

Report of the Interim Strategic Director

MEMBER SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE1. Purpose of report

To seek approval for new Social Media Guidance for members.

2. Background

Social media has become an intrinsic part of everyday life for many people and many members have a presence on these channels. Whilst it is each elected member's own decision as to whether they engage with residents in this way, the Council welcomes the use of social media and wishes to support members in their use of these channels.

Advice and training has been offered to members in the past, but it is considered that new guidance would help set out more clearly what is and is not acceptable use of these channels and how they can be used in a way that protects members and the reputation of the Council.

The Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct.

3. Financial implications

There are no financial implications.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that the Social Media Guidance for Elected Members be adopted.

Background papers

Nil

APPENDIX 1

**GUDANCE**
GUDANCE: SOCIAL MEDIA GUDANCE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

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1.0 Purpose

The Council welcomes Members' use of social media as a means to communicate with their constituents. This Guidance is designed to set out clearly what is and is not acceptable use of these channels and how they can be used in a way that protects Members and the reputation of the Council.

It covers:

1. Reasons to use social media
2. Potential risks and problems
3. Responsible use of social media in accordance with the Member Code of Conduct.

2.0 Scope

Social media refers to websites and online tools which allow people to share content and interact e.g. blogs or posts on platforms including, but not limited to, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn.

This guidance applies to the use of social media by all Broxtowe Borough Council Members and should be used in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct.

3.0 Protocol

3.1 Why use social media?

The many social media platforms now available have changed the ways in which elected members can communicate in their roles as Elected Members. The use of social media can increase engagement with the public for members and offers a new, instantaneous approach to reaching constituents quickly.

It is not a requirement for members to have a social media account to fulfil their role as an Elected Member. However, the Council wants those who do wish to use these channels to feel confident when using social media.

Social media can help Members:

- Engage a wider audience particularly younger people
- Be more transparent
- Offer immediate communication
- Improve democratic engagement
- Increase community engagement and connect with residents
- Support emergency and crisis communications
- Improve and protect the Council's reputation
- Gain feedback from the community
- Inform local residents what they do in their role as Councillor

3.2 Think before you post

- Any form of communication is capable of being misinterpreted. Social media in particular moves very quickly and can be shared widely, which can magnify the problem of misinterpretation.
- Any activity on social media should be done with consideration of the rules and standards you apply to the rest of your behaviour as an elected member as part of the Member Code of Conduct.
- Although social media allows for a more conversational tone, publishing to the web is still publishing and once you have posted, even if you delete it, it will be recorded on the web. Ensure your content is accurate, informative and thought through – just like you would when speaking to the media or in public.
- Do not disclose confidential information or personal data
- Do not bring the Council into disrepute – you should not publish anything that could reasonably be perceived as reflecting badly upon the reputation of the Council.
- Be mindful of how it may look to the public if you are focused on social media on your tablet or phone in a meeting, rather than on the business at hand.

3.3 Legal issues

- **Libel** – if you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation, they may consider it as defamatory and consider legal action. This could also occur if someone else publishes something defamatory on your website or blog and you don't take swift action to remove it.
- **Copyright** – placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source without obtaining permission is a breach of copyright laws.
- **Data Protection** – Data Protection laws should be followed at all times. Do not publish the personal data of individuals unless you have their express permission. If you place personal information on a public forum you should expect it to be published by others.
- **Bias and predetermination** – if you are involved in making planning, licensing or other quasi-judicial decisions do not say anything through social media (or anywhere) that suggests you have made your mind up on an issue that is due to be formally decided. While your likely view on a particular application may be well known, you need to be able to show that you attended the committee or hearing prepared to take on board and weigh up all the evidence and were genuinely persuadable to a different view, otherwise the decision may be later challenged.

3.4 Social media and the Member Code of Conduct

Aspects of the Code of Conduct for Members will apply to your online activity in the same way as they do to any other communication you may use.

- Be aware of whether you are, or appear to be, acting in your capacity as a Councillor rather than as a private individual.
- It can be presumed by others that you are speaking as a Councillor, even if you are clear in your own mind that you are acting in a private capacity. This also means your views can be taken as being those of your organisation or party when this may not be the case.

The following elements of the Member Code of Conduct are particularly relevant to your use of social media:

- Always treating people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with and those you work alongside
- Having regard to the principles of – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership
- dealing with representations or enquiries from residents, members of our communities and visitors fairly, appropriately and impartially
- behaving in accordance with all the Council's legal obligations, alongside any requirements contained within this Authority's policies, protocols and procedures, including on the use of the Authority's resources
- promoting and supporting high standards of conduct when serving in my public post.

3.5 Top Tips

Do's	Don'ts
Keep your personal accounts and your Councillor accounts separate. You could also consider clearly stating on your profile that your views are your own.	Post in haste or where your judgement might be impaired e.g. if you are tired or have consumed alcohol
Set appropriate privacy settings on your accounts	Post comments you would not be prepared to make on paper or face to face
Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on your pages or blogs and remove them as soon as possible to avoid the perception that you condone such views.	Use social media in any way to attack, insult, abuse, defame or otherwise make negative, offensive or discriminatory comments about council staff, service, users, their family or friends, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations or the Council. Don't upload or distribute any material that could also be considered abusive or offensive
Be aware that you will be seen as acting in your official capacity if you publish information that you could only have accessed by being an elected member	Publish confidential information that you may have learned or had access to as part of your role as an elected member, including personal information.
You can make political points but be careful about being too specific or personal if referring to individuals.	Represent your personal views as being those of the Council

4.0 Responsibilities

Members are responsible for their own personal social media pages and activity.

However, members should be aware that as Broxtowe Borough Councillor's the information they post, regardless of whether they express personal views, cannot be completely detached from the Council.

5.0 Related Policies, Standards and Guidelines

This guidance is in addition to the Members Code of Conduct.

Members are obliged to adhere to the Local Government Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986, which came into force on 31 March 2011, as in the Council's Constitution.

6.0 Further guidance

The Corporate Communications Team and the Monitoring Officer(s) are happy to help with additional guidance and advice.

Some useful reading and guidance leaflets are available on the Members Area of the intranet, including an At A Glance Leaflet.

7.0 Appendices

7.1 Access to social media

WiFi facilities are available in the Town Hall for members wishing to bring their own devices.

This unrestricted access recognises the need for elected members to engage with their communities via the increasingly popular online means of communication.

To have your device configured to work wirelessly in the Town Hall. Please contact the ICT Service Desk on 0116 917 3194 or email ictservicedesk@broxtowe.gov.uk to make an appointment.

At all times, members are reminded of their responsibility for ensuring they comply with all relevant legislation when using social media, including the Member Code of Conduct.

7.2 Advice for using social media

Social media is very different to traditional websites in offering two-way communication and an opportunity for instant feedback. As such, a very different approach is necessary when producing content for social media.

It is your personal choice whether or not you chose to participate in any kind of social media activity in your own time and the views that you express are your own.

However, as a Broxtowe Borough Councillor, you should be aware that any information you post about Broxtowe Borough Council cannot be kept entirely separate from your private views.

Hints & Tips

- **Use common sense** - common sense and good judgement should be used when posting or sharing material to avoid negative publicity. "Think before you tweet" and only post online what you would be willing to say in person. Consider your audience – what interests your target audience? Adapt language and tone to reflect the intended audience.
- **Be prepared** – social media can generate instant feedback, so be prepared to answer questions in a timely manner.
- **Use what you have** – social media does not have to take up a huge amount of time. Many councillors already produce newsletters and other communications materials on a regular basis, much of the content from which could be used in blogs, emails or updates to Facebook and Twitter, where more people can access it.
- **Commitment** – to be effective, social media requires commitment. If you are asked a question on your social media page or blog, respond in a timely manner and make sure you check and update your pages regularly.
- **Be respectful** – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language and speak as an individual. Be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Make sure that you respect people's

confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.

- **Be credible and consistent** – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.
- **Be responsive** – The “social” in social media implies a conversation. Make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you can’t. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner (make sure you meet user expectations for the type of social media that you’re using).
- **Be confident** – Don’t be scared of participating and seek further guidance if you need it. If you’re about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, pause to think about it. Feel confident in what you say before you say it – and say it as clearly as you can.
- **Networks** – think carefully about which people you follow and which networks and groups you choose to join.

8.0 Document Attributes

Document Information

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Document Approval

Date	Name & Job Title of Approver(s)	Version

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End of Document