

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 12 November 2018
Report Subject	Social Media Protocol
Report Author	Chief Officer Governance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The code of conduct does not contain any specific provision relating to the use of social media, however it does contain obligations on:

- treating people with respect
- compliance with equalities legislation; and
- not bringing one's council or position into disrepute
- use of council resources for party political purposes

These provisions only apply where a member is acting in an official capacity and so purely private use of social media does not fall within the ambit of the code.

To date the Council has not adopted a separate social media protocol, and has instead circulated to members the guidance published by WLGA (the Guidance) which addresses the issues raised by social media clearly and comprehensively.

In February this year the Committee resolved to continue to rely on the Guidance, which at that time was 4 years old, but was in the process of being updated. The Committee therefore further resolved to request the North Wales Standards Forum, the Monitoring Officer, the Head of Democratic Services, the Communications Team and the ICT Manager, to submit any suggestions to WLGA to improve or update the Guidance, and to request that the updated Guidance reflects the wider platform of social media channels and highlights the potential dangers to users.

The Guidance was subsequently updated (the Updated Guidance) and separate guidance was also published by WLGA on dealing with online abuse entitled "Councillors' Guide to Handling Online Abuse", a link to which is provided in the Updated Guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee relies on the Updated Guidance.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	HOW THE CODE APPLIES TO SOCIAL MEDIA
1.01	In most cases the code only applies to Members who are acting in an official capacity. This includes acting or giving the impression of acting in the role of Member. Thus if a Member mentions public issues or Council activity on social media then those comments are likely to be perceived as having been made in an official capacity. Purely personal use of social media, especially where visibility is closed and not public (e.g. limited to friends only on Facebook), will usually fall outside the ambit of the code.
1.02	<p>The code of conduct does not specifically include any obligations in relation to social media. At their essence social media are simply means of mass communication and so the following obligations in the code are potentially relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paragraph 4(a) have due regard to the need for equality of opportunity• Paragraph 4(b) show respect and consideration for others• Paragraph 5(a) do not disclose confidential information• Paragraph 6(1)(a) not to bring office or authority into disrepute
1.03	<p>The Updated Guidance is a very clear and comprehensive guide to social media. The Guidance was circulated to all Members when it was originally published and circulated to members of the Committee. The Updated Guidance contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A short explanation of the different social media platforms• A positive explanation of the benefits to Councillors of using social media• An explanation of some of the dangers councillors (including to their own well-being) may face when using social media, including “trolling” and how best to mitigate and deal with these issues• Guidance on style and “do’s and don’ts”• Guidance on possible code issues• Commentary on predetermination• Advice on Data Protection and GDPR issues, including a link to further advice on these issues• Advice about Welsh Language standards on social media• A reminder not to use council IT equipment for party political purposes
1.04	The Updated Guidance provides advice on how Members can look after their own safety and well-being on social media, as well as providing a link to new guidance specifically dealing with handling online abuse.

2.00 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

2.01	None associated with this report.
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3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	The purpose of the Updated Guidance is to enable Councillors to benefit from the use of social media whilst minimising the associated risks such as reputational damage and/or breaching the code of conduct, as well as providing practical advice on how to manage social media in the interests of councillors' personal well-being.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Social Media Guidance for Councillors

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	WLGA Social Media Guidance - http://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=344
6.02	Councillors' Guide to Handling Online Abuse - http://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=1504 Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the interests of local government and promotes local democracy in Wales. It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members. The WLGA's primary purposes are to promote better local government and its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public services and democracy.