

To: **Employment Committee**  
**16 October 2019**

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**Social Media Policy**  
**Director of Organisational Development, Transformation and HR**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The council currently has several protocols and policies that cover staff personal and professional use of social media. This has led to a limited assurance audit result, so a one stop policy is required to satisfy the auditor's recommendations.
- 1.2 To enable staff to understand their responsibilities and what the council considers to be appropriate use of social media both personally and professionally, a full policy has been drafted. Guidance has also been drafted to complement the policy. The policy and associated guidance reflect comments made by an auditor following the council's first social media audit last year and comments made by the Employment Committee at its July 2019 meeting.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 **To approve the Social Media Policy attached at Appendix A.**

**3 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 Bracknell Forest Council currently has a Social Media Protocol, which sets out correct business and expectations for corporate accounts. It provides limited guidance on how staff should use it in a personal capacity. The council's Employee Handbook also references social media usage in a personal capacity. However, there is currently no cohesive policy.
- 3.2 Case work and case law continue to evidence the need for a clear social media policy to ensure staff are clear on the corporate stance and have the appropriate guidance.
- 3.2 The social media audit made suggestions regarding the current Social Media Protocol, these have been incorporated in the collaborated policy, addressing all the auditor's comments. The policy ensures compliance with the action points set out by the auditor within the timescale specified.
- 3.3 As social media usage continues to grow, Bracknell Forest Council staff need clear and concise guidance on what the council expects of them online. Even if they are not acting in an official capacity, staff need to understand and take ownership of everything they do and say on social media as it can have reputational and legal ramifications for the council. This policy provides such guidance.

**4 Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 Continue with separate guidance in the Employee Handbook and Social Media Protocol, which would be updated to reflect the auditor's comments on business use.

## **5 Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Bracknell Forest Council had its first social media audit in summer 2018, which was formalised and agreed in December 2018. As it was rated 'limited assurance', a review is planned for autumn 2019. One of the actions that was flagged as a priority one red action was the Social Media Protocol, which had started to be redrafted but hadn't been completed prior to the visit. In redrafting this guidance, which focussed primarily on business/corporate use, it seemed prudent to update guidance to staff so that a clear policy was available, with all information in one place.
- 5.2 Social media is growing with new platforms and trends coming onstream continuously. In the UK, there are approximately: 42m Facebook users; 16m Twitter users; 21m LinkedIn users; and 14m Instagram users. It's estimated that there are 36m UK visitors to YouTube each month; globally it is estimated that a billion hours of video is watched on the site each day.
- 5.3 Bracknell Forest Council has been successfully using social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter, since 2008 with YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts added more recently. These are split between corporate 'BFC' accounts and more service-led accounts, for example highways and children's centres. There is a confirmed process for any service wishing to create and maintain a service-led social media account, with the corporate accounts owned and managed by the council's communications and marketing team. This is reflected in the current social media protocol.
- 5.4 The current Social Media Protocol is outdated and has a limited section on staff using social media in a professional and personal capacity; it is general in approach. It does not adequately cover key areas.
- 5.5 Whilst the council recognises staff are entitled to their own opinions and should be ambassadors for the organisation, especially on professional channels like LinkedIn, it also recognises that whatever they say and do online could have ramifications for the organisation, community and them personally. Therefore, this policy aims to keep staff safe and reduce any conflict of interest. It gives staff and managers a clearer understanding of what is not acceptable and sets out employees' responsibilities as well as making it clear that non-compliance can lead to disciplinary proceedings, if appropriate.
- 5.6 The social media policy has been redrafted since its previous iteration was presented to the Employment Committee in July 2019. It reflects the comments made by the committee, including making it more concise. The policy is supported by social media guidance, which will be available to staff on the intranet.

## **6 Consultation and Other Considerations**

### Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are a number of legal and reputational risks to officers, Members and the organisation arising out of inappropriate use of social media which this policy seeks to mitigate.

### Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### Other Consultation Responses

6.3 N/A

### Equalities Impact Assessment

6.4 N/A

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.5 Adoption of the proposed policy and guidance will help ensure that risk to the Council's reputation from inappropriate or unauthorised social media posts from staff is minimised.

### Background Papers

Appendix A – Social Media Policy

### Contact for further information

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