

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
REPORT FROM TASK AND FINISH GROUP – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY REVIEW**

LEAD MEMBER: Councillor Jeffrey Hailes, Chair of the Social Media Policy Review Task & Finish Group

LEAD OFFICER: Sarah Pemberton, Director of Corporate Services and Commercial Strategy

REPORT AUTHOR: Rose Blaney, Scrutiny Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Accept the recommendations made in Section 5 of this report
- 2) Forward the recommendations to the Executive

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to provide Members with an update of the Social Media Policy Review Task and Finish Group.
- 1.2 Within the current Social Media Guidance and Acceptable Use Policy (2019), under Policy Monitoring, it is suggested that the policy should be reviewed and updated every two years. It has been two years since a review was done by the Information Governance Officer and four years since a review through a Task & Finish Group.
- 1.3 The Task & Finish Group consisted of Councillors Jeffrey Hailes, Jeanette Forster and Linda Jones-Bulman. The group met three times and have now completed their work.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The original 2017 policy suggests that the policy should be reviewed and updated every two years or when there has been an update within legislation. Although a review was undertaken in 2019, this was done only by the Information Governance Officer in accordance with IPCO recommendations.
- 2.2 Overview and Scrutiny felt that a full review through a Task & Finish group would be more beneficial for this review after two years since the last one (in accordance with the policy).
- 2.3 There is the perception that with the Covid-19 Pandemic restricting people from interacting, Social Media has been used more by both Councillors and council staff.
- 2.4 The increase in Code of Conduct complaints relating to Social Media use was also a motivation for councillors to want to review the current guidance and policy.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 The Task & Finish Group agreed three key objectives:
 - 1) To review the current guidance and policy for Social Media use.
 - 2) To work with the Communications team to understand the changes in Social Media and how they have worked since the creation of the policy in 2017 and the update in 2019.
 - 3) To update and amend the current policy to reflect the post-Covid-19 world, and more generally the rise in use of social media.
- 3.2 The review only includes the Social Media Guidance and Acceptable Use Policy; it does not cover any of the council's policy documents directly linked to the policy. Those not covered within the review are detailed in section 8 (References) of the current Social Media policy.
- 3.3 Consideration needed to be given into how the changes to the policy would affect both councillors and council employees.
- 3.4 The group noted that any changes made would need to reflect the current Social Media setting and be understandable to avoid any possible confusion.

3.5 The group wanted to ensure that the information included within the updated policy was clear and concise to enable both council staff and councillors to understand what is being asked of them within the policy.

4. Review

4.1 The review began by creating the scope, with the group wanting to be able to answer five key questions:

- 1) What has changed since the original policy was created?
- 2) How can the social media policy be improved upon?
- 3) What should be taken into consideration when implementing changes to the social media policy?
- 4) Does the policy cover the majority of social media platforms that could be used by councillors and employees?
- 5) Does the policy include the correct amount of information needed for councillors and employees to follow the policy correctly?

4.2 Once the scope was agreed, the group began to analyse the current Social Media Guidance and Acceptable Use Policy.

4.3 Once the group had a list of points that they believed needed to be amended, updated or investigated further, they arranged to have a meeting with the Communications Team.

4.4 The Communications and Engagement Manager attended the meeting on behalf of the Communications Team to discuss the current policy and proposed policy updates.

4.5 Following the conversations with the Manager, the group compiled the proposed amendments into the policy. A full list of the proposals can be found under 5.1.

4.7 The group had a final consultation with the Communications and Engagement Manager and also consulted with the Policy Officer before bringing the draft version of the updated policy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 As mentioned above, the group proposed a number of amendments to the 2019 policy for Overview and Scrutiny to consider and then, subject to OSC's agreement, forward to the Executive. The updates are:

- a) Introduce a new appendix – Appendix D – which will include the Members Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is mentioned throughout the policy, it was felt by the group that by adding it as an appendix it would further understanding of the policy and would also enable members to have another reference point as to where to find the Code of Conduct.
- b) Under section 3 (Scope), the second paragraph would be reworded to instead state:

“The policy advocates the acceptable usage and conduct of all those who represent Copeland Borough Council (whether that be as a councillor or employee) when using any type of social media.”

- c) Update the table within section 4 (Definitions) to remove ‘MySpace’ which is no longer widely used and replace it with the more popular ‘TikTok’. Although the table is not an exhaustive list, providing only a few examples, the group felt as though it would be more beneficial to have the most commonly used types of social media as the examples given.
- d) It was requested that, under section 5 (Policy Details), the paragraph entitled ‘Conduct’ is amended to show a clear definition between what is expected of employees and what is expected of councillors. The aim of this is to provide clarification of what information relates to who. The amendment was the preferred option, rather than creating two policies; one for members and one for employees.
- e) Amend the second paragraph in section 7 (Policy Monitoring) to reflect the change in the reporting structure with the Audit and Governance no longer existing in the same format. It was suggested that the paragraph should now read:

“Incidents/complaints of a social media nature involving members, will be reported to the Standards and Ethics Committee on a regular basis, in the normal way.”

- f) A request was made to have included, within Appendix A under 'Actions', a point relating to councillors not posting on any social media site during a live meeting. Highlighting that it could be potentially dangerous, especially if on a sensitive subject, and if a post was made before all the information could be given, the post could hold incorrect information which could cause issues.
- g) Policy Appendix A, point 11, highlights being aware of your own safety when placing information on the internet. The group would like to add the example of adding personal contact information. Councillor contact information is published on the Council's website, publishing other personal contact information could be dangerous.
- h) Policy Appendix B needs to be updated to provide a more in-depth 'How To' for taking screenshots and attaching them to emails.
- i) A request was made to change policy Appendix C, commenting that blogging was no longer a popular method for councillors. However, it was also noted that social media trends tend to come and go. So, rather than change Appendix C, the title and content will be updated to "Guidance for Councillors on Blogging and Similar Content". The similar content is in reference to posts that are made as part of a series for a topic discussion which can be made across multiple platforms. The content of policy Appendix C would be updated accordingly.

5.2 All of the amendments mentioned above can be seen within the draft policy attached at Appendix A of this report.

5.3 A note was also made to recommend training with the Communications team be available to members upon request.

5.4 The Group also recommends that an email be sent to all councillors following the amendments to the policy being agreed, to highlight what is expected of them in relation to social media conduct.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 In conclusion, the Task & Finish group noted that the majority of the 2019 Social Media Guidance and Acceptable Use Policy still held true and, as much as the world of Social Media may have changed in the past two years, the majority of the guidance within the policy was still accurate.
- 6.2 The group believe that updating this policy now will help provide clarity to both members and council employees, especially in the upcoming 18 months leading to Local Government Reorganisation.
- 6.3 Though the amendments made are minor in terms of the whole policy, the group believe that keeping the policy as up to date as possible would benefit the council as a whole.

Appendices: A. Draft - Social Media Guidance and Acceptable Use Policy 2021

Background Documents: Social Media Guidance and Acceptable Use Policy 2019