

HUMAN RESOURCES AND COUNCIL TAX COMMITTEE

7 JULY 2021

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PARTNERSHIPS)

A.1 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

(Report prepared by Will Lodge)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide the Human Resources & Council Tax Committee with an updated Social Media Policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tendring District Council adopted a Social Media Policy in September 2018 with the aim of codifying best practice with regards to the Council's use of social media channels.

It covers broadly three areas: staff members' personal use of social media; use of corporate social media accounts; and processes associated with corporate social media accounts.

The Policy specifically sets out that inappropriate use of social media by staff may potentially result in disciplinary action, and what may constitute inappropriate use. It also builds in safeguards for the Council by enshrining best practice into policy.

Since its adoption, the Council's use of social media has continued to grow and so a review of the policy has been held to ensure it remains up-to-date and in line with best practice.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- a) That the Human Resources and Council Tax Committee formally approves and adopts the revised Officers' Social Media Policy; and
- b) That the Assistant Director (Partnerships) be authorised to update the policy with any future legislative or best practice changes, in consultation with the Council's Communications Manager (and others as outlined within the policy).

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The Social Media Policy supports the wider Communications Strategy of the Council. Under the Communications Strategy adopted in April 2021, a key area for growth is social media and increasing the amount of content produced and posted by frontline staff.

As such the Social Media Policy helps to deliver all of the Council's priorities by providing effective and timely communication of news, events and policies of the Council. By informing people of new ways of working and interacting with the Council it also helps to drive behaviour change, such as the channel shift agenda.

In addition, increased communication of things the Council is doing, and doing well, was a key theme arising from the Local Government Association's Peer Review conducted in February 2018.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources

There are no finance implications arising from this policy – training is delivered in-house for those who use social media. Social media channels are maintained and updated using existing resource.

Risk

The adoption of a Social Media Policy reduces reputational risk to the Council by making staff better aware of their responsibilities when using social media, either professionally or personally.

In addition, by enshrining that the Communications Manager and Heads of Service/Assistant Directors have full admin rights to accounts, it strengthens the Council's resilience in the event of staff absence or departure.

LEGAL

There is no legal requirement to have a Social Media Policy. However, it is considered best practice. The Social Media Policy does uphold legal requirements in other areas, such as those involving Data Protection.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities / Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.

Although there are no direct equality or diversity issues, the Policy recognises social media is a good way of potentially getting the Council's message to harder-to-reach communities, thus improving consultation and public engagement.

There is no direct environmental impact, but social media can again be used as way to communicate messages in support of the Council's Climate Change Declaration.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The revised Social Media Policy aims to keep up-to-date best practice with regards to the Council's use of social media channels.

The Policy does not seek to control staff members' own personal social media accounts. However, it does remind staff to be careful about what information they share about themselves online, and the potential impact their profile and posts can have not only on themselves, but on the Council.

With regards to business use of social media, the Policy sets out the basic principles the Council – through its staff – should adhere to, and puts established safeguards into written policy. By establishing a clear process for establishing social media channels and running them – such as who is authorised to do so – it allows the Council to speak with a consistent message.

The Policy also places an emphasis on training of staff to use social media correctly and effectively, and on managers to identify training needs.

Aside from a number of minor changes to reflect changes to the Council's structure (e.g. the introduction of the Assistant Director role), there are three bigger changes within the revised draft policy:

1. At 5.12 softening of the language slightly with regard to adding of business contacts on personal social media accounts. This is to account for the fact that some social media channels (e.g. LinkedIn) are specifically geared towards a professional/work profile – use of which by employees can be beneficial to the Council.
2. Addition of 5.14 and 6.13 making it explicit that social media should not be used for investigatory work; this strengthens the existing 'catch-all' clause 4.7 (that social media should not be used in any way which breaches other policies).
3. Addition of 6.10 and 6.11 outlining our support for staff if they encounter abuse or other inappropriate behaviour while administering the Council's social media channels.

Fortunately cases of people behaving inappropriately towards Council staff who monitor and respond to social media enquiries is relatively low, and often a reminder to people of what is and is not acceptable behaviour is sufficient to maintain a positive relationship.

Sadly there have been a few isolated incidents where unacceptable behaviour has continued, and appropriate action therefore taken. Staff are offered support in handling such behaviour, and personal support if they become affected by it.

A piece of work is currently being carried out to create some 'house rules' for our social media channels which we ask those who engage with us, in line with best practice; this will be included within the wider review of our existing Social Media Strategy and Guidelines later in 2021.

In addition, another piece of work is underway to create a 'how-to guide' for staff on handling social media enquiries, which again can form part of the revised Guidelines.

Other changes to the revised Social Media Policy are:

- Removing a duplicate section on review of the policy
- Changing 'annual' review to 'every three years', in line with other policy reviews
- References to Assistant Directors to reflect structure changes
- Updating the title of this committee to reflect changes
- Revised reference to the Communications Strategy
- Making explicit the support of the Communications Team to nominated responsible persons.

Unison has been consulted on the proposals and is supportive of them.

CURRENT POSITION

The Council currently has the existing Social Media Policy, along with a Social Media Strategy and Guidelines (both of which are due for review later in 2021 following the adoption of a new Communications Strategy).

Tendring District Council has corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts, while a number of services or projects also have their own accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Draft new Social Media Policy (Marked to show revisions)
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