

**Report for:** Standards Committee, 29 June 2021

**Title:** Updated Social Media Guidance for Councillors

**Report authorised by:** Raymond Prince - Assistant Head of Legal Services

**Lead Officer:** Ayshe Simsek – Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** N/A

**Report for Key/  
Non Key Decision:** Non key

## 1. Describe the issue under consideration

This report responds to comments at Standards Committee in January and March 2021 and puts forward updates to the existing guidance. It is proposed to reissue the guidance to support councillors who use social media.

### Cabinet Member Introduction

N/A

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1. That the Committee:

- a) Consider the updated Social Media Guidance for Councillors (Appendix 1).
- b) Note that the Guidance will be:
  - (i) posted on the Members Portal on the Council's intranet
  - (ii) incorporated into the Members Toolkit for new councillors in May 2022
  - (iii) Used to provide training to councillors In May 2022

## 3. Reasons for decision

- 3.1. Local authorities are under a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for their elected and co-opted members. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring that appropriate training is given to elected members on the Ethical Standards Framework, the Councillors' Code of Conduct and any guidance and advice.

## 4. Alternative options considered

- 4.1. It would be open to the Committee to do nothing. However, this is not recommended.
- 4.2. This is because the Council is under a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for its elected and co-opted members. The guidance will provide support to councillors who are subject to the Code of conduct when using social media in their official capacity.

## **5. Background information**

- 5.1. Standards for England (formerly the Standards Board) was previously responsible for drawing up an England-wide code of conduct for councillors and previously provided guidance and advice note on matters related to the code of conduct such as use of social media by councillors.
- 5.2. Following the abolition of Standards for England in 2012 local authorities were required to adopt local codes of conduct. The provision of guidance and advice on standards issues is the responsibility of the Monitoring Officer.
- 5.3. Social media is used by the Council, and councillors now use it to inform and engage with the community who now expect this to be another communication channel. When using social media, councillors are subject to the Code of Conduct and relevant legislation. Therefore, there are risks to using social media which councillors need to be aware of.
- 5.4. The Social Media Guidance for Councillors aims to provide support to councillors in their use of social media. It aims to ensure that councillors understand and comply with the Member Code of Conduct, council policies and laws which are relevant to the use of social media, so they can actively take part in social networks whether the use is for official council business or personal.
- 5.5. Further to considering other borough's social media policies, these all contain the same principles and suggested practical information. These were based on the LGA guidance for Councillor social media use. There has been some further additions proposed in red which are more practical and FAQ section added.
- 5.6. Although it was commented that the two Independent Persons had experience with social media and social media training, given their role on the Standards Committee and considering complaints, having additional contact with the councillors may not be keeping with this role. External or internal trainers could be sought to take forward this training.

## **6. Contribution to strategic outcomes**

- 6.1. The guidance supports the governance of the Council and its decision-making, thereby assisting the Council to meet its strategic outcomes.

**7. Statutory Officers comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, Equalities)**

**Finance**

7.1. None

**Procurement**

7.2. None.

**Legal**

7.3. By virtue of section 27 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council is required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members and to adopt a code dealing with the conduct that is expected of members and co-opted members when they are acting in that capacity.

7.4. Councillors are subject to the Code of Conduct when using social media. The proposed guidance on social media for councillors provides an overview of the law and other considerations when using social media either as a Councillor or as an individual.

**Equality**

7.5. None.

**8. Use of Appendices**

8.1. Appendix 1: Social Media Guidance for Councillors

**9. Background information Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

**9.1. Councillors and social media on the use of social media for councillors**  
**<https://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-and-social-media>**