



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14TH JULY 2015

SUBJECT: DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report is seeking the views of Members prior to its presentation to Cabinet for approval for the introduction of a Social Media Policy for the employees of Caerphilly County Borough Council.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report brings forward a Social Media Policy to provide guidelines to employees on using social media in both their private and professional lives, having regard to the high standards of conduct expected of Local Government Officers and to protect officers from potential misunderstandings and confusion.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Policy links to the People Management Strategy and therefore to all other strategies, including the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and supplementary guidance. The Council relies on employees to deliver all its strategies and service provision.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The advancement of technology has led to a significant increase in the use of social media applications. Social media is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enables users to interact with each other sharing information, etc. It can take many forms for example blogs; wikis; social networks; forums; podcasts; and content communities. This includes social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, You Tube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Flickr, icloud or Dropbox. This is not an exhaustive list. These websites may be accessed by PCs, tablets or mobile phones both inside and outside of the workplace.
- 4.2 Officers of the Council are of course free to use social media in their own time, but where Officers are identified directly or indirectly as a Council employee using social media in a personal capacity it is expected that they behave appropriately and in line with the Council's policies and values. Any inappropriate online activity will be a matter of concern for the Council.
- 4.3 The Council's Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy refer to the standard of behaviour required by our employees and these rules apply to employees' conduct online.

- 4.4 The Council's Disciplinary Procedure has been used increasingly to address misconduct that is alleged to have arisen as a result of an employee's online conduct.
- 4.5 Currently, the Council does not have any guidance for employees in relation to their online conduct. The lines between public and private lives, personal and professional matters are hazy in online social networks. This policy and the guidance is intended to clarify the responsibilities of employees both inside and outside of work when using social media.
- 4.6 When using social media it is important that all data protection and information governance issues and legislation are adhered to. The policy details where employees are able to find further information on these areas.
- 4.7 A number of the Council's employees use social media on behalf of the Council to promote the Council's services and to consult with the residents of the borough. The Council operates a Facebook page, a Twitter account, You Tube, Flickr and Instagram.
- 4.8 The Council has a responsibility to ensure that it has a policy in place to investigate the disputed accuracy of posts and remove any posts that are found to be inaccurate or inappropriate on its social media sites.
- 4.9 Corporate Management Team (CMT) has agreed that employees are able to view the Council's social media sites within the workplace for up to a maximum of 30 minutes each day and this will be notified to employees via the HR Support Portal. Even though employees are able to access social media sites within the workplace they should always bear in mind that work based priorities will always take precedence.
- 4.10 The Policy is intended to cover employees' use of social media both on behalf of the Council and in their private lives in relation to what they should or should not say about their employment with the Council. It also provides Guidance to Managers on how to deal with these situations and how to provide support to anyone who has comments made about them on social media sites. A copy of the draft policy has been attached at Appendix 1. Training is already provided to employees who use social media on behalf of the Council so that they are aware of the appropriate standards of behaviour expected of them.
- 4.11 Advice on the policy has been sought from Information Technology, Communications and the Corporate Information Governance Unit and their comments have been included within the policy.
- 4.12 The Council's recognised trade unions have been consulted on the policy and the majority of the feedback has been included in the final draft of the policy, which is attached at Appendix 1. The one area that has not been included is where the trade unions were concerned whether an employee could be held responsible for their comments if they had not identified themselves as working for the Council. However, legal advice suggests that if it is reasonable for the comments to be attributable to the employee and identifies them as an employee of the Council then they can be held liable for their actions.
- 4.13 The new policy will be placed on the Council's HR Support Portal and employees will be made aware of the new policy via an all user email to employees and Managers. Managers of employees who do not have access to the Council's email system or Intranet will be asked to make their employees aware of the new policy.
- 4.14 The Council has the option whether to introduce the policy or not but by its introduction, it is helping to provide guidance to employees on the standards expected of them, thus hopefully avoiding any future disputes about employees not being aware of what they can and cannot do in relation to social media. This will also reinforce the standards of behaviour expected of Local Government Officers as detailed in the Council's Code of Conduct for Officers. It also provides guidance to Managers on dealing with any misuse of social media that is brought to their attention.

- 4.15 The policy will apply to all employees except those employees directly employed by schools. For the policy to apply to schools each School Governing Body is required to adopt the policy. The HR Team will facilitate this process via agreed consultation process for school policies.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Senior Policy Officer (Equalities and Welsh Language) has been consulted on the introduction of this policy. A number of Equalities and Human Rights issues were raised and discussed during the drafting of the policy and the results of those discussions are reflected in the final policy being presented here.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications attached to the introduction of this policy.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications attached to the introduction of this policy.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 All consultation responses are included in the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Scrutiny members are asked to consider the contents of the report and make a recommendation to Cabinet to adopt the policy.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The recommendation is made to support the Council to introduce a Social Media Policy that will provide guidelines to employees on using social media in both their private and professional lives, having regard to the high standards of conduct expected of Local Government Officers and to protect them from misunderstandings and confusion.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972
Local Government Act 2000
Employment Rights Act 1996
Data Protection Act 1998

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Draft Social Media Policy