
**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE & LEGAL SERVICES
AND MONITORING OFFICER**

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

Reason for this Report

1. To allow the Committee to review the Social Media Guidance for Councillors issued by the Council.

Background

2. The growing use of social media presents varied opportunities and challenges for Councillors. In recognition of this, the Standards and Ethics Committee considered this issue in 2013/14, and at its meeting in July 2014, following consultation with political Group Leaders and Whips, approved the Social Media Guidance for Councillors ('the Guidance').
3. The Committee reviewed the Social Media Guidance in July 2016 and agreed that the guidance remained fit for purpose, so no changes were made.
4. At the Committee's last meeting, in November 2017, the Committee agreed to review the Guidance again, having regard to the fact that it was originally drafted several years ago, and to allow new Committee members an opportunity to suggest any changes considered appropriate.

Issues

5. The Social Media Guidance for Councillors issued by this Committee in July 2014 is attached as **Appendix A**. The Guidance is intended to:
 - Give guidance in relation to the use of social media by Councillors;
 - Highlight sections of the Members' Code of Conduct that relate to the use of social media; and
 - Highlight some of the pitfalls for councillors to be aware of.
6. Members are invited to review the Guidance and consider any appropriate amendments, which will then be consulted on with the Group Whips and the Head of Communications.
7. Members may wish to note that social media guidance has also been issued by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The WLGA 'Social Media: A Guide for Councillors', August 2013 (the 'WLGA Guidance') is attached as

Appendix B. It is understood that the WLGA Guidance is being reviewed, but there is no indication of the timescale for revised guidance to be issued.

8. In response to growing concerns about online abuse and bullying or ‘trolling’, the WLGA last month produced draft guidance ‘Councillors Guide to Handling Online Abuse’ (‘WLGA Handling Online Abuse Guidance’) – attached as **Appendix C**.
9. One issue raised by a Committee member is the advice regarding Councillors using separate social media accounts for their Council and personal use. This issue is addressed on page 13 of the Council’s Guidance (Appendix A); and pages 6-7 of the WLGA Guidance (Appendix B).
10. The advice to use separate accounts is intended to make it clearer when a Councillor is commenting or acting in a personal capacity, rather than in their official Councillor role. It should, however, be noted that the capacity in which a Councillor is acting will be considered from the perspective of a member of the public; and that the Members’ Code of Conduct will apply whenever a Councillor is acting as a councillor or has created the impression that they are acting as a Member. Also, certain duties under the Members’ Code (specifically, the duty to not act in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute; and the duty to not misuse your position or the authority’s resources) apply to Members at all times. This means that Councillors are best advised to be aware that any social media comments may be linked to their role as a councillor, even if they are on a personal account, if that account identifies them as a Councillor or if the topic commented on is one related to the Council.
11. Although it will be noted from the Council’s Guidance (page 13) that ‘The Committee recommends using separate social media accounts for Council and private business’, it must be emphasised that the question of whether or not to use separate social media accounts is a matter for each individual Member to decide for themselves, having regard to the guidance and their own particular circumstances.
10. Members may also wish to note that training on social media was included in the WLGA New Councillor Induction session held in November 2017; and is included in the Council’s Member Learning and Development Programme.

Legal Implications

11. The relevant legal implications are set out in the report and its appendices.

Financial Implications

12. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations of the report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to consider the Council's Guidance attached as **Appendix A** and recommend any changes considered appropriate for consultation with members and a report back to this Committee.

Davina Fiore

Director of Governance and Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

22nd March 2018

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Social Media Guidance for Councillors, July 2014
Appendix B	WLGA 'Social Media: A Guide for Councillors', August 2013 http://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=344
Appendix C	WLGA Draft 'Councillors Guide to Handling Online Abuse', February 2018

Background papers

Standards and Ethics Committee report 'Social Media Guidance', July 2016