

Non-Executive Report of the: Standards (Advisory) Committee 25 April 2019	
Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance	Classification: Unrestricted
Social Media Policy	

Originating Officer(s)	Mark Norman – Legal Adviser & Deputy Monitoring Officer Holly Bell – Trainee Solicitor
Wards affected	All Wards

Summary

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in England. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders. In January 2019, the CSPL reported on the outcome of its review into local government ethical standards. The increased use of social media by councillors was considered as part of the CSPL review and in accordance with best practice this report sets out proposals for the adoption of a new social media policy to apply to both Members and officers.

Recommendations:

- (1) That the Advisory Committee consider the draft Social Media Policy attached as Appendix 1 and recommend to full Council its adoption and inclusion in part D of the revised Constitution.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The CSPL review identified that many local authorities fail to address adequately in their codes of conduct important areas of behaviour such as social media use. The draft Policy attached as Appendix 1 (which should be read in conjunction with and supplements the Code of Conduct for Members/Employee Code of Conduct) is designed to address this issue.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 N/A.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- 3.1 Although the Code of Conduct for Members and the Employee Code of Conduct do not specifically address appropriate use of social media, the Council has published policy guidance on the use of social media on its intranet.

- 3.2 The draft Policy attached as Appendix 1 which has been drafted in conjunction with the communications team, updates and revises the existing guidance and will be included in part D of the Council's revised Constitution. The draft Policy also draws on best practice from those authorities that have already adopted specific social media use policies. These authorities include:

- East Devon District Council
- Wiltshire Council
- Chesham Town Council
- Salford City Council
- Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Developing a Social Media Use Policy for Members and officers will contribute to the Council's compliance with equalities legislation. Consideration must be given to ensure that any Policy does not conflict with an individual's right to freedom of expression.

5. OTHER STAUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,

- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.

5.2 A Social Media Policy for Members and officers will contribute towards the Council's risk management and also affect Best Value implications.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL COMMENTS

7.1 The principal statutory provisions relating to standards of conduct for Members are contained in the Localism Act 2011. Section 27(1) of the 2011 Act provides that the Council must promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the authority.

7.2 The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 encourage openness and scrutiny of government. The regulations provide public meetings may be filmed, tweeted or blogged. Any social media policy must therefore not prohibit these activities.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- Committee on Standards In Public Life – Report on Local Government Ethical Standards

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – draft Social Media Policy

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

- N/A