Report to: **Standards Committee**

Date of Meeting: **7th June 2013**

Lead Officer: **Gary Williams, Monitoring Officer**

Report Author: **Gary Williams, Monitoring Officer**

Title: **Social Media**

1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   To seek Members' views as to the most appropriate method of providing guidance to elected members in respect of their use of social media.

2   BACKGROUND

2.1   The use of social media in all walks of life has become an accepted form of communication and engagement.

2.2   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.

2.3   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.

2.4   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.

2.5   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.

2.6   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.

2.7   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.

2.8   Training has recently been provided to elected members on the use of social media. A copy of the training materials is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

2.9   Guidance was 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.

3   RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   That Members consider the merits of introducing a protocol on the use of social media.