Social Media Strategy

April 2020

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1. Introduction

1.1   Social media is a valuable tool for the public sector; with 67% of the UK population using social media, it is vital that Buckinghamshire Council has a social media presence.

1.2   A council's social media presence provides visibility and recognition in an online space, ensuring residents know that the council exists and what the core business is so that services are accountable to council taxpayers. It plays an important role in the way the council presents itself to internal and external stakeholders and offers opportunities for positive PR to bigger and more varied audiences.

1.3   Social media enables a council to communicate directly with people in the community and beyond, often instantly and for very little money.

1.4   Online communities are reflective of offline communities, and if this online community is supportive of and works with the council, it can help the council to achieve its objectives offline.

1.5   This strategy aims to determine how Buckinghamshire Council will use social media to support the overall vision and objectives of the Council.

1.6   It identifies the social media platforms Buckinghamshire Council will use, establishes how each channel can be used most effectively, and recommends a suitable approach to content creation and publication, as well as security and governance.

1.7   There are various ways for organisations to approach social media use. Some organisations might broadcast information only and rarely respond to followers (for example media companies like ITV and BBC), some use humour to build and engage with audiences (for example the Museum of English Rural Life), some have dozens of hyper-local accounts run by frontline staff (for example Metropolitan Police) and others share content that at first glance is not explicitly relevant to their brand, but helps build a following (for example Innocent Smoothies).

1.8   At Buckinghamshire Council, our social media strategy will focus on; community, customer service and reputation.

2. Community and localism

2.1   Social media will be used to inform, consult and involve local people. It supports the Council's vision of engagement with residents, partners and stakeholders that is meaningful, timely, inclusive and direct.

2.2   Social media will be used to provide residents with information and news about council services and direct them to the resources they need, or encourage them to participate in certain behaviours and actions. In emergency situations, social media can be used to quickly get a message out to warn and inform.

2.3   Social media is a valuable device for obtaining genuine feedback, especially from harder to reach audiences, and will be used by Buckinghamshire Council to enable local people to help shape proposals that will affect the services they use and deliver or the areas where they live and work. It will help us to hear the voices of those most affected and hear a balance of views.

2.4   Social media makes it easy for the council to be accessible to many people; the 67% of the population who use social media can contact the council and get involved in their local community by using the smartphone in their pocket.

2.5   Social media use at Buckinghamshire Council will embed the Council in the online community and offer an opportunity for local people to get involved digitally.

3. Customer service

3.1   Social media can be used as another customer service channel, providing an additional way for residents to contact the Council, in a way which is convenient for them and likely to be more efficient than traditional channels.

3.2   Social media at Buckinghamshire Council will have a strong customer focus, helping to make services accessible and offering residents a choice of engaging with the Council online.

3.3   Residents already contact organisations online with service requests, whether it's an agreed or advertised method of customer service or not, so it's important that Buckinghamshire Council is equipped to handle these enquiries.

4. Reputation

4.1   Residents are already talking about the Council on social media, therefore it is imperative to seize the opportunity and join the conversation. Buckinghamshire Council will participate in 'social listening'; using social media to gather feedback and opinions from our residents and stakeholders and identify and respond to issues and concerns.

4.2   Social media will be used to enhance the Council's image and reputation by sharing positive news stories. This will position the Council as an industry leader and employer of choice, and support the Council's five-year ambition to win the best council award.

4.3   A council's social media presence offers employees a way to identify with the organisation online and become online 'brand ambassadors', further enhancing the reputation of the council and its position within the community, and nurturing the image of the council as a desirable place to work; attracting the best candidates for employment, which will ultimately improve the effectiveness of the council in delivering excellent services.

4.4   The key to all of the above is having a large, engaged social media following which links into an even bigger network. A council may only have 100 Twitter followers, but if each of those followers is influential in the local area, and have for example 5,000 followers each, they could potentially share the council's message to over 500,000 people between them.

4.5   This strategy sits under the Communications Strategy for Buckinghamshire Council. Details about the operational tactics for social media use at the Council follow in the social media policies and guide (appendices iii and iv).

5. Social media aims:

- To support the overall communications objectives of Buckinghamshire Council

- To embed Buckinghamshire Council in online communities

- To enable effective, timely, two-way engagement with residents

- To give local communities greater influence, empowering residents to get involved in the council and their community in a way that's convenient for them

- To support localism within Buckinghamshire

- To provide excellent customer service via social media channels

- To promote the council as an industry leader and employer of choice

- To promote Buckinghamshire as a great place to live, work and visit, and a county of which everyone is proud to be a part

- To champion the county's voice on local and national issues

- To position the council as a forward-thinking, dynamic and digitally focused local authority

- To make best use of resources by effectively utilising the relatively inexpensive communication tool of social media

- To demonstrate public support for our partners, developing relationships and encouraging collaboration.

6. Social media objectives:

- The social media strategy objectives will support Buckinghamshire Council's business objectives and overall communications objectives. Therefore these will be added to this strategy once they have been set by Buckinghamshire Council. The strategy and objectives will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure it continues to support Buckinghamshire Council's objectives, and to incorporate any new social media platforms or emerging trends.

- Retain audiences. District followers are dual followers (identified) so aim for year one is to maintain this number and there is a risk of losing them through confusion. Already growing at 100 a month, would like to retain current figure and maintain growth rate of 100 a month. Year 2 will be focused on growth Grow engaged audiences for Buckinghamshire Council social media accounts; this will be measured qualitatively and quantitatively (see notes on evaluation). The quantitative objective is to achieve a combined total of 40,000 followers across all the main corporate social media channels by December 2020.*

- Embed Buckinghamshire Council in the local online communities; this will be measured by engagement rates, and this will vary depending on the objective of each campaign / post – each campaign will have to set objectives with engagement rates with Twitter posts achieving an average engagement rate of 3%, rising to 5% for video posts.** CHANGE THIS

- Acknowledge all customer service enquiries within one working day.

* 40,000 is approximately double of the number of social media followers of Bucks County Council across all social media channels in 2019.
**Average engagement rate for a Facebook post in the UK is 3.82%, rising to 6.96% for video posts.

7. Audience research and channels summary

7.1 There are several different social media platforms popular in the UK, each with different functions and attracting different user demographics.

7.2 Evidence from the district and county councils' social media accounts and experience of the communications teams has helped to inform this research.

7.3 Buckinghamshire Council will use a selection of the social media platforms available; those most used by our communities, most appropriate to our purpose and most effective for our communication needs. Directing our resources to the channels most-used by the resident groups we are trying to communicate with rather than attempting to have a presence on all social media platforms regardless of their effectiveness or relevance to the Council is the recommended strategy. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Nextdoor are thought to cover all of our target audiences who use social media, with significant overlap.

7.4 To use social media effectively to deliver communications objectives, consideration must be given to the audience we are trying to reach and which channel would be most appropriate. The best time of day to post and the language and style to use also differs depending on the audience. Best practice for content creation for each platform features in the social media guide (appendix iv). Posting appropriate content for the demographic using the social media platform will also help to grow followers and reach, rather than risking losing followers who don't like or are unfamiliar with the style of content.

7.5 The demographic of each social media platform is expected to age within the platform; the so-called 'generational shift'. Behaviours suggest people won't change to a different type of social media as they get older, but the social media will adapt with its ageing demographic. Newer trends will host younger audiences. Buckinghamshire Council will review our use of channels and their audiences annually in order to keep abreast of social media trends and evolution.

7.6 Social media is designed to be a two-way conversation, so although producing proactive content is important, it's also vital that we listen to residents on social media and respond to them. Not only service requests, but having conversations, answering general questions and showing support for and interest in things which are happening in our residents' lives and the wider community are all essential. Social media should not just be a broadcast channel; for Buckinghamshire Council it isn't 'follow us' on social media, it's 'talk to us'.

7.7 Content will be tailored appropriately for each different social media channel. However, the overall tone, language and style will be consistent across all channels and reflect the Council's values and aims and overall image. Consistency across the channels is important so that residents, stakeholders and wider audiences can recognise the Council no matter which platform they interact with us on; whether it's over the phone in customer service or via an Instagram comment.

7.8 Regular training will be provided by the Communications Team to all members of staff who use social media on behalf of the Council, including the customer services team.

Overview of social media channels and intended use

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	YouTube	Nextdoor
Purpose for Council	Community presence, share news and information, promote events and services, alerts	'Brand awareness' showcase of council and council involvement in community	Brand awareness and loyalty, sharing news and events, live/quick updates on urgent topics	Recruitment, celebrating professional success and promoting business activities	'Shop window', to share council news and info and video library	Engagement with residents, hyper-localised content
Audience	35-65 year olds, predominantly female	18-44 years old 60% female	25-54 year olds, 54% female	25-55 year olds, 60% male, professionals and jobseekers	13-35 year olds 50/50 male and female	45+ years old, not on other social media, community minded
Style	Friendly, informal, fun, reassuring and informative	Friendly, informal, slang, fun	Friendly, informal, accessible language, emojis, authoritative when necessary	Formal but not stuffy, sleek, professional	Fun, informal, current	More formal but still friendly, clear and concise
Main type of content	Video, photos, text, short and snappy, engaging	Photos, videos of scenes and events around Bucks, behind the scenes at council	Visual assets such as images, videos, GIFs	Job ads, business news, events	Video only; how-to videos, informative, entertainment	Clear, engaging posts, with video and photos
Best time to post	Any time but peaks early mornings, 3/4pm, evenings	Early morning or evenings, every day	During the week, early mornings and evenings peak times	Monday – Thursday, daytime and evenings	Evenings and weekends, but consistent times	Any time due to longevity of posts

8. Facebook

8.1 Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the UK and is an important one for Buckinghamshire Council.

8.2 The primary vision and purpose of Facebook is community, which aligns with one of Buckinghamshire Council's strategic priorities; 'fostering healthy, vibrant and resilient communities that people contribute to and enjoy'.

8.3 Facebook is Buckinghamshire's main online community, and Buckinghamshire Council will become part of that online community.

8.4 This will be achieved through engaging in conversation with residents, answering questions and giving information and advice.

8.5 Facebook will also be used to support the Council's localism agenda. Tens of thousands of Buckinghamshire residents are part of Facebook local community groups. Rather than trying to create our own new community groups from scratch, we will use the active community groups that already exist, and share our posts in these groups. We will build relationships with the administrators of these groups so they can share our information with a ready-made, engaged audience. Where the group settings allow, we will directly interact with the groups as Buckinghamshire Council. This will enable the Council to share local news and information and engage with smaller communities.

8.6 We will not sit separately from the local Facebook community; we want to be at the heart of it, joining in with the conversations that are already happening and making meaningful contributions to the existing online local communities.

8.7 Monitoring local groups and pages is resource-intensive and it is accepted that it is not possible to see or respond to every comment and conversation in these local groups. This should not be seen as a problem or a deterrent to attempting to engage at all.

8.8 Via Facebook, the Council will strive to be part of the conversation, but not an all-seeing 'Big Brother' figure. It is recognised that residents can share their opinions on Facebook without the Council replying to everything.

8.9 Buckinghamshire Council's main Facebook page will be used to share the majority of content, with smaller groups or event pages linked to the page considered occasionally for specific needs.

8.10 The corporate page will share localised content by using hashtags for the location such as #Aylesbury and #Beaconsfield, and targeted geographical ads, as well as relying on Facebook algorithms to deliver relevant content to Facebook users based on their location.

8.11 Targeted paid-for Facebook posts can also be used to capture a specific geographical area or residents with particular interests.

8.12 Video is an effective means of communicating on Facebook and should always have subtitles as most people browse social media on a mobile device with the sound off. Live streaming, live polls and Q&As all promote interactivity. Content will be a mixture of light-hearted, fun but informative posts, and more serious updates.

9. **Twitter**

9.1   Twitter is about breaking news, up to the minute information and a steady stream of updates.

9.2   Positive news stories about Buckinghamshire Council and local residents, information about local events and things to do, weather, road, transport and emergency updates are all important to share on Twitter.

9.3   Residents are not the only people likely to follow the council on Twitter; local news outlets, businesses and stakeholders are likely to follow the council on Twitter too.

9.4   It's a very effective platform for quick conversations with the community.

9.5   Twitter is also a great way of showing support and involvement for seasonal, religious and topical calendar events or campaigns, and sharing updates on important projects and developments.

9.6   Twitter is a particularly effective way of building digital relationships with partners, which enhances offline relationships. Achieving the best outcomes for our communities requires joined-up thinking and working collaboratively with our partners is critical to this.

9.7   We will share and engage with tweets from partners including health and care organisations, emergency services, the voluntary and community sector, armed forces community, housing providers, educational establishments, businesses, town and parish councils and local MPs. Coordinated social media campaigns with these partners can be an effective way of tackling key issues and driving change.

9.8   Building a captive audience on Twitter requires active participation in the Twitter community, sharing relevant content from partners and joining in with appropriate trends.

9.9   Twitter is particularly important as a customer services channel as the majority of enquiries will come through this platform, and Twitter users can expect prompt, professional and helpful responses from Buckinghamshire Council.

10. **Instagram**

10.1   Instagram is the most popular social media channel for millennials (people aged 22 – 39), and although it's usually fun and light-hearted, there is room for more serious content and calls to action too.

10.2   For Buckinghamshire Council, Instagram provides an opportunity to use high quality photos and videos to connect with a younger audience, encourage community participation and responsible citizenship. Instagram will be used to generate interest in local democracy, targeting the next generation of voters.

10.3   Instagram will also be used for place branding and marketing, fostering a sense of pride in the community, and promoting Buckinghamshire as a great place to live, work and visit.

10.4   Suitable content would be sights and scenes from around the county, promotion of local events and things to do, good news stories from the council and community, highlighting seasonal, religious and topical calendar events, and updates on major planning or building developments.

10.5   Instagram is a great place to visually showcase some of the amazing things the council is involved in, however it's important to avoid trying to push services/or content which could

be irrelevant to that audience. Instagram is a place for beautiful, striking imagery, and not usually for direct sales unless you know your audience want to buy the product/service.

10.6 Bucks County Council's HR team used Instagram as a recruitment tool and this will continue as Buckinghamshire Council.

11. LinkedIn

11.1 LinkedIn is a platform for showcasing the council as a leading organisation and employer. It is a way for staff and councillors to network with each other and with stakeholders and professionals across industries in Buckinghamshire and beyond.

11.2 The best type of content is job adverts, business and council news, event promotions and election news.

11.3 The Communications Team will have oversight of the account, but the HR team will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the page, including administering job advertisements on the site.

11.4 Staff and Members are encouraged to write blog posts and share articles on their own LinkedIn pages, which can then be shared on the Buckinghamshire Council corporate page to encourage conversation, promote the Council as an industry leader and desirable employer and build a network of local authority professionals.

12. YouTube

12.1 YouTube is the biggest social media platform in the UK. Its audience is a younger demographic, so effective use of this channel offers a way to communicate and engage with this younger audience.

12.2 However, content has to be tailored appropriately. The best type of content on YouTube is comedy, how-to videos, pop culture and entertainment.

12.3 Not all council subject matter will lend itself to a YouTube video, but with a bit of creativity and willing councillors and officers, many topics can be transformed into YouTube videos for this audience.

12.4 YouTube can also be used as a depositary for videos produced for other social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.

12.5 It will not be the focus for Buckinghamshire Council's social media activity but should be considered as a suitable channel for some more youth-focused campaigns and messages.

13. Nextdoor

13.1 Nextdoor is a hyper-local social media network with an older demographic than other channels.

13.2 Residents who use Nextdoor want to hear about things that affect them in their neighbourhood such as information about waste services, roadworks, consultations, planning or building developments and libraries.

13.3 Good news stories, local events and initiatives are also well-received, including information about anything that generally could impact quality of life and safety.

14. Snapchat and other social media channels

14.1 Snapchat is incredibly popular with younger people, but does not lend itself to effective use by public sector organisations. This is because users (90% of whom are aged 13-24), don't typically follow authority organisations on Snapchat; it's a fun social media for sharing photos and videos with their friends.

14.2 Communicating with this age group would be more appropriate through schools' networks and youth workers or other social media channels.

14.3 However, one-off uses like geo-filters for events can be an effective means of engaging with this audience occasionally.

14.4 Social media is always evolving and new channels are created all the time.

14.5 The Communications Team will monitor new channels and update the strategy accordingly and staff across the Council are encouraged to have an input and share their ideas too.

15. Customer service enquiries via social media channels

15.1 Buckinghamshire Council will have a strong customer focus, and services will be accessible to everyone. Social media provides another way for residents to contact the Council with service enquiries. Whilst some people value talking to someone face to face, many people like to access information or services online.

15.2 Using social media monitoring tools, customer enquiries can be assigned to the relevant teams, either to answer them directly or to provide a response for use by the communications officer. Enquiries should be dealt with promptly and with the same high standards as staff would apply to enquiries received via any other channel.

15.3 Customer services staff with access to social media will be provided with regular training by the Communications Team.

16. Members' use of social media

16.1 Members are encouraged to establish and manage their own social media accounts. This helps members to engage with residents and be open, transparent and democratically accountable to them.

16.2 Members will be offered social media training organised by the Communications Team and given the social media policy and guide for reference.

16.3 To foster a sense of community, Buckinghamshire Council corporate accounts may share or engage with posts from Members on social media.

16.4 Members are responsible for their own social media accounts and must adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct at all times. This is covered in more detail in the social media policy (appendix iii)

17. Staff use of social media

17.1   All staff are encouraged to be ambassadors of Buckinghamshire Council and, just as we welcome staff sharing stories of events and developments in a way that supports the organisation, we also appreciate staff sharing and engaging with the council's social media content in a positive way.

17.2   Staff are not expected to defend the organisation on social media if they see comments criticising the council and instead should alert the Communications Team so they so they can issue a corporate response if appropriate. Staff use of social media is covered in more detail in the staff social media policy (appendix iii)

18. Branding

18.1   The new social media accounts will feature Buckinghamshire Council branding. The correct logos, headers and cover photos, as well as contact information must be in place before a channel is launched.

19. Social media software

19.1   Social media will be managed by the Communications Team via a social media management system. The preferred option is CrowdControlHQ which was used by Buckinghamshire County Council.

19.2   Monitoring tools available include individual social media platform analytics for example Facebook pixel, Google analytics and social media monitoring software.

20. Evaluation

20.1   There are many ways to measure social media activity, but producing meaningful evaluation is more challenging. For example, the number of followers on a Twitter account alone doesn't tell you how many of these followers live in the county, or how many of them read your tweets.

20.2   The engagement on a Facebook post could be extremely high, but all the comments could be negative about the council. Even looking at sentiment doesn't necessarily provide an accurate picture; a message about the death of a councillor could result in hundreds of comments with 'negative' sentiment, but this is because they are comments from people giving their condolences and sharing their sorrow, and doesn't mean this is a 'negative' engagement.

20.3   Therefore, the best way to evaluate social media activity at the council is to use a combination of key performance indicators, making use of the data and analytics available, but with a human interpretation of this information, combining both quantitative and qualitative success measures.

20.4   Social media activity will be measured and evaluated on a monthly basis with a report produced for each social media account. A highlights report will be shared with the rest of the organisation in order to encourage staff participation in social media and inspire staff to become brand ambassadors.

20.5   The evaluation will inform future social media activity, with adjustments being made to improve our approach and ensure we are achieving our objectives.

21. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- Number of followers; this will be particularly important during the first year of the Council, but does not tell the whole story

- Engagement: Shares, views, comments

- Sentiment

- Customer service enquiries handled

- Subsequent press coverage

- Website visits / link clicks

21.1 Each channel may have its own additional KPIs, as will different campaigns and event promotions.

22. Equality and accessibility / inclusion

22.1 Buckinghamshire Council is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good relations, and eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation through its roles as an employer, service provider, commissioner of services, educator, partner and community leader, and this will be reflected in the Council's social media use.

22.2 Via our social media channels we will positively promote equality and diversity within our workforce and across the services we are responsible for.

22.3 We will ensure our social media content is accessible and inclusive; this means using subtitles and audio, appropriate language and imagery.

22.4 We recognise, respect and celebrate the fact that our staff and the people we serve are all different, whether this is in our ethnic background, family setting, gender, religion and belief or other factors. We believe that diversity can drive innovation, a culture of fairness and respect and equality of opportunity for all.

22.5 We will use our social media channels to promote diversity and equality in everything we do to improve the quality of life of everyone living in, working in and visiting Buckinghamshire.

23. Policy and governance

23.1 The Communications Team will manage a database of passwords and social media users. All social media users will be required to participate in regular training.

23.2 All social media accounts will have 'rules of conduct' in place for followers and an escalation policy, along with standard responses to FAQs and a content calendar to include events, awareness days and campaigns.

23.3 The process for crisis communications will be covered in the Council's Emergency Plan, but as a general rule, in the event of a crisis, all scheduled non-essential social media messages will be postponed and the lead communications or media officer running the crisis response will direct the messages that need to be issued on social media.

23.4   The Communications Team manages the Council's social media presence in its entirety, but recognising that there are some accounts for specific business cases or services which will be run on a day-to-day basis by 'frontline' staff.

23.5   Although there are other channels for specific business cases, in general service area or team accounts will be limited and the corporate accounts, with their wider reach, will be used. This is to control the corporate message and branding and to avoid inundating the public with new social media accounts. Lack of joined up messaging across all service areas in the council will result in misinformation and confusion amongst stakeholders and undermine sense of ownership.

23.6   Content creation and management of social media channels is time-consuming, so publishing all content on the main council channels will be the most effective use of time and resources for maximum impact.

23.7   Service areas can request their own social media account from the Communications Team and will need to fill in a business case request before this is approved (see appendix ii).

23.8   Opening a new social media account might be appropriate if there will be a return for the significant time invested in social media. More often than not, using the corporate accounts which are well-resourced and have an existing audience is the best tactic. The communications manager will make the final decision on approving the opening of new accounts.

23.9   See appendix iii for staff and Member social media policies.

24. Conclusion

24.1   Social media can be a valuable tool for delivering Buckinghamshire Council's objectives, enhancing the reputation of the council, embedding it in the community and offering excellent customer service.

24.2   We know from monitoring that residents are already talking about the existing councils on social media channels; therefore it is imperative to seize the opportunity and join the conversation as the new Buckinghamshire Council.

24.3   Strategic use of social media will ensure good engagement with residents, better customer service and wider sharing of information on services most important to customers.

24.4   To do this effectively, social media must be well researched, well planned, regularly monitored and closely evaluated.

24.5   Buckinghamshire Council's vision and values will be reflected in the approach to social media, including the style and tone of social media content.

24.6   Our social media focus is on being part of an online community that enables local people to easily engage with the council and get involved, on enhancing our reputation as an employer, a service provider and a county, and on providing excellent customer service.

24.7   The strategy will evolve with the objectives for the Buckinghamshire Council and the overall communications strategy.

Appendix i

Social media handles for new council - reserved

Instagram

@BuckinghamshireCouncil

@BucksCouncil

Twitter

@BucksCouncil

Facebook

Handle: @BucksCouncil

Page name: Buckinghamshire Council

Page ID: 2070328539677218

Social media handles for new council - reserved

Appendix ii

Request for a new social media account

Name

Job role

Team / department

Line manager

Head of Service

What social media account/s are you requesting?

What will be the aim of the account/s?

What are the account's objectives?

Please indicate why the Buckinghamshire Council corporate social media accounts would not meet your needs

What is your content plan for the first six months of the account/s? Please give details such as campaigns, events, key messages, photos and videos.

What is your plan for gaining followers and how many do you aim to have after a year?

Who will be responsible for managing the accounts?

How many hours a week will each person named above commit to managing the accounts?

Suggested username / handle for the account:

I understand that if a social media account is approved I will be required to:

- Attend a social media training workshop with the Communications Team
- Submit a weekly evaluation report of the account to the Communications Team
- Conduct a quarterly review of the account and use it to update and improve your content plan
- Share passwords and user details with the Communications Team
- Take responsibility for security and governance of the account/s, including changing the password regularly, reporting safeguarding issues and monitoring the account

Signature

Line manager's signature   **Date**

Appendix iii

Buckinghamshire Council Social Media Policy

Appendix iv

Buckinghamshire Council Social Media Guide