

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

What do the Guidelines Cover?

These Guidelines cover all Social Media platforms, including but not limited to:

- Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Myspace, Foursquare, LinkedIn, Google+)
- Micro-blogging sites (Twitter)
- Blogs (including personal blogs as well as comments)
- Video and Photo Sharing Websites (Flickr, YouTube)
- Forums and discussion Boards (Google Groups, Yahoo! Groups)
- Email between councillors and other parties

Social Media

Social Media is a collective term used to describe easy ways to create and publish on the internet. People generally use the term to describe how organisations and individuals share content – text, video and pictures – and create conversations on the web. Examples of Social Media tools include blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Flickr, Tumblr and YouTube. The Council recognises the benefits that these new methods of communication can bring, but reminds all Members to use Social Media responsibly.

Summary Principles:

- **These Guidelines should be considered in conjunction with the Council's Members' Code of Conduct**
- **It relates to all use of Social Media, when acting in any capacity**
- **When making use of Social Media, Councillors should make use of stringent privacy settings if they do not wish them to be accessed by press or the public**
- **You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of Social Media**
- **Treat others with respect**
- **Comply with equality laws**
- **Do not disclose confidential information**
- **Do not disclose any personal or sensitive information**
- **If using third party material, ensure you have the requisite permission and that it is accurate.**

- **Since the judgment of whether you are perceived to be acting as a Councillor will be taken by someone else, it is safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role.**

Key Points

- ❖ Your online presence reflects on the Council and your role as a Councillor. Be aware that your actions captured via images, posts or comments can affect your ability to take part in Council business.
- ❖ Comments posted on personal blogs should have clear disclaimers that the view expressed by you in the blog are your views alone and do not represent the views of the Council. Be clear and write in the first person. Make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the Council.
- ❖ Comments on personal blogs, other blogs, forums and social networking sites should be respectful to the Council, it's staff and other people.
- ❖ You need to use sound judgement and control what you publish online. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time so consider the content carefully.
- ❖ Social Media activities should not host content which is defamatory of others.
- ❖ Abuse of Social Media can be a criminal offence.

The Council has produced the below simple guidelines to help Members:-

- ✓ **Do** – listen to what people are saying online, consider it and only respond if you feel it is appropriate
- ✗ **Don't** – publish anything you would not say in traditional media, for example during the pre-election period, or saying how you will vote on a particular issue
- ✓ **Do** – remember libel and copyright laws still apply to things you post on Social Media sites and what you publish is widely accessible and may always be around
- ✗ **Don't** – bring the Council, or your Member role, into disrepute
- ✓ **Do** – make it clear whether you are speaking from a personal perspective or as a Member representing the Council or a Member representing your political party
- ✗ **Don't** – use Social Media during Committee meetings if you are a Member of the Committee or taking part in the meeting, if it interferes with or distracts from the business of the meeting
- ✓ **Do** – think about how the public might perceive who you follow on Twitter or befriend on Facebook etc
- ✗ **Don't** – disclose any information which you have received in confidence
- ✓ **Do** – be respectful in your communications with others. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments (which can be a criminal offence). Think before you publish!

- ✘ **Don't** – assume that everyone shares your sense of humour. Others may be offended by the joke you thought was hilarious, or may not realise when you are being sarcastic or ironic
- ✔ **Do** – use Social Media when sober. Drinking alcohol and tweeting is not a good idea.

Remember – Although Freedom of Expression provides Councillors with a greater degree of protection when acting as a Councillor, inappropriate use of Social Media could amount to a breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

As a District Councillor you are in a position where you are able to request information from officers that might not otherwise be publically available and you will also be included on information sent out to all Members. This may be privileged information that is provided to you to ensure you are aware of local issues and to enable you to fulfil your role as a District Councillor. You must consider how you use this information since it may be that it is private or privileged. You should check before posting this information on social media.