Social Media Policy - Guidance for Members and Officers
Report by Head of Communications

Summary: The Authority is increasingly using online communications channels to communicate and engage with stakeholders and the public. There is a need to put in place a **Social Media Policy – Guidelines for Members and Officers** so that the ever expanding range of social media channels can be used appropriately by officers and Members for both corporate and private accounts. This is of particular importance to nurture and protect the positive reputation of the Authority.

Recommendation:

That the Broads Authority formally adopts the Social Media Policy – Guidelines for Members and Officers.

1 Background

1.1 The Broads Authority is embracing social media as a means of communicating and engaging with stakeholders and the public. The use of social media is becoming an increasingly vital element of our communications strategy. This is reflected in the appointment of a Communications Officer with specific responsibility for digital communication and social media earlier this year.

1.2 The Authority has developed corporate accounts which are growing in popularity with increasing numbers of followers who are 'liking' and sharing content to their own networks. Members and Officers also have their own personal social media accounts. In some cases individuals may choose to state that they are employees or Members of the Authority within their personal accounts or may express and attract views that do not reflect those of the Authority.

1.3 It is important to offer guidance so that
- Corporate accounts are managed to ensure consistency and accuracy of messaging, style of content and speed of response. This is of particular importance in emergency situations where people need information from a trusted, credible source
- There is a clear distinction between corporate Broads Authority accounts and personal accounts
- There is a clear distinction between the personal views of officers and Members and information from the Authority

- Members and Officers have a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities regarding their personal and professional use of social media
- Members and Officers are aware of the potential pitfalls and legal issues that can be encountered
- The positive reputation of the Authority is nurtured and protected

1.4   The Social Media Policy – Guidelines for Members and Officers has been prepared and drafted in consultation and with input from the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer.

2   Related policies and procedures

2.1   The Authority offers some policies and protocols on social media within the Members Code of Conduct, Employees Code of Conduct and Protocol on Member and Officer Relations and the Social Media Policy – Guidelines for Members and Officers complements and links to these.

Background papers: None

Author: Rob Leigh, Head of Communications with input from the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

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Broads Plan Objectives: This Policy contributes to all corporate priorities but in particular supports the priority partnership actions to:
- Raise awareness and understanding
- Connect and inspire people

Appendices:
Appendix 1 – Social Media Policy – Guidelines for Members and Officers

Social Media Policy

Guidance for Members and Officers

1. Introduction and purpose

1.1 This guidance is designed to help Members and officers use social media in an appropriate way. For convenience, reference to Members includes co-opted members of the Navigation Committee and Officers includes all the employed staff of the Authority.

1.2 It should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- For Members, the Members' Code of Conduct
- For Officers, the Authority's Code of Conduct for Employees
- For both Members and Officers, the Protocol on Member and Officer Relations

1.3 When used well social media is an excellent way for the Broads Authority to engage and communicate with residents, visitors, businesses, professionals and other stakeholders.

1.4 Many people prefer to receive their information via social media and for some, but not all sections of society, it has replaced traditional channels such as newspapers, email and telephone.

1.5 More importantly, many people now expect to be able to communicate with organisations via social media, just as they do by telephone, email and other traditional channels. This demand is likely to increase even further over time.

1.6 It is for all these reasons that the Broads Authority is increasing the use of social media through corporate accounts managed by the Communications Team.

1.7 There is also potential for developing the organisation's social media identity through personal use by staff and Members however this has to be done carefully.

Quick stats

- 73% of UK internet users have a social media profile (22% in 2007)
- 81% of these people use social media at least once a day (30% in 2007)
- 64% of all adults use social media at least once a week (the percentage for 16-24 yr olds is 99%!)
- Adults spend 1 hour and 16 minutes a day using social media

Source: Ofcom 2016

The UK's most popular social media sites:

- 40 million use YouTube
- 35.1 million use Facebook
- 11.9 million use Twitter
- 11.3 million use LinkedIn
- 8.8 million use Google Plus

Source: Ofcom 2014

2. Scope

2.1 This guidance applies to <u>professional use</u> of social media on behalf of the Broads Authority by its Communications Team as well as <u>personal or private</u> use of social media by Members and Officers when referencing or identified as being affiliated with the Broads Authority.

2.2 The definition of social media continues to evolve as platforms and technologies develop. On the whole, it refers to any web-based practices which can be used to share content.

2.3 Social media platforms include all social networking sites, including but not exclusive to, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Yammer, Pinterest, Flickr and other sites and services such as blogs that permit users to share information with others online.

3. Accounts in the Broads Authority's name

3.1 Management of social media is a cornerstone to reputation management, strengthening the brand and creating advocates. It takes a great deal of time, resource and energy to manage a social media account effectively and building your network can take a long time. It is also important to ensure consistency in messaging and tone of voice.

3.2 This is why the official Broads Authority corporate social media accounts are managed by the Communications Team and these should be used for the majority of Authority related social media activity. No additional corporate

accounts should be set up without consultation with the Commuinications Team.

3.3 The Communications Team will work with colleagues to encourage more social media use and will provide guidance and training where required.

3.4 Administrators of coporate social media accounts and Officers should not be named within authority online posts. This is to avoid compromising personal accounts with inappropriate followers or 'trolling' (a term used to describe the posting of inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community)

4. Personal social media accounts

4.1 There is often a fine line between the use of social media as a work tool and your personal use as an individual outside of your work or Member role. Sometimes your opinions may conflict so you must take care to separate the two when it happens.

4.2 We recognise that many Members and Officers make use of social media in a personal capacity. While you may not be acting on behalf of the organisation, you must be aware that you can influence the perception of the Authority by linking personal accounts to the Authority through posts.

4.3 If you use social networks or blogs for personal use and have indicated that you work at the Broads Authority, or in the case of Members that you are a Member, you should consider using a disclaimer that states that opinions on this site are your own. An example: "The views expressed are my own and don't reflect the views of the Broads Authority" (or "the views of my employer", as applicable).

4.4 Sometimes Members of the Broads Authority are members of another authority or body and their profile indicates this. In those situations, you should make clear in what capacity you are expressing any view.

4.5 See also the section on Members' capacity.

5. Guidelines to Members and Officers for all accounts

5.1 The following applies to Officers and those Members whose social media account identifies them as a Member of the Authority.

5.2 Always be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to the reputation of the Broads Authority.

5.3 You are personally responsible for content you publish.

5.4   Never disclose commercially sensitive, anti-competitive, private or confidential information. Also do not breach copyright for example by; using someone else's images or written content without permission.

5.5   What you publish will be around for a long time so consider the content carefully and also be sensible about disclosing personal details.

5.6   Social media networks, blogs and other types of online content sometimes generate press and media attention or legal questions. Members and Officers should refer these enquiries to the Communications Team.

5.7   If you identify inaccuracies about the Broads Authority please politely and sensitively point out the situation as you see it. You must also advise the Communications Team that you have identified information that is inaccurate or could damage the reputation of the organisation.

5.8   Ensure compliance with data protection legislation – for example move the discussion to private message (Facebook) or Direct Message (Twitter) when personal details need to be discussed; or ask them to contact us another way (ie telephone). Delete any information posted on our sites that contains personal details.

5.9   You may 'block', 'hide' or 'ban' abusive users.

6.   Guidelines to Members on capacity

6.1   Members, can feel in a grey area as to whether they are covered by the Members' Code of Conduct or not, when using social media. The following guidance should assist.

6.2   The Members Code of Conduct will apply if you are undertaking your role as a Member when using social media. Whilst the Members' Code of Conduct is not there to police your freedom of expression or your personal social media accounts, it can nevertheless potentially apply to situations when you are using social media other than in a purely private capacity.

6.3   Each situation is fact-specific and no hard and fast rules can be set out which will cover every eventuality. However, you especially should take care if you use a private account to comment on or disclose the Authority's business or make personal comments about other Members or Officers or write about things which you only know through being a Member. You run the risk that such comments will fall within the Members' Code of Conduct.

6.4   In serious cases, your use of a private social media account to disclose confidential information about Authority business or make gratuitously abusive comments about other Members, would be a clear breach of the Code of Conduct. In those circumstances you would not be able to claim that you are doing so in a private capacity.[1]

1 see for example the case of Heesom v Public Service Ombudsman for Wales [2014]

7. Some legal issues

7.1 Use of social media can bring the same legal issues as the use of any other media. The key difference is that with social media, breaches of the law can become apparent very quickly and to a potentially huge audience.

7.2 You should be familiar with legal risks. These can include:

- Breach of copyright by using a third party image without permission. Make sure you have permission to use any photographs or printed material which is not your own.
- Defamation – writing something about an individual or body which is considered to harm reputation can and does lead to significant claims for damages in the courts.
- Breach of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 or section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 – these include sending messages which are designed to cause anxiety or distress, or are of an offensive or menacing character. These are criminal offences.
- Unfair Trading Regulations – these forbid fake blogs, falsely representing oneself as a customer and falsely advertising on social media sites.
- Making comments which suggest that you are predetermined or biased in relation to a planning issue.

7.3 Never upload, post, link to or forward any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content. This includes your colleagues, members of the public or the Broads Authority as an organisation. It could result in disciplinary action.

7.4 Do not take or use any photographs of children who appear to be under the age of 18 years without permission from a parent or guardian.

8. Top Tips for using social media

8.1 Only set up a social media account if you are able to manage it and give speedy and appropriate replies to correspondence. People expect quick responses on social media so it should be prioritised similarly (if not over) other incoming messages. Think of a query as if it's a media enquiry or being asked in a public meeting.

8.2 Followers don't automatically appear. The single biggest trick to getting the most from social media is to build your online communities by sharing, listening, being active and being social. You will need to provide interesting things to read, watch or listen that your target audience values and wants. Keep accounts updated regularly. There should be activity at least every day or two.

8.3 There are a large number of social media platforms. You should only create profiles on ones that are relevant. It is better to do one really well, than several poorly.

- **Be human** - be approachable in your language and tone. Write in plain English
- **Be friendly** - Use warm and welcoming language.
- **Be engaging and helpful** - Respond to questions and post/contribute when you can move the conversation on or help
- **Be professional and respectful**
- **You can't control, only contribute** - You cannot stop conversation amongst your audience. You can only contribute to it
- **Be strategic by planning ahead** – who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
- **Listen -** social media is designed to be a two-way channel, just like any good conversation
- **Monitor and adapt** - Keep records of 'likes', 'mentions' 'popular content' and 'analytics' for future analysis - use this recorded data to see what works and what doesn't to help make decision in the future
- **Post questions** - You'll find that many people on social media are very happy to help if you post questions to your community or followers
- **Don't be afraid to ask for help** – The communications team will be happy to provide you with advice on your social media use

## 9.	Golden rule

"Don't post any message on social media that you wouldn't happily say in a public meeting"

## 10.	 What happens if you get it wrong?

10.1	It's possible to make a mistake and get it wrong. If it happens to you as an Officer tell your line manager immediately and consult with them and the communications team to agree remedial action to avoid embarrassment or reputational damage.

10.2	If you are a Member, contact the Communications Team for advice.

10.3	If you make a mistake, be open and honest whilst quick to correct it.

## 11.	Further information and contacts

11.1	Guidance produced by the Communications Team in conjunction with the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer.

11.2	Contact Rob Leigh, Head of Communications on 01603 756049
	Rob.leigh@broads-authority.gov.uk

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