

Non-Executive Report of the: Standards Advisory Committee 30 January 2020	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Andreas Christophorou, Divisional Director, Communications and Marketing	Classification: Unrestricted
Social Media Policy	

Originating Officer(s)	Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications Carmen Hurst, Digital Content Manager
Wards affected	All Wards

Special Circumstances Justifying Urgent Consideration

This report had not quite been finalised by the statutory deadline. However, it is a noting report for discussion and it is important that the Committee consider it at the same time as training is being offered to Members.

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.

A report was presented to Standards Advisory Committee 25 April 2019 setting out a draft social media policy for discussion. This report provides an update to confirm the policy is now final and is being implemented in January 2020.

Recommendations:

That the Standards Advisory Committee

1. Note the council's social media policy and guidance is now final and being implemented.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Social media is a key platform that is used by staff and members in a range of ways. This activity is bound by a policy to minimise the risks associated with using social media, as well as to help leverage and make the most of opportunities for positive engagement. This will support staff and members to tell our story and to talk about Tower Hamlets, as a council and as a place, in a consistent tone that positively engages residents and stakeholders.
- 1.2 This policy need was further highlighted through the Standards Advisory Committee (SAC) following advice from the Government's Committee on Standards in Public Life report (CSPL) on Local Government Standards. The CSPL report identified that many local authorities fail to address adequately in their codes of conduct important areas of behaviour such as social media use. The policy addresses this need and reminds that when using social media, staff and members are bound by their respective codes of conduct in the same way as for any other written or verbal communications.

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 policy and guidance document has been drafted by the communications team following internal discussions (with HR, IT, legal and information governance) and presentation at a previous Standards Advisory Committee meeting. It updates and revises the existing guidance and provides consistency and clarity for members and staff. The 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
- 3.3 The policy will be communicated with staff and members through induction processes, promoted on all internal communications channels and to managers and available on the intranet. (It will not be added to the constitution for members, in line with CSPL advice). Training sessions for members are taking place in the week commencing 20 January 2020.

- 3.4 The policy applies to all council employees (including contractors, temporary, agency or casual staff, and apprentices or trainees), members and anyone who has access to the council's network, systems and information. It covers the use of social media networks, online blogs, discussion forums and other digital activity to ensure consistent and appropriate use across the organisation. This includes (but is not limited to) Facebook pages and Facebook groups, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Snapchat. It aims to support successful two-way engagement with our residents and communities, and ensure appropriate, effective and consistent use of social media, while reducing associated risks.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The social media policy for members and officers contributes to the council's compliance with equalities legislation. Consideration has been given to prevent this policy from conflicting with an individual's right to freedom of expression.

5. OTHER STATUTORY 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 The policy and guidance for staff and members 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

- NONE

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