

Cardiff Council
Members' Social Media Code of Principles

At the full Council meeting in March 2021, Cardiff Council passed a Motion which recognised that:

- a) Councillors have a duty to promote kind and honest discourse both online and off line;
- b) Discussion, robust debate and scrutiny are vital to a democracy and should not be discouraged, but must be carried out without abuse;
- c) Social media is an increasingly aggressive space where abuse is common place and public figures are often the target for abusive behaviour, which inevitably has a significant detrimental impact on their wellbeing;
- d) Misinformation is often the trigger for such abusive behaviour; and
- e) Anonymous accounts with no trail of accountability are often the worst culprits,

And agreed to introduce a Code of Principles for social media use.

After consideration of this issue by the Standards and Ethics Committee and consultation with Members, the Council has adopted the following principles in relation to its Members' use of social media:

1. Standards of conduct

All Members are required to comply with the duties set out in the statutory [Members Code of Conduct.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#), and these duties continue to apply to Members' use of social media. Amongst other things the Code requires that:

You must—

- (a) carry out your duties and responsibilities with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of their gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion;
- (b) show respect and consideration for others;
- (c) not use bullying behaviour or harass any person; and
- (d) not do anything which compromises, or which is likely to compromise, the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, your authority.

(paragraph 4 of the Code of Conduct)

You must not—

- (a) disclose confidential information or information which should reasonably

be regarded as being of a confidential nature, without the express consent of a person authorised to give such consent, or unless required by law to do so;

(b) prevent any person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law.

(paragraph 5 of the Code of Conduct)

You must—

(a) not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute;

(paragraph 6.1(a) of the Code of Conduct)

2. Respect and consideration

Members should treat everyone with respect and consideration. Whilst legitimate criticism is part of democratic accountability, criticism should be fair, constructive and courteous, and Members should not post comments which may be regarded as malicious, aggressive, disrespectful or bullying.

3. Equality

Members' comments should treat everyone equally, without discrimination, in particular, against groups with 'protected characteristics' under equality laws (ie. age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation) or Welsh language speakers.

4. Professionalism

Members are expected to participate in robust political debate, but should refrain from making, or acting in any way which encourages, unfair or inaccurate public criticisms of the authority or its councillors or officers doing their jobs. Policies may be criticised, without making unnecessary personal comments.

5. Honesty

Members' comments should reflect views which they honestly hold. They should refrain from making misleading comments.

6. Accuracy

Information given should be factually correct and not misleading. Members should make all reasonable efforts to verify the factual accuracy of the information they post.

7. Accountability

Members should be accountable for their comments, including 'liking' or sharing comments made by others, and are also responsible for making all reasonable efforts to monitor and edit any third-party comments made via their platforms.

8. Informed

Members should try to make sure they have sufficient information about a subject before commenting on it and make all reasonable efforts to fully read and understand the substance of information before they 'like' or share it.

9. Transparency

Members should openly identify themselves as a Councillor and refrain from anonymous comments or the use of 'sock puppet accounts' (false online identities created for the purposes of deception). For the avoidance of doubt, this does not prevent Members from posting comments on community pages, as long as the Member is openly identifiable.

10. Confidentiality

Members must take care to avoid disclosing any confidential, exempt or personal information, without clear authorisation or consent from any individuals concerned.

Status of this Code and Consequences of Breach

By resolution of the Council, this Code has been incorporated into the Members' Code of Conduct for elected Members of Cardiff Council. This means that a failure to comply with any of the above principles may constitute a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct, which may result in misconduct proceedings and associated sanctions being imposed on any Member found to be in breach.

Informal Resolution

Members are encouraged to raise concerns they may have about the content of social media with the member concerned and/or with the relevant Group Whip and Group Leader, saying how they would like the matter to be resolved in a reasonable and proportionate way. For example, this could include asking for a comment to be amended or removed. All members are expected to act in a reasonable manner to seek to resolve any concerns. If this does not achieve resolution, or if it is a recurring problem or a pattern of behaviour, members are encouraged to report their concerns to the Monitoring Officer.