



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 2020

Reference number: TBC

Title: REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

Author and/or contact officer: Nick Graham, Director of Legal & Democratic Services – nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: none specific

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

- 1. To note and review the Guidance documents approved the Shadow Executive as they relate to Councillors**
- 2. To provide any comments or suggestions for improvement on the Guidance documents**

Reason for the decision: Social Media is a key communication tool used by the Council and many Councillors; it is also used by service users and key stakeholders. It has a significant role in the reputational management of the Council and the personal reputation of Members. The Council has developed and adopted a suite of documents giving guidance to staff and Councillors which the Committee has asked to review.

Background

During the transition period, because of the importance of social media as a way of communicating with residents, a set of Social Media Standards were developed and approved alongside a suite of documents setting out the Council's approach to the use of social media, which included advice and guidance for Councillors. Copies of those Standards and the Social Media Policy, Strategy and Guide are set out in the Background papers.

The Council's general approach to social media and managing its corporate accounts is set out on the Council's public website. This includes a set of standards for conduct on social media use indicating that abuse and threatening posts will not be tolerated, together with advertising, 'trolling' and 'spam'. Residents are advised to not use social media for complaints and are directed to the complaints process.

As well as a set of Standards, the Guidance to Councillors is set out in the following the documents.

Social Media Strategy

The Strategy outlines in broad terms the aims and objectives of social media use by the Council and sets this in the wider context of the Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy. It outlines the different social media channels and encourages the use of social media by Councillors. Councillors are advised to read the Strategy alongside the Code of Conduct for Councillors and a commitment is given to training in social media. In the interest of fostering good community relations the corporate accounts will often link to Member accounts where appropriate and relevant.

Social Media Policy

The Policy applies to Staff and Councillors and sets out a significant amount of detail on social media use including detailed guidance on the use of the corporate social media accounts. This covers such topics as: advice on posting; offensive content; misuse and offences; security and privacy; videos and images.

Councillors are again reminded of the Code of Conduct and that Councillors who post content are likely to be seen as acting in their role as Councillors rather than in a private capacity. The Policy emphasises that care needs to be taken when posting content to ensure that the confidential information is not disclosed. Tips on content are also given together with a link to the Local Government Association's comprehensive set of policies on how to make the best use of social media, including 'Do's and Don'ts' referred to in the Background Papers.

Social Media Guide

The Guide is a practical introduction to social media with numerous tips and advice on how use the different social media network. There is a useful glossary of terms in addition to guidance on personal safety and security when using social media.

Training on Social Media

Media training is provided to Members as part of Induction and general development. A link to the online training is below:

[Media Law training for members \(buckinghamshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/media-law-training-for-members)

As of today, 66 Councillors have undertaken this training.

Legal Implications

The use of social media can have legal ramifications if used inappropriately or misused. Councillors can also face allegations that they have breached the Code of Conduct and can face sanctions as a consequence. Clear guidance is important in ensuring that Councillors can use social media safely and effectively.

Corporate Implications

Social media is a key communication tool used by the Council and can be key to the Council's management of its reputation. The proper and effective use of social media is an important way in which Councillors relate to their communities and electorate. The maintenance of high ethical standards applies to the use of social media as it does to all Councillor conduct.

Next Steps and Review

Councillors' comments will be used to inform any revisions or amendments to the Guidance and the development of appropriate training on Induction for new Council Members after May 2021.

Background Papers

Social Media Standards

Social Media Policy

Social Media Strategy

Social Media Guide

LGA: do's and don'ts of Social Media use

