

# BLAENHONDDAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL



## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY** Adopted by Council 25 April 2022

### **Introduction**

The world is experiencing big changes in the way individuals, organisations, government and businesses communicate and how information is created and owned, as well as the speed in which it can be shared. Social media is changing the way people live, work and even speak and think, and provides an opportunity for the Council to extend its engagement with a wide range of individuals and partners.

Social media is a blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia tools that are used for creating content and two-way communication. They can be accessed using a smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or smart TV. Social media accounts are free of charge and can be set up quickly and easily from an Internet page, reaching a wide audience and the benefits for the Council could be significant.

### **1. Policy Statement**

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help employees and Members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as social networking websites, forums, message boards, blogs or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires employees and Members to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the use of social media will be monitored and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

### **2. The Scope of the Policy**

- 2.1. All employees and Members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.

- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3. Breach of this policy by Members will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

### **3. Responsibility for Implementation of the Policy**

- 3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council and its work.
- 3.3. All employees and Members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or to the Chair of the Council.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

### **4. Using Social Media Sites in the Name of the Council**

- 4.1. All staff and Members are permitted to post material on a social media website but should not do so in the name of the Council and on its behalf. In any event, any post regarding the Council should be consistent with the rules and scope of this policy.
- 4.2. **If there is any doubt as to whether comments are appropriate they should not be posted until checked with the Clerk.**

### **5. Using Social Media**

- 5.1. The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and the support and services it provides to the community. It also recognises the importance of employees and Members helping to shape community conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
  - a) Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council all individuals must have read and understood this policy
  - b) Employees must have gained prior written approval to do so from the Clerk.

### **6. Rules for Use of Social Media**

Anyone permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, must adhere to the following general rules:

- 6.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

- 6.2. Any employee/Member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by materials posted or uploaded by a colleague on to a social media website should inform the Clerk.
- 6.3. Commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information should never be disclosed. If there is any doubt as to whether information to be shared falls within one of these categories, it should be discussed with the Clerk.
- 6.4. Any content belonging to a third party should not be uploaded, posted or forwarded unless that third party's consent has been obtained.
- 6.5. Before including a link to a third-party website, the terms and conditions of that website should be checked to ensure that it permits its inclusion.
- 6.6. When making use of any social media platform, employees and Members must read and ensure compliance with its terms of use.
- 6.7. Employees and Members should be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact a contribution might make to people's perception of the Council.
- 6.8. An individual is personally responsible for content published by them into social media tools.
- 6.9. Employees and Members should not escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.10. There should be no discussion of colleagues without their prior approval.
- 6.11. Individuals should always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory, e.g., politics and religion. Although it is acceptable for Members to make political points or canvas votes via their own personal social media accounts, those will not be permissible if commenting on behalf of the Council.
- 6.12. Individuals should avoid publishing contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people who were not intended to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

## **7. Monitoring Use of Social Media Websites**

- 7.1. Employees and Members should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Disciplinary Procedure and councillors under the Code of Conduct.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the individual and the Council.
- 7.3. In particular, a serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct/breach of the Code of Conduct (this list is not exhaustive):
  - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature).

- b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation.
- c) material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, its councillors or its employees.
- d) confidential information about the Council or anyone else.
- e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, whether for the individual or the organisation); 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 Disciplinary Procedure/Code of Conduct.

- 7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation, 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.
- 7.5. If anyone notices any use of social media by other employees/Members in breach of this policy, it should be reported to the Clerk/Chair.

## **8. Monitoring and Review of this Policy**

- 8.1. The Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Further information for Members, published by the Welsh Local Government Association, on the use of social media can be made available on request.