Title:	**Constitution of the Council** **(Part 5G: Social Media Policy for Councillors)**
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SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR COUNCILLORS

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

1.2 For the purposes of this policy, the term "social media" covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, blogs, and any similar sites which develop after the creation of this policy. It also includes comments on online newspaper articles.

1.3 An overview of the main types of social media can be found at the end of this policy.

2 BENEFITS AND RISKS

2.1 The following potential benefits have been identified with the use of social media:

2.1.1 Ability to connect with harder-to-reach groups;

2.1.2 Real-time updates on emerging situations (i.e. as they happen);

2.1.3 Heightened level of interactivity;

2.1.4 Low cost in comparison with traditional forms of media;

2.1.5 Enhanced transparency;

2.1.6 Building a sense of belonging in a neighbourhood;

2.1.7 Increased resident satisfaction levels;

2.1.8 Help to reduce social problems like vandalism or racism.

2.2 The following risks have been identified with the use of social media:

2.2.1 Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites;

2.2.2 Disclosure of confidential information;

2.2.3 Damage to the reputation of the Council;

2.2.4 Social engineering attacks or "phishing". This is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by individuals fraudulently claiming to be a business or client;

2.2.5 Bullying or witch-hunting;

2.2.6 Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation;

2.2.7 Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

3 WHO THIS POLICY COVERS

3.1 This policy covers all Councillors. It should be considered in conjunction with the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.

3.2 It relates to all use of social media, whether inside or outside of official capacities.

4 WHO CAN USE SOCIAL MEDIA

4.1 All Councillors are able to set up their own social media accounts, for which they will be responsible. It is recommended that in the case of Facebook and similar sites, Councillors wishing to keep their personal life and official capacities separate should create a Facebook "Page" rather than using their personal profiles.

5 USERS'RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Councillors using social media should make use of stringent privacy settings if they do not wish them to be accessed by the press and public.

5.2 In any biography where the Councillor is identified as a Councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the Council. Use of the Council's logo on a personal account or website should only occur with the written permission of the chief executive.

5.3 The logo should not be used on sites or applications which are unrelated to or not representative of the Council's official position. If in doubt, contact the chief executive.

5.4 Where possible, a Councillor should make clear who they are in the profile of any account and whether they are an authorised representative of the Council, unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as a potential threat to personal security. In such instances, the Council's ICT Manager must be consulted.

5.5 Councillors are personally responsible for the content which they publish on any form of social media. Publishing – or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) – an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel.

5.6 Councillors must treat others with respect, avoid personal attacks and not make disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.

5.7 Councillors must comply with equality laws contained within the Equality Act 2010 and associated legislation. They must not publish anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.

6 ANONYMOUS POSTINGS

6.1 When commenting online on any matter relating to the Council, Councillors should identify themselves as a Councillor (for instance in their profile) and make it clear whether or not they are representing the views of the Council. They must not make anonymous posts nor use a pseudonym when making such comments so as to hide their identity.

6.2 Councillors who fail to identify themselves as a Councillor in breach of this obligation will be deemed to be acting in their official capacity for the purposes of the Code of Conduct and such failure will itself be a breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

7 SAFETY

7.1 Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the Internet and should not publish information which could give details which could leave them vulnerable.

7.2 Any Councillor receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to their political group leader, democratic services and/or the police.

7.3 They should use a secure password (generally more than eight characters long and using a mixture of letters and numbers) and never share their password with anyone.

8 INFORMATION PROTECTION

8.1 Councillors must not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activity on behalf of the Council unless they are authorised to do so.

8.2 They should not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their prior written consent.

8.3 They must handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's data protection policies.

8.4 Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that Councillors ensure that they are confident of the nature of the information they publish. Comments posted online are permanently available and can be used by media such as newspapers.

8.5 Councillors must not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal or publish exempt committee reports or private papers.

8.6 Copyright laws still apply online. Councillors must not use images to which they do not hold the copyright. Information shared should be attributed to the source (i.e. via web link). Councillors must respect fair-use and financial disclosure laws.

9 ELECTIONS

9.1 The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature – and this includes web advertising. There are additional requirements, such as imprint standards, for materials which can be downloaded from a website. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk. Accounts may need to be closed for a defined period before local and national elections in order to comply with legislation which affects local authorities.

9.2 Political blogs cannot be linked from the Council's website and the Council will not promote Councillors' Twitter accounts during the election purdah period.

10 BEST PRACTICE

10.1 Councillors must not use insulting or offensive language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in a workplace. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered controversial, such as politics or religion.

10.2 Social media must not be used to publish content which may result in action for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.

10.3 Corporate social media must not be used for party political purposes nor specific campaigning purposes as the Council is not permitted to publish material which "in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party" (Local Government Act 1986). The Council's corporate social media accounts must not be used for such purposes by a Councillor.

10.4 Councillors must not use the Council's social media accounts to promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns, whether or not related to the function of the Council.

10.5 Social media must not be used in an abusive or hateful manner.

10.6 Social media must not be used for actions that would put Councillors in breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

10.7 Use of social media must not breach the Council's misconduct, equal opportunities or bullying and harassment policies.

11 BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

11.1 Failure to comply with this policy may result in a formal complaint being made to the Monitoring Officer to be dealt with under the Council's Standards Procedures.

11.2 Other violations of this policy, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 1988, could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved.

11.3 The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by Councillors deemed inappropriate or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.

Appendix 1

EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The types and numbers of social media tools are constantly growing and this policy is intended to cover all emerging brands of social media account as well as those listed below.

Facebook: A website and accompanying mobile application on which users create a profile or timeline for themselves where they send and receive requests from "friends" which link their accounts, enabling them to share photos, information and common interests. Accounts can be set to "private" which prevents anyone but a user's approved friends seeing the content.

Blogs: Short for "weblog", this is an online diary and can take the form of a personal website created from scratch and designed by the user, or a template hosted on a site such as Blogger, Wordpress or BlogsToday. It is effectively an online diary which can be themed or personal, surrounding an individual's interests or opinions.

Twitter: A microblogging site where users communicate in 140-character statements, including images and links to websites if required. Unlike Facebook (which is essentially private unless you grant access to a 'friend'), Twitter accounts are generally public unless restrictions are placed by the user to make them private. Users attract followers, who do not require permission to read a user's 'tweets' (the name of the messages) unless they are blocked. It can be compared with sending a text message to a virtual message board.

Messages can be further shared by 're-tweeting' and public messages exchanged using the "@" symbol and a user's Twitter name or 'handle'.

YouTube: A video-sharing website, where users can view and upload their own videos.