

Telford and Wrekin Council Standards Committee

Protocol for the use of social media by Councillors

The Standards Committee recognise that the use of social networking and blogging are effective methods for councillors to interact with local people and engage with those who would not normally have access to local councillors and politics.

The Committee supports the use of such media but is also aware of the challenges that it brings. This protocol is intended to assist Councillors in thinking about how they can continue to make best use of social media whilst complying with the Code of Conduct.

THIS PROTOCOL IS IMPORTANT AND SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY ALL COUNCILLORS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The Committee suggests the following:

Think about whether you are acting in your official capacity as a councillor when posting messages or blogs. Be clear when you are making comments in a private capacity. Note that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is that you will be seen as acting in an official capacity when you post or blog

Set appropriate privacy settings for your social media accounts and blogs, especially if you have accounts which are private and non-political

Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on your social media accounts and remove them as soon as possible to avoid the perception that you condone such views. Also consider carefully what posts you decide to 'like' or retweet.

Ensure that you use council facilities appropriately; if you use Council social media or Council blogs/website you will be viewed as acting in your official capacity. You should not use council facilities for personal or political posts and blogs.

Think carefully before posting information about individuals or matters that may be commercially sensitive. Posting sensitive information could not only be a breach of the Code of Conduct but could also be a criminal offence or lead to litigation being brought against you and/or the Council. When posting any information that you have access to in your role as a Councillor you will be seen to be acting in your official capacity.

When making political points using social media be careful about specific views referring to individuals. A personal attack on an individual could be seen as disrespectful whereas general comments about an issue or policy is less likely to be viewed as a failure to show respect.

Don't post comments or blog in haste. If you are angry, tired or just in a bad mood stay away from your social media. Even if posts are removed quickly after, a screen shot can be taken of the post when it was on your account and this can form the basis of a complaint. Making comments in posts and blogs is just the same as making those comments in writing and/or in person to the individual concerned. Make sure that your own posts are truthful, factual and can be supported with evidence if challenged.

If you have any queries or concerns you are welcome to contact Jonathan Eatough on 01952 383200 or Jonathan.Eatough@telford.gov.uk