

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 14 MAY 2013**

REPORT BY: **HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

SUBJECT: **SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL**

1.00 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.00 To approve the attached Social Media Protocol.

2.00 **BACKGROUND**

2.01 Members will be aware that there has recently been a lot of discussion in the press about whether the use of social media such as tweeting should be permitted in meetings. In an effort to clarify the position it has been agreed that all authorities will consider adopting a social media protocol at their annual general meetings (though of course each council may adopt something slightly different).

3.00 **CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 The protocol is intended to cover social media such as Twitter and Facebook where communication is essentially to an open audience. It is not intended to cover sending emails or texts, which, by their nature, are to a “closed” or preselected group of recipients.

3.02 In order for the protocol to be comprehensive it has sections that deal with the obligations on councillors, officers and members of the press and public. The situation for each is slightly different and the protocol reflects the different considerations.

3.03 In respect of councillors and co-opted members, the intention is to permit the use of social media whilst giving guidance on how to avoid some of the potential pitfalls. Such pitfalls include not only more complex matters like potential defamation claims, but also more straightforward issues such as appearing rude by not paying attention. None of these are issues that cannot be overcome, however, and it is important that Members are free to communicate their views on what is happening in Council meetings in the interests of openness and accountability.

- 3.04 In respect of officers, the position is much clearer. Officers are in meetings to advise Members and should only be using social media at meetings if that is their particular role within the Council. This enables the Council to communicate in a corporate manner.
- 3.05 In respect of members of the press and public, of course, it is more difficult for the Council to impose any restriction. Both the press and public have a right to attend meetings and the use of social media is little different to a reporter reporting on a meeting. As at present, the only condition that can be imposed is that people who use social media do not disrupt the business of the meeting by doing so. However the protocol does ask that people using social media give a fair account of the meeting.
- 3.06 The protocol does not cover the broadcasting or recording of meetings. At present the broadcasting or recording of meetings is at the discretion of the chair, though it is not normally allowed.
- 3.07 Councillors will be aware that we have received money from the Welsh Government in order to web cast our meetings and your officers are currently trying to identify the most cost effective way to achieve that. Should the Council start web casting meetings then some simple supplementary rules (over and above those already in the Constitution) will be needed, which can be adopted at the time. If the Council chooses to broadcast its own meetings then it would also be logical to allow others to do so subject to some simple rules. Again, this can be decided at the time.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That the Council approves the attached Social Media Protocol.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 None directly arising from this report.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 None as a result of this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 None as a result of this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 Making it easier to report on meetings by permitting the use of social media will reduce the need for people to attend the meetings themselves thus having a small beneficial impact on those with limited mobility.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None as a result of this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None as a result of this report.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 None as a result of this report.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 – Social Media Protocol

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

As referred to in the report.

Contact Officer: Gareth Owens
Telephone: 01352 702344
Email: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk