



COUNCIL - 7TH OCTOBER 2014

SUBJECT: SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 1.1 The Draft Social Media Protocol for Member was considered by the Democratic Services Committee on 17 September 2014.
- 1.2 Comments were made on 2 points in the Draft Protocol and it was agreed that these would be recorded in this report to Council.
 - 1.2.1 Concern was raised about paragraphs 2.1.5 and 2.1.6 which state that the members should not use social media during meetings and should use mobile devices sparingly and discreetly during meetings.

A difference of opinion arose in this regard with some Members in favour of the prohibition of social media use during meetings and other Members in favour of its use. The main concern expressed was that updating social media during a meeting would divert Members attention from the matter under debate which should be their primary focus.

The WLGA Guidance on Social Media states;

"Tweeting on meeting progress and receiving comments from the community can be helpful for transparency and engagement BUT excessive use of Twitter may give people the impression that you are not concentrating on the business in hand or are even relying on guidance from outside the meeting."

The then Local Government and Government Business Minister, Lesley Griffiths, made the following statement on 21 March 2014 on this topic;

"I am also very pleased nearly all County Borough Councils allow blogging and tweeting from their public galleries and Chambers. Social media is an evolving world and an excellent tool which should be embraced. There is no legislative barrier to councillors or the public using social media or filming during council meetings. Allowing filming and blogging is a matter for each Local Authority to decide for itself but I urge all Councils to give this matter serious consideration."

- 1.2.2 Concerns were also raised about paragraph 2.1.8.5 which states that members should be aware that any person they include as a contact on a social media site should be regarded, for the purposes of the Code of Conduct, as a close personal associate.

Guidance from the Public Ombudsman for Wales confirms the following;

"Close personal associates include people such as close friends, colleagues with whom you have particularly strong connections, business associates and close relatives. It does not include casual acquaintances, distant relatives or people you simply come in contact with through your role as member or your work in the local community. Close personal associates

can also include someone with whom you have been in dispute, or whom you may be regarded as having an interest in disadvantaging. For example, being a member of the same golf club as another person would not of itself constitute a close personal association but having that person as a weekly golf partner might well do. If you are in doubt, you should ask your Monitoring Officer."

This has to be translated into the associations that are made using social media and therefore contacts on a social media site should be regarded as close personal associates. There are clear benefits of using social media to communicate with members of the public but as described in the protocol different professional and personal sites can be used to differentiate between friends and constituents.

- 1.3 It was moved and seconded that the recommendation contained in the Officer's report be approved and Council informed of the endorsement of the Democratic Service Committee and by a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.
- 1.4 The Democratic Services Committee recommend to Council that the Social Media Protocol set out in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report be adopted.
- 1.5 Members are invited to consider the report and the above recommendation.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Democratic Services Committee Report - 17th September 2014 (Agenda Item. 6)