

Ethics Committee
Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities

26 July 2018
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Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities – Councillor A Khan

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director Customer Service & Transformation

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Social Media Protocol for Elected Members

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Social media is a powerful communication and networking tool which has become increasingly part of our everyday life. Social media is used to describe any kind of on-line tool that you can use for sharing information, including blogs, photo sharing, video sharing, social networks, mobile phone applications, texting, digital TV services and collaboration tools. Unlike a telephone conversation or email, it is a broadcast medium meaning messages have the potential to be viewed by a wider range of people than just the intended recipient.

Although it is not a requirement for elected members to use social media to fulfil their job as a councillor, an increasing number do so in an attempt to share information and to give and gauge opinions. As a result, a first-ever social media protocol for Coventry City Council's elected members has been created. It is designed to offer basic help and advice as well as highlighting good practice and helping to avoid potential pitfalls. The protocol also complements the general rules under the Code of Conduct for Members.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Ethics Committee is asked to consider the social media protocol for elected members and to make any recommendations for consideration by Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities.
- 2) The Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities is asked to consider any recommendations made by the Ethics Committee and to approve the social media protocol and confirm that it should be shared with all elected members

List of Appendices included:

Social media protocol for Elected Members

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Social media protocol for Elected Members

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Social media is a powerful communication and networking tool which has become increasingly part of our everyday life. Coventry City Council is supportive to any elected members' increasing use of social media which is a good way of connecting with their electorate as well as people and issues across the city. With more and more councillors using social media, a protocol has been created to provide clarity on what is and what is not acceptable usage of social media and minimise legal and reputational risk. This guidance complements the existing general rules under the Members' Code of Conduct. In short, the basic position is that the same standards of behaviour and conduct apply online as would be expected offline.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 A social media protocol has been put together in recognition of the increasing number of councillors who are using social media to reach out and engage with the electorate. Although it is not a requirement for members to use social media to fulfil their job as a councillor, more are choosing to do so. The protocol is designed to offer basic help and advice as well as highlighting good practice and helping to avoid potential pitfalls.
- 2.2 It is also designed to assist members in understanding their obligations when using Social Media and to provide advice for how they may better protect themselves from risks.
- 2.3 The protocol highlights potential legal issues when using social media including libel, copyright and data protection. It also raises awareness of how members' use of social media could leave them at risk of falling foul of the Members' Code of Conduct.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 The protocol has been put together by Coventry City Council's Communications Team and has been tested with three, cross-party elected members who are known to be users of social media.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 The Social media protocol for Elected Members would be shared with all 54 elected members if endorsed by the Ethics Committee and Cabinet Member.
- 4.2 This will be achieved by sending copies to them and through social media training sessions that will be offered later this year.

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. However, offering social media guidance to all members will help demonstrate the Council is committed to monitoring and reviewing ethical standards of members using social media.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

Not applicable

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Providing social media guidance will help mitigate the risk of elected members inadvertently falling foul of any potential issue.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Keeping such matters under review will help promote high standards amongst elected members in accordance with the Localism Act.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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