views expressed are their own; ;
- Should not advocate any particular position on an issue of current public controversy or debate unless making it clear that the views expressed are their own;

6. Social Networking Sites

6.1 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.

6.2 All Chiltern Members 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.

6.3 When a 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 the press offices at either Council before responding.

7. Political activities on social networking sites

7.1 When Members are using personal social media accounts they are free to engage in political activity. However, when they identify themselves as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks Member on these sites they must make clear what their position on the Council is and state that their views are their own. When using the Council's social media accounts Members should not express personal or political views.

8. Consideration towards other Members and staff when using social networking sites

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

8.2 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. Members 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.

8.3 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 (under the Members Code of Conduct).

9. Blogging and Microblogging

9.1 There will be Members 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.

9.2 Blogs, microblogs or other personal websites which do not identify the blogger as a Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council Member, that do not discuss Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council business and are purely about personal matters would normally fall outside this guidance.

9.3 Members who already have a personal blog, microblog or website which indicates in any way that they are a Member of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the Chief Executive and/or the Leader of the Council.

9.4 Similarly, Members who want to start blogging or microblogging, and wish to say that they are a Member for Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council, should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the Chief Executive/Leader of the Council.

9.5 If a blog makes it clear that the author is a Member of 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".

9.6 Unless there are specific concerns about the nature of their role Members are free to talk about content on their blogs or microblogs. If in doubt, Members should consult the Chief Executive and/or Leader of the Council.

9.7 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, Members should consult the Chief Executive and/or Leader of the Council.

9.8 Personal blogs, microblogs and websites should not be used to attack or abuse colleagues. Members should respect the privacy and the feelings of others.

9.9 Remember also that if Members break the law on a blog or microblog (for example by posting something defamatory), they will be personally responsible.

9.10 If a 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 the Chief Executive and/or Leader of the Council.

9.11 If a 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 the Chief Executive and/or Leader of the Council.

9.12 When a 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 the press office at the relevant Council before responding.

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

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

10. Third party sites

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

10.2 The overall parameters, purpose and benchmarks of any project must be discussed with Leader of the Council or in their absence, the Deputy Leader.

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

10.4 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.

10.5 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.

10.6 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.

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

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

10.9 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.

10.10 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.

10.11 When required other authority information can re-issued, or re-tweeted, e.g. Thames Valley Police messages by Members.

10.12 Members can consult the relevant 'Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email' for further detail if required.

11. Open Access Online Encyclopaedias (most common is Wikipedia)

11.1 In the course of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council work, Members may find errors in online encyclopaedias. If Members edit online encyclopaedias using Council equipment 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 Members 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.

11.2 When correcting errors about Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council, Members should be transparent about who they are. They should never remove criticism of Chiltern and/or South Bucks District Council. Instead, they should respond to legitimate criticism. Members should not remove derogatory or offensive comments but must report them to the Chief Executive and/or Leader of the Council for them to take action.

11.3 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 Members 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 Chief Executive and/or Leader of the Council.

12. Style of social media messages

12.1 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.

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

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

12.4 Postings to the Chiltern District and South Bucks 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.

12.5 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).

13. Monitoring use of social media

13.1 Members 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 Members Code of Conduct.

13.2 Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Member and the Council. It may also cause embarrassment to us and our customers/residents. (see also 1.6)

13.3 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 disciplinary action under the Members Code of Conduct (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 Members Code of Conduct.

13.4 Where evidence of misuse is found the Chief Executive/Leader of the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

13.5 If a Member notices any use of social media by other Members or members of staff in breach of this policy they should report it to the Chief Executive/Leader of the Council.

13.6 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.

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

14.1 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.

ENDS