

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL****STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 25 April 2017****REVIEW OF PROTOCOL FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA****REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: GOVERNANCE, PROCUREMENT  
AND COMMISSIONING****1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 For Members to consider whether or not the existing Social Media Protocol for Councillors needs to be reviewed.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **That the Committee considers the existing Protocol for the Use of Social Media by Councillors and any comments received from members and agrees that the final wording for any changes identified are delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee.**
- 2.2 **That the Monitoring Officer provides training on the use of social media to include the legal ramifications of misusing social media.**

**3. SUMMARY**

- 3.1 The Members' Social Media Policy, attached at Appendix 1, was originally prepared by the Member Development Steering group as a result of comments by the Council's Independent Person and debate at this committee in February 2016. It was approved and endorsed by the Chairman of the Standards Committee and circulated to all members in October 2016.
- 3.2 The reason that it was produced was to provide some practical advice for members when using social media, and the Independent Person when being consulted on complaints.
- 3.3 Although it has only relatively recently been approved, the Chair of the Standards Committee has asked for it to come before the Committee for review in the light of recent experience to see if the Protocol needs to be amended/ updated.
- 3.4 At the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016 it was recommended by this committee that the Speaker be approached to approve training wither before or

after a Council meeting. In the light of recent experience more detailed training is probably required that might be more appropriately delivered separately from a Council meeting

#### **4. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

- 4.1 Standards Committee – 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016

#### **5. INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The Protocol was developed by the Member Development Steering Group who drafted it in consultation with the political groups on the Council between February 2016 and September 2016 when the Group agreed that the document could be forwarded to the Chair of Standards Committee for his consideration and approval.
- 5.2 Since the approval of the Protocol there have been a number of complaints from members and members of the public about Councillor's use of social media. Without going into detail of individual cases the key areas where complaints have arisen is in relation to exchanges between Councillors and complaints from members of the public that have alleged overly personal attacks.
- 5.3 All the complaints have been discussed with the Council's Independent Person and, to date none of the complaints have been referred for investigation although one complaint is pending following suggested local resolution.
- 5.4 The use of social media is undoubtedly a useful tool for democratic engagement but can be controversial in respect of the tone of communication, its immediacy and its perceived transient nature.
- 5.5 In respect of the tone of the communication the approach taken by the Monitoring Officer, again agreed with the Independent Person, is that there is a spectrum depending upon the nature of the relationship. For example, there is a distinction between communication between a 2 Councillors debating with each other (1), a Councillor and a member of the public debating topical issues (2), and a Councillor and a member of the public who is approaching that Councillor for advice and support (3). The Monitoring Officer's approach is, subject of course to the particulars of the case, to accept more robust conversation in 1 and 2 than in 3.
- 5.6 Towards the end of last month the Chairman of the Standards Committee wrote to Group Leaders asking for their support in endorsing the Protocol and has since asked that all members be invited to attend the Standards Committee or submit comments about their experiences on social media to the committee for their consideration.

5.7 He has also written to all members asking them to contribute to this debate either in person or by providing written comments for consideration at this meeting. Any comments received will be provided for members' consideration either before the meeting or at the meeting depending upon the nature of the comments and when they are received.

5.8 The Monitoring Officer is planning training for members on the use of social media to update members on practical tips for effective use and the legal implications of going too far.

### **5.9 Equal Opportunities**

Consideration of the Protocol enforces the Councils, and Councillors, leadership role in making sure that no-one is discriminated against.

### **5.10 Environmental Impact**

None

### **5.11 Legal Comment**

The statutory requirements for a Code of Conduct and ethical framework for Councillors is set out at part 1, chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011.

Whilst not mandatory, the social media protocol will assist councillor's when carrying out Council business and will be taken into account in the event that code of conduct complaints are submitted that relate to social media matters.

### **5.12 Links with Corporate Priorities**

The work of the Committee contributes to the Council's co-operative values of openness and honesty, fairness and respect and ownership and the provisions in the Code of Conduct relating to respect/selflessness.

### **5.13 Opportunities and Risks**

There is a risk to the reputation of the Council as a whole and individual Councillors if the use of social media is not carried out appropriately.

### **5.14 Financial Implications**

There will be a cost to the Council for the training proposed in this report but it will be covered from the existing Member Training budget.

6. **WARD IMPLICATIONS**

No ward specific implications

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The Localism Act 2011

**Report prepared by Jonathan Eatough, Monitoring Officer, telephone  
01952 383200**