

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

23 November 2018

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES – C.GRIFFITHS

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All

WLGA Social Media Guidance for Councillors

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with a copy of the recent guidance produced by the Welsh Local Government Association (“WLGA) regarding social media guidance for Councillors (“the Ombudsman”).

Background

2. The WLGA recognises that social media is playing an increasingly important role in local politics and has prepared a guide for Councillors in relation to its use.
3. The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales has seen a number of complaints that have been made to the Ombudsman recently from members of the public regarding comments that have been placed by Members throughout Wales on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, to which they have taken objection to and wish to complain further. The Ombudsman have found that there has been no breach of the Members Code of Conduct in some of these complaints but nevertheless they are becoming more mindful of such issues.
4. The guide explains some of the more common types of social media that are available and sets out both the advantages and disadvantages of social media use.

5. The guide also sets out some “Golden rules” for social media use and specifically addresses the relationship between social media and the member’s code of conduct.
6. Finally the guide references the various criminal and civil liabilities that could arise from misuse of social media.
7. In due course a copy of this guidance note will be issued to all Members and forwarded on to Town and Community Clerks for onward distribution.
8. The Head of Legal Services and the Democratic Services Manager will shortly be embarking on a training programme for Members with regards to social media issues which in effect will discuss the same principles identified in this WLGA guide.
9. On the 24th September 2018, the Monitoring Officer, issued some general guidance to Members reminding them that if they can be identified as a councillor when they are using social media, either by their account name or how they describe themselves or by what they comment on and how they comment, the requirements of the Members Code of Conduct will apply. Some practical guidance was also given, similar in vein to that which is set out in the WLGA guide

Financial Impact

10. There are no financial impacts associated with this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

11. There are no equality impacts associated with this Report

Workforce Impacts

12. There are no workforce impacts associated with this Report

Legal Impacts

13. The ethical framework of Members is as derived from the Local Government Act 2000 and the Members Code of Conduct is as set out in the Constitution of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (“the Council”) as created by the Conduct of Members (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) Order 2001. The powers of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales are as defined in the Local Government Act 2000 and the Public Service (Ombudsman) Wales Act 2005 (as amended)

Consultation

14. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

15. That Members note the content of this report.

Appendices

16. None

List of Background Papers

17. The Constitution of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council incorporating the Members Code of Conduct

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