

Council report



10 March 2021

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Not in Council Plan
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

The Social Media Guidance for Councillors of Milton Keynes ('the Guidance'), attached at **Annex A** of the report, aims to encourage and support Councillors when using, social media in either a professional or personal capacity.

On 28th January 2021, Standards Committee approved the Guidance subject to the following amendments:

- a) Reference to the Code of Conduct be removed from the Guidance;
- b) Allowed for social media to be used during meetings but reminds Councillors of the perception of this in certain meetings;
- c) Highlight that the Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Milton Keynes Council Code of Conduct; and
- d) Provision for an annual review of the Guidance by the Standards Committee.

The amendments have been incorporated into the Guidance and therefore the Standards Committee seeks Full Council approval of the Guidance.

1. Decision/s to be made

- 1.1 That the Social Media Guidance be approved by Full Council.
- 1.2 That the annual review of the Social Media Guidance be delegated to the Standards Committee.

2. Why is the decision needed?

- 2.1 In recent years, there has been an increase in code of conduct complaints against Councillors in respect of their social media use. Between 1 April to 1 December 2020, eight out of 29 complaints received related fully or partly to social media conduct.
- 2.2 Many local authorities have sought to limit the amount of complaints and give greater clarity in assessing complaints by introducing guidance on social media and policies. At present, the Council does not have any specific guidance on social media use for its councillors, nor is social media mentioned in the current MKC Code of Conduct.
- 2.3 The Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct (the Model Code) which was published on 23 December 2020 specifically states that the Code extends to *'all forms of communication and interaction, including ... in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments'*. However, the Model Code does not go further than this and does not provide any guidance to Councillors on how to use social media. The Standards Committee will be reviewing in detail whether to adopt the Model Code and any amendments that should be made, with any recommendation subject to separate Full Council approval.
- 2.4 Whilst the Model Code explicitly states that it extends to social media use by Councillors it is considered helpful for councillors to have guidance on how to use social media responsibly as a councillor, when they are likely to be considered to acting in their capacity as a Councillor' and which specific behaviours which may constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 2.5 The purpose of the Social Media guidance is to assist and enable Councillors to use social media while sitting within the expected behaviours set out in The Code of Conduct. When dealing with code of conduct complaints, it is the Council's adopted Code that applies, and the Social Media Guidance provides guidance.

3. Implications of the decision

Financial	N	Human rights, equality, diversity	N
Legal	N	Policies or Council Plan	N
Communication	N	Procurement	N
Energy Efficiency	N	Workforce	N

4. Alternatives

4.1 The Council could choose:

- (a) not to adopt the Social Media Guidance; or
- (b) adopt subject to any amendments.

5. Timetable for Implementation

5.1 If the Guidance is approved by Full Council, it will come into effect immediately and will be published on CMIS.

List of Annexes

Annex A - Social Media Guidance for Councillors of Milton Keynes

List of Background Papers

LGA Model Member Code of Conduct: Consultation response analysis, November 2020

<https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-model-member-code-conduct-consultation-response-analysis-november-2020#methodology->