



Draft Report to Special Meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council Corporate Scrutiny Committee to be held on 28 October 2014

Proposed Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (this matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mark Edwards)

Executive Summary

This report provides a background and rationale for the Council to adopt a Social Media Policy and a Recording of Meetings Protocol. The Committee is requested to review the draft documents and provide comment for Council on the proposals.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 The Council already operates within a world where the use of Social Media is growing and becoming an increasingly significant way of communicating with individuals and organisations.
- 1.2 The Council already uses a Twitter account and currently has approximately 800 Twitter followers which are growing at approximately 100 per month.
- 1.3 In addition, some individual Councillors and members of staff already have their own Twitter accounts and Facebook pages and no doubt going forward this trend will be on the increase as Social Media continues to evolve.
- 1.4 Against this background Southwest Audit Partnership has recommended that the Councils should have an approved Social Media Policy to provide guidance for Councillors and staff and minimise the risk of exposing the Authority to reputational damage. It should be emphasised that such a Policy is not about controlling what people do as individuals but rather providing a framework for them to make informed and balanced choices.
- 1.5 In the light of this advice, Officers have looked at the practice elsewhere including liaising with the Local Government Association and external

specialists and drafted guidelines on how to use Social Media effectively – attached is Appendix A to this report together with a draft Social Media Policy attached as Appendix B to the report and a short summary of the Policy attached at Appendix C to the report.

- 1.6 The Committee is invited to review these documents and make any comments to assist the Council when considering the adoption of a Social Media Policy.
- 1.7 On a related matter, the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 have made it a requirement for Councils to allow any member of the public to take photographs, film and audio record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings. Attached as Appendix D to this report is a relevant section of Guidance produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government in this respect.
- 1.8 In the light of these developments the Monitoring Officers' Group have prepared a draft protocol which is to be considered for adoption by all the Local Authorities in Somerset – attached at Appendix E to this report.
- 1.9 In addition to considering the adoption of this protocol, the Committee may wish to consider making a recommendation to Full Council in regard to implementing the audio recording of meetings open to the public which could be undertaken at minimal additional cost. This would ensure that the Council has at least as accurate a record of any of its public meetings as any individual who may have chosen to record the proceedings.
- 1.91 Both Exmoor National Park Authority and West Somerset District Council have followed this practice for some time and the experience has been positive in that the process has not been found to have been disruptive to the smooth running of the meetings (members just need to speak clearly into the microphones which they need to do in any case to make sure everyone can hear clearly). The recordings also increase transparency and access for the community with recording being available on request and at the National park, recordings of meetings are made available on the Authority's web-site within four working days of the meeting being held.
- 1.92 The Council have already agreed – and allocated funding - to update the microphone loop system and this is in hand to be introduced within two to three months. If the Council did wish to proceed with audio recording the public part of its meetings then all that would be required would be to purchase a small recording device that was compatible with the new system at an estimated cost of up to £200 which could be found from existing budgets.

2. Legal Comments

- 2.1 The adoption of a Social Media Policy produces a risk of corporate social media accounts being misused and becoming the possible source of litigation

claims. In addition the adoption of a Recording of Meetings Protocol would also ensure that the Council meets its legal obligations under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

3. Links to Corporate Aims

3.1 This report has no direct links to Corporate Aims although the adoption of appropriate policy should underpin good governance arrangements.

4. Environmental and Community Safety Implications

4.1 This report has no environmental and community safety implications.

5. Equalities Impact

5.1 The adoption of social media policy should enhance the ability to manage issues and minimise the risk of material on Council Social Media Accounts that could potentially put the Council at a reputational risk for breaching any aspect of the Equalities Act.

6. Risk Management

6.1 The adoption of the suggested protocols should minimise the risks of Corporate Social Media Accounts would be misused, and regulated and expose the Authority to reputational damage.

7. Partnership Implications

7.1 There are no direct Partnership Implications associated with this report.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Corporate Scrutiny is requested to review the draft Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol and provide comment for Council on the proposals.