TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

13 NOVEMBER 2014

Report of Director of Central Services

Part 1- Public

For recommendation to Council

1   **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Summary
The purpose of this report is to update Members on the use of social media sites by the Council and to seek approval to the terms of a policy for staff.

1.1   **Introduction**

1.1.1   The rapid expansion of social media in recent years has transformed the communications 'landscape' and presented the Council with opportunities to engage with our communities in new and innovative ways, and in ways which our communities expect us to communicate with them. This report outlines the various social media tools available, explains how the Council can use social media to improve communications with residents, groups, clubs, organisations and businesses and seeks approval to the terms of a social media policy for staff.

1.2   **Social Media**

1.2.1   The focus of this report is on the increased use of social media as a means of communicating with our communities. Members will be familiar with social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as these sites have become increasingly popular and there is an increased demand for Council services to use the medium of social media to engage with residents and other partners. Other sites such as Flickr allow for sharing of photographs, and YouTube for posting of videos. Many Members will have their own social media accounts as a means of engaging with their constituents, inviting comment on local issues/ Council decisions and to promote their own views and policies.

1.2.2   This report does not intend to focus on particular social media sites, as there are a variety of sites that may be used to communicate in particular ways with particular communities, and these may change from time to time. Rather, the proposals are intended to increase engagement with our communities, through listening and responding to issues raised and building positive relationships. The focus of social media can be on two way communications, rather than simply about delivering messages on Council services or events.

1.2.3 It is envisaged that an increased use of social media sites could bring many benefits to the Council and our communities. These include

- Social media can broadcast information to huge numbers of people almost instantly, increasing communications reach at very little cost
- Provide opportunities to engage people in the democratic process
- Increase partnerships, connect with residents and build communities
- Potential to increase engagement with harder to reach groups e.g. 18-30 year olds.
- Digital media can deliver savings

1.2.4 The Borough Council set up a Twitter account in October 2013 to help publicise the Tonbridge Town Centre Public Exhibitions and this has been used from time to time since then (for example during the floods over Christmas and New Year, and to highlight key events/news etc). More recently a Facebook account has been established. We have identified an increased demand from the public to make use of social media sites to communicate effectively with them, and it is therefore proposed to increase our use of social media over the coming months.

1.2.5 The Tonbridge and Malling Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has recently launched its own Twitter account and this is managed independently of the Council by members of the CSP.

1.2.6 It is proposed that the Council takes a phased approach to expanding its use of social media beginning with those sites where we already have an account i.e.Twitter, Facebook and then look to include LinkedIn, Flickr/Instagram and You Tube as appropriate. It is intended that nominated Officers within the Services will be responsible for posting and responding to messages on approved social media sites, with Media and Communications retaining an overarching role in monitoring the use of such sites.

1.2.7 In order for social media to be used effectively it is important that it forms part of our wider communication and customer service strategies. It is therefore intended to revise these strategies in due course to ensure that they complement our proposed use of social media sites.

1.3 Social Media policy

1.3.1 The Social Media policy (**Annex 1**) has been developed in consultation with staff. It was presented to the Joint Employee Consultative Committee in September and comments made by JECC reps/ Unison have been taken on board in arriving at the draft policy attached to this report.

1.3.2 The draft policy provides a framework for staff to follow when using social media for business purposes,

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 The operation of the policy has negligible financial impact upon the Council.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 None other than identified elsewhere in this report.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 The proposed increase in the use of social media sites by the Council will promote greater transparency and openness. However, as with any online activity there will be risks. The key to achieving success in our use of social media will be in balancing the risks and benefits.

1.6.2 The identified risks include

- Disclosure of confidential information;
- Damage to the reputation of the Council;
- Potential for inappropriate postings by staff

1.6.2 In order to mitigate these risks it is appropriate to implement effective policies. It will also provide reassurance for staff as to how social media sites should be used. It is considered that the draft policy at Annex 1 meets these objectives.

1.6.3 JECC and Unison representatives have been consulted on the draft policy. Their comments have been taken on board and appropriate amendments have been made to the draft policy.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report.

1.8 Conclusions and Recommendations

1.8.1 The Council is at the early stages of embracing the benefits of social media. However as an Authority it is important that we maximise the potential of available communication streams in order to ensure that we are engaging effectively with our communities.

1.8.2 The proposals to increase the use of social media will be taken forward in a measured and consistent way.

1.8.3 Members are therefore asked to

(a) **endorse** the conclusions in this report; and
(b) **RECOMMEND** to Council that the social media policy at **Annex 1** be approved

Background papers:

None

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Director of Central Services

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	**Answer**	**Explanation of impacts**
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	N/A	
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		