

Subject:	Social Media Protocol for Members and Social Media Networking Policy for Employees		
Date of Meeting:	8 March 2016		
Report of:	Head of Law & Monitoring Officer		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis	Tel: 29-1500
	Email:	Abraham.ghebre-ghiorghis@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE.**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring to the Audit & Standards Committee the outcome of a review of the protocol on the use of social media by members and a social networking policy for employees, both of which were first approved by this Committee at its meeting on 16th April 2013.
- 1.2 The suggested revisions to the above-mentioned protocol aim to update and refine it so as to better inform the ongoing project to equip both members and staff to use social media appropriately and in a compliant way.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee approves the revised Social Media Protocol for Members at Appendix 1.1 to this report.
- 2.2 That the committee notes the Social Networking Policy for Employees at Appendix 1.2 to this report.
- 2.3 That the committee note that the revised Social Media Protocol – if approved - will be circulated to all Members, together with an explanatory covering letter which highlights the changes which have been made to it.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 At its meeting of the 16th April 2013, the Audit and Standards Committee approved a protocol and a policy in relation to the usage of social media by Members and officers respectively for the discharge of Council-related duties.
- 3.2 The approach which gave rise to those new policy and protocol documents emerged from the recommendations agreed at the Audit and Standards Committee's meeting of 22nd January 2013, which implemented a number of action points emerging from an investigation by the Monitoring Officer aimed to improve the Council's management of confidential information.

3.3 Officers and social media usage:

Data received from HR indicates that there have been 6 allegations of breaches of the Social Networking Policy for employees during the 2 years following its introduction. That data may be viewed as evidence of the relevance of the Policy. Having consulted with HR and the officer responsible for social media in the Communications team, as well as with the Independent Persons, there are no proposed amendments to that policy. It is however attached for completeness.

3.4 Members and social media usage:

Members may also wish to note that some data has been obtained on councillor engagement via social media from the relevant officer in the Communications team. That data is attached as Appendix 1.3. It indicates that of 54 elected councillors, 30 have accounts with Twitter which have been identified. Of those members who have accounts, 25 are active in the sense of posting at least once a week.

Failures to observe the Social Media Protocol for Members are considered against the specific requirements of the Code of Conduct. Historically data regarding complaints of breaches of the Protocol have not been compiled. Members will however note that the most recent complaints outlined in the update Report before today's Committee concern social media comments made by elected member(s). The complaint which has been resolved has given rise to proposed revisions to the Protocol which make specific reference to the need for transparency where members consider it appropriate to 'block' individuals. The revised Protocol also includes new provisions which go to social media usage during Council meetings. Although this has not given rise to any current complaints, the practice of social media usage during meetings arguably has a higher profile since regulations permitting the broadcasting of Council meetings by the public were introduced in 2014.

- 3.5 The Social Media Protocol for Members (revised) and the Social Networking Policy for Employees (originally based on an existing informal guidance document, and not subject to revision on this occasion) - are attached at Appendices 1.1 and 1.2 respectively.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation with Human Resources and Communications has taken place on the content of the Social Media Protocol for Elected Members and the Social Networking Policy for Employees.
- 5.2 Consultation has also recently taken place on these two documents with the Independent Persons.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Acceptance of the recommendations and adoption of the revised Social Media Protocol for Members may be seen as part of the ongoing direction of travel agreed by the committee at its meeting on 16/3/13 to ensure the availability of appropriate guidance on social media usage.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The proposed actions set out involve changes to working practices, codes, protocols and culture, all of which are expected to be achieved within existing departmental revenue budgets.

Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld

Date: 26/02/16

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 As detailed in the body of the report.

Lawyer Consulted: Victoria Simpson

Date: 24/02/2016

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no equalities implications arising from the report.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 There are no sustainability implications arising from the report.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.5 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from the report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.6 The adoption of appropriate protocols and policies set a framework for improvement to the council's corporate governance and lessen the risk of issues arising.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.7 The attached document aims to assist in the project to continually improve the Council's corporate governance and to ensure properly managed openness and transparency by its Members.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

- 1.1 Social Media Protocol For Members
- 1.2 Social Networking Policy For Employees
- 1.3 Table providing data on member usage of twitter

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None