

FINANCE, POLICY AND GOVERNANCE



MEMBERS INFORMATION NOTE

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

At its meeting on 17 June 2013 the Standards Committee discussed Guidelines for Members to assist understanding of potential pitfalls of using social media.

Given the clear benefits of social media for engaging with constituents who may not be reached through more traditional means, it was felt important to assist Members inadvertently causing difficulty for themselves.

Please find attached the Guidelines, re-issued as a reminder to Members and for the benefit of new Members, which include a note that inappropriate use of social media could amount to a breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

If you have any queries about the attached Guidelines please contact Anthony Roche, Monitoring Officer, on 01462 474588 or anthony.roche@north-herts.gov.uk

Anthony Roche
Corporate Legal Manager and Monitoring Officer

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Guidelines for Members when Using Social Media

Social media is a collective term used to describe easy ways to create and publish on the internet. People generally use the term to describe how organisations and individuals share content – text, video and pictures – and create conversations on the web. Examples of social media tools include blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Flickr, Tumblr and YouTube. The Council recognises the benefits that these new methods of communication can bring, but reminds all Members to use social media responsibly.

The Council has produced the below simple guidelines to help Members:-

- ✓ **Do** – listen to what people are saying online, consider it and only respond if you feel it is appropriate
- ✗ **Don't** – publish anything you would not say in traditional media, for example during the pre-election period, or saying how you will vote on a particular issue
- ✓ **Do** – remember libel and copyright laws still apply to things you post on social media sites and what you publish is widely accessible and may always be around
- ✗ **Don't** – bring the Council, or your Member role, into disrepute
- ✓ **Do** – make it clear whether you are speaking from a personal perspective or as a Member representing the Council or a Member representing your political party
- ✗ **Don't** – use social media during Committee meetings if you are a member of the Committee or taking part in the meeting, if it interferes with or distracts from the business of the meeting
- ✓ **Do** – think about how the public might perceive who you follow on Twitter or befriend on Facebook etc
- ✗ **Don't** – disclose any information which you have received in confidence
- ✓ **Do** – be respectful in your communications with others. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments (which can be a criminal offence). Think before you publish!
- ✗ **Don't** – assume that everyone shares your sense of humour. Others may be offended by the joke you thought was hilarious, or may not realise when you are being sarcastic or ironic
- ✓ **Do** – use social media when sober. Drinking alcohol and tweeting is not a good idea.

Remember - inappropriate use of social media could amount to a breach of the Member Code of Conduct.