

Report To:	STANDARDS AND PERSONNEL APPEALS COMMITTEE
Date:	7 DECEMBER 2022
Heading:	REVIEW OF MEMBERS' SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
Executive Lead Member:	NOT APPLICABLE
Ward/s:	ALL
Key Decision:	NO
Subject to Call-In:	NO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Members with introductory information to begin the review of the Members' Social Media Policy. The Council's current Members' Social Media Policy is appended to this report as Appendix A.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee are recommended to:

- Note the information contained within this report
- Consider any proposed changes needed within the existing Members' Social Media Policy appended as Appendix A

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Review of the Members' Social Media Policy is included on the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee workplan 2022/2023.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered at the introductory stage of the Review of Members' Social Media Policy.

Detailed Information

CURRENT MEMBERS' SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The existing Policy was developed as part of the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee workplan 2017/2018. It was added to the then workplan for review in light of a significant number of complaints being made about Members' use of social media.

At a working group held in late 2017, Members considered a range of social media policies from other local authorities. At the time, Members felt that the Members' Social Media Policy should be reworked to make it clearer that a member is responsible for the content of all posts on their social media accounts, and they are responsible for deleting inappropriate content even if it has been written and sent by other people.

The Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee recommended the current version of the Members' Social Media Policy to Council at the Annual Meeting held in May 2018, and the Policy was subsequently adopted.

The current version of the Members' Social Media Policy is appended to this report as Appendix A.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION – SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

The Local Government Association (LGA) have produced a series of guides to support councillors in using social media:

- *Overview of Social Media for Councillors*
- *Guide to the Role of Councillors on Social Media*
- *Guide to Creating Content for Social Media*
- *Guide to Tackling Online Abuse*
- *Guide to Creating Accessible Social Media Content*
- *Guide to using Facebook*
- *Guide to using Instagram*
- *Guide to using Twitter*
- *Guide to using YouTube*
- *Guide to using Nextdoor*

Full details of the all the LGA published guides can be found online [here](#).

The LGA state that effective communication is vital for councillors. Social media can play a key role in achieving this, provided it is used in the right way.

Social media can enable councillors to:

- Promote the work they are doing to a variety of audiences
- Engage with residents, businesses, and community groups
- Listen to conversations and issues going on in their local areas

Overview of Social Media for Councillors serves as an introduction for councillors on the use of social media, including an overview of how and why councillors should use it, their responsibilities, ways to stay safe, and approaches to handling negativity.

Information in the *Overview of Social Media for Councillors* guidance includes:

- Getting started on social media
 - Why should councillors use social media?
 - Communicating on social media
 - Prioritise what social media platform you use
- Staying safe and secure online
 - How to set yourself up to stay safe using social media
 - Steps you can take to separate your councillor role and family life online
- Your responsibilities as a councillor
 - The golden rule to follow
 - Understand what you can and can't post online, including legally
- How to deal with negativity and abuse online
 - Learn not to feed social media 'trolls'
 - LGA Digital Citizenship 'rules of engagement' infographics
 - Be confident to block or delete followers
 - Taking a break from social media

Guide to the Role of Councillors on Social Media explains how councillors can use social media to communicate with their local community and listen in on the conversations people are having. The guidance explores the role councillors can play on social media, how to engage in healthy debate, and what to consider when publishing or sharing.

Information in the *Guide to the Role of Councillors on Social Media* includes:

- Understanding the different roles that councillors can play on social media
 - Information-sharing from the council
 - Information-sharing with the community
 - Civic and ceremonial roles
 - The virtual doorstep
 - Having a measured response to online opinions
 - Considering party political dimensions for councillors on social media
- Engaging in healthy debate and tackling misinformation
 - Abiding by the golden rule
 - Encouraging positive, polite, and constructive debate
 - Remembering that your behaviour influences others
 - Using your voice to tackle misinformation and inaccuracy
- Considering the Code of Conduct while being active on social media
 - Is information already in the public domain?
 - Be aware of what you share
 - The Councillor Code of Conduct still applies

Guide to Tackling Online Abuse explores the growing problem of online abuse and attacks. Many councillors experience this sort of negativity on social media. It is important to know how to identify it and effectively deal with it.

Information in the *Guide to Tackling Online Abuse* includes:

- Types of abusive behaviour to look out for
- Using positive language and tone to shape engagement
- Techniques to handle online abuse
- Taking a break or coming off social media

In readiness for the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee meeting, Members will have been sent a link to access all of the LGA social media guidance under separate cover, requesting them to consider the guidance and understand how it can aid development of the Members' Social Media Policy.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The Members' Code of Conduct applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

- Face to face meetings
- Online or telephone meetings
- Written communication
- Verbal communication
- Non-verbal communication
- Electronic and social media communication, posts, statements, and comments

The Code does not have effect in relation to a councillor's conduct other than where it is in a councillor's official capacity. Official capacity includes when:

- A councillor is conducting business of the Authority
- A councillor is acting as a representative of the Authority
- A councillor's actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that they are acting as a councillor or as a representative of the Authority

Breaches of the Members' Social Media Policy may lead to a breach of the Council's Members' Code of Conduct.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Council strives to ensure effective community leadership. This is achieved through good governance, transparency, accountability, and appropriate behaviours. All of these factor into the use of social media by Members.

Legal:

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.
[RLD 04/10/2022]

Finance:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
There could be a risk that the Council’s adopted Members’ Social Media Policy becomes outdated.	The Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee will undertake a Review of the Members’ Social Media Policy to ensure the documents remains up-to-date and fit for purpose.

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications resulting from the recommendations within this report. Any HR implications relating to the review of the Members’ Social Media Policy will be addressed as part of the review process.

Environmental/Sustainability

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Equalities:

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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