

Report To: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting: 9th May 2014

Lead Member / Officer: Monitoring Officer

Report Author: Monitoring Officer

Title: Social Media Protocol

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The report is about a draft Social Media Protocol for Members and employees of the Council.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To give the Members on the Standards Committee an opportunity to consider the contents of the current draft Social Media Protocol and to provide their comments and observations.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 That Members consider the draft Social Media Protocol attached as Appendix 1 to the report and provide comments and observations on the draft.

4. Report details.

- 4.1 The use of social media in all walks of life has become an accepted form of communication and engagement.
- 4.2 There is an increasing appetite amongst many sections of society to access information and to communicate through the various forms of social media such as Twitter, Facebook etc.
- 4.3 Social media is a term which describes easy ways to publish information on the internet. The term is generally used to describe how individuals, companies and other bodies share information and create discussions online.
- 4.4 The ease with which information can be distributed in this way and the growing numbers of people who use social media to access information means that the way in which Councils and Councillors interact with the public will change.
- 4.5 Although there are many benefits to the use of social media, there are potential pitfalls that await the unwary. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, in his guidance on the Code of Conduct makes repeated reference to the use of social media. The Ombudsman reminds members that the Code of

Conduct applies to their activities online in the same way that it applies to other aspects of their role.

- 4.6 Many authorities have issued guidance to Members about the use of social media. These documents vary between being extensions to the Code of Conduct and Ombudsman's advice to more holistic documents advising of the potential uses of social media whilst containing sections dedicated to the potential conduct issues.
- 4.7 There is a potential for increased engagement through social media if the Council adopts a policy of webcasting its meetings. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of webcasting engages sections of the community who rely on receiving their information online and may wish to communicate with the Council and Councillors through social media.
- 4.8 Guidance was previously produced for elected Members in 2010 regarding the use of social media. A copy of this Guidance is attached as Appendix 2 to this report. In June of 2013 the Committee received a report on the use of social media and resolved that a protocol document be compiled for consideration by the Committee incorporating the Welsh Local Government Association Guidance which had previously been circulated and which is attached as Appendix 3 to the report. Soon after this resolution, work being done elsewhere in the Council on safeguarding identified the need for a protocol for staff in respect of the use of social media from a safeguarding point of view. It was also considered that the use of social media was an important communication tool for the Council and that a protocol should be developed to guide members of staff in the use of social media. Since these three strands were being developed independently of each other it was agreed that, if possible, a single Social Media Policy should be adopted which could contain appendices relevant to different users of social media including elected Members.
- 4.9 The draft Social Media Policy attached as Appendix 1 has been developed by the Corporate Communications team with input from officers involved in safeguarding as well as standards issues.
- 4.10 Members will note that the Policy consists of a General Policy document giving general advice. The document is supported by appendices which give specific advice for the use of social media in different circumstances and in particular includes, at Appendix B, specific guidance drawn up for elected Members by the Welsh Government Association.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The increase of the use of social media will enable the Council to communicate its priorities to a wider audience and will contribute to the priority of modernising the Council.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 There are no costs directly associated with this report.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

7.1 This report does not require an equalities impact assessment.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 Consultations have been carried with Scrutiny and others.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 There are no obvious significant financial implications arising from the report

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 The use of social media by officers and Members does carry potential risks, many of which are highlighted in the Policy itself. The advice and guidance contained within the Policy and appendices give practical guidance and advice which, if followed, should reduce the risk associated with the use social media. The risk to the Council of not making appropriate and efficient use of social media is that it will not be delivering key messages to some members of the community who access the majority or all of their information on-line.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 There is no decision required.