

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS OF MILTON KEYNES

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What is the purpose of this Guidance and who does it apply to?

Milton Keynes Council has always been committed to innovation and creativity in the digital revolution which has taken place over recent years. We actively encourage the use of social media, which has become an integral part of everyday life for many of us as it is a useful way to communicate and connect with people from all over the world.

In respect of Councillors, social media has many benefits including raising a Councillor's profile, helping to deliver information to constituents in a fast and effective manner and for improving reputation. However, there are also many ways in which Councillors may use social media inappropriately, and this can have long lasting consequences for Councillors, and the Council's reputation.

The Social Media Guidance for Councillors ('the Guidance') is intended to assist Councillors of Milton Keynes Council when using social media, in a personal or professional capacity, to avoid potential breaches of their Code of Conduct. Whilst Standards matters are and dealt with on a case by case basis, this Guidance is designed to assist Councillors on what is and isn't appropriate behaviour when using social media.

Importantly, this Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Who is this Guidance for?

The Guidance applies to all Councillors and co-opted Councillors of Milton Keynes Council.

A co-opted member is defined in section 27(4) of the Localism Act 2011 as "*a person who is not a member of the authority but who:*

- (a) *is a member of any committee or sub-committee of the authority;*
- (b) *is a member of, and represents the authority on, any joint committee or joint sub-committee of the authority; and*

(c) *who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of that committee or sub-committee”.*

Pros and Cons of Social Media



The Code of Conduct

Councillors are personally responsible for their conduct online should always be mindful of the Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles.

'Acting in Capacity' as a Councillor

This is a subjective test. However, there are actions which increase the likelihood of a Councillor being found as 'acting in their capacity as a Councillor'. For example, by identifying that they are a Councillor on their profile page, by using social media to campaign or to share Council news/developments with the public.

A Councillor may wish to consider the following when using social media:

- Keep separate accounts for professional and private matters
By having one account which incorporates both a Councillor's professional and personal life, Councillors are increasing the risk of being found as acting in their capacity if a complaint is made.
- If a Councillor wishes to keep just one account, be clear on what the account is used for. For example, if the account is personal, keep it private and refrain from using Council or Councillor terminology or referring to your role as a Councillor.

General Responsibilities when using Social Media

In addition to the Model Code of Conduct, Councillors should be mindful of the following responsibilities:

- Councillors should take particular care to ensure that, in any comment or post they create, they do not imply that they are speaking on behalf of the Council as a whole.
- Once a post is made on social media, it is there for the world to see, even if it is deleted this does not mean that someone has not already saved a copy of it. Councillors should never post anything on social media that they would not be prepared to discuss in public meetings, with their constituents and with their friends and family. Councillors should think carefully before engaging in activity on social media.
- Councillors should be honest about who they are on social media and not impersonate anybody if it could lead to bringing the Council into disrepute.
- Councillors should be mindful of the safety of themselves, their families and others.
- Councillors should only share accurate information from reliable sources and should be mindful of 'fake news' stories and outlets.
- Councillors should be trustworthy and not use social media to divulge any confidential or exempt information which has been shared with them.
- Councillors should keep their social media accounts secure and protected by passwords. They should not allow anybody else access to any of their social media platforms.
- Councillors should remain professional and polite when conversing with members of the public. This includes the use of private messaging, commenting on posts or replying.
- The way we interact with people in person is not just limited to the things we say. Body language, expression, tone of voice and who we are speaking to are all contributing factors to interaction. Considering this, Councillors should always consider how any comment/post they make on social media could be construed.
- Councillors should be mindful of the public perception of using social media during Council meetings and consider whether it is appropriate.

Potential Legal Issues

Councillors should be mindful that, in addition to a potential breach of the Code, misuse of social media may give rise to other consequences. The following issues, which may lead to criminal or civil legal proceedings, may also arise:

- Data Protection.
- Publication of Obscene Material.
- Incitement.
- Copyright.
- Harassment.
- Discrimination.
- Bias.
- Defamation.
- Judicial Review.

Training

Training on the use social media will be made available to Councillors.

The Local Government Association have also published a Checklist for Councillors. This can be found at the attached **Annex**.

If you are unsure, or have any questions about your social media use, contact the Monitoring Officer.

Review

This guidance will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Standards Committee.