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Key Decision:	No
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CABINET

27 FEBRUARY 2020

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES AND MEMBERS

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce a new social media policy for employees and Members of Cannock Chase Council. This replaces a guidance note produced in November 2012, which was aimed at officers only.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That Cabinet approve the Social Media Policy for Employees and Members, as attached at Appendix 1, and recommend that Council adopt the policy at its next appropriate meeting.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

Key Issue

3.1 Given the growth and increasing importance of social media as a means of communication, this is an important policy for the Council. This is especially the case in view of social media's ability to improve engagement, to enable Council news and information to get out quickly to audiences (many of whom might not be reached by traditional media), and for the Council to obtain useful feedback on the news and information it shares.

Reasons for Recommendation

3.2 An updated policy is needed as social media use has become widespread and increasingly sophisticated since that first guidance was produced over seven years ago, particularly as Members use of social media was not covered at the time. Therefore, the policy seeks to help Members understand

how best to use social media, but also how they can avoid some of the pitfalls associated with its use which might cause damage to the Council's reputation.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The policy supports the corporate priorities of Promoting Prosperity and Improving Community Wellbeing where social media messaging has an important part to play in communicating progress and achievements in delivering the strategic objectives that contribute to these priorities.

5 Report Detail

5.1 The report acknowledges the incredible growth in social media use as a means of communication over the past 15 years and how councils, including Cannock Chase Council, are increasingly using social media channels to communicate with residents and other stakeholders in the community.

5.2 Although there are well known downsides to social media such as bullying online and its ability to spread misinformation quickly, there are key benefits for councils, employees and Members in using social media.

They include:
- Councils being able to communicate quickly and directly with people
- Being able to hear the voices of ordinary people and gain a real sense of how residents are feeling about what their council is doing
- For employees - to build relationships and to follow interests online
- For Members - to have the opportunity to engage on a more immediate basis with their ward residents, to explain their decisions as a portfolio or shadow portfolio leader, and to campaign

5.3 The policy has four distinct sections:
- Why the Council uses social media
- What this policy means for employees including personal use of social media
- Guidance for Members when using social media
- Guidance for employees using or posting on Council owned social media accounts

5.4 In drafting this policy, consultation has taken place with all Members, representatives of the Council's trades unions and employees. Responses from the consultation have been incorporated in the policy.

5.5 It includes helpful principles for employees and Members when using social media. These include being respectful, being credible and consistent, being honest about who you are, being responsive and being confident.

5.6 The Council has identified several key objectives in its own use of social media. These are:

- To create an effective presence for the Council across social media

- To extend the reach of the Council's messages online

- To build on existing, and to create new relationships, with key audiences including the public, journalists, key stakeholders and policy makers

- To act as the informal/human voice of Cannock Chase Council and promote understanding of its key messages in a new way

- To demonstrate a commitment to exploring new ways of working

- To increase opportunities for the Council to interact and engage with the public

- To monitor what is being said about the Council online and react where necessary to messages of dissatisfaction and promote positive responses. At the same time correcting factual inaccuracies about the Council and its services where these become known to us

5.7 Currently, the Council operates the following corporate and departmental accounts:

- Twitter - @CannockChaseDC (8,756 followers as at 28 January 2020) and @CCDCYourVoice (used for consultation and engagement activities) (223 followers as at 28 January 2020).

- Facebook - Cannock Chase Life (found at @cannockchasedc) (5,029 follows as at 28 January 2020).

- Facebook - Cannock Chase Council Countryside Service (found at www.facebook.com/Cannock-Chase-Council-Countryside-Service-111298768960981/) (1070 follows as at 28 January 2020).

- Instagram - @cannockchasedc (450 followers as at 28 January 2020).

- YouTube - CannockChaseDC (31,515 views to channel as at 28 January 2020).

- LinkedIn - Cannock Chase District Council (basic details on the Council, no regular postings currently made).

The Council has agreed to the following departmental accounts:

- Twitter - @ccdc_sbc - Cannock Chase Council and Stafford Borough Council Building Control (32 followers as at 28 January 2020).

- Twitter - @ccdcpartnership - Cannock Chase Community Safety Partnership (376 followers as at 28 January 2020).

- Instagram - @visitcannockchase (693 followers as at 28 January 2020) (used by Economic Development).

5.8   For employees of the Council the policy clearly sets out what they need to bear in mind when using social media, particularly as employees can be identified as working for the Council even when posting or tweeting comments or content in their own, private time. There are several helpful do's and don'ts including avoiding potential conflicts of interest with their Council roles and being mindful of who employees become a friend to, or follow, on social media and share information and their thoughts with.

5.9   For Members a rights and responsibilities section advises - among a number of items - that Members are responsible for their own accounts; that they must not post comments or content appearing to commit the Council to a particular course of action outside of the Council's approved decision making process; and they must not post information on cases they may be working on, or involved with, in their Council work and responsibilities.

5.10   The policy strongly advises Members to separate their personal business on social media from their Council business making the point that "once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without consent, used in a different context or further distributed". They are advised to have accounts which are clearly branded as coming from a councillor where they are then free to make social media posts that represent their views as a councillor, and to campaign. They are advised to make it clear that the views they express do not necessarily reflect the views of the whole council. This could be expressed in the social media profile of the account holder.

5.11   The final section concerns accounts which are either corporate accounts operated by the Policy and Communications Team centrally or departmental accounts operated by individual departments.

5.12   The section includes, among several points, the tone of voice employees should adopt when using Council branded accounts (this is important to create a consistent approach when there are several Council employees providing content on different Council branded accounts), and guidance for employees using Council accounts on how these should be used and maintained including notes on social media during campaigns, Purdah, emergency situations and managing online communities.

5.13   Members will be offered training to help them get the best out of using social media, as part of the annual Members' induction programme.

6   Implications

6.1   **Financial**

None

6.2   **Legal**

None

6.3 Human Resources

The policy has been informed by the Council's Disciplinary Procedure for Employees. A section on social media is included in a new Code of Conduct for Employees.

6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

None

6.5 Human Rights Act

None

6.6 Data Protection

The importance of ensuring that any information or content posted by the Council on social media sites does not fall foul of the Data Protection Act 2018 is emphasised in the policy. All employees and Members receive data protection training each year which includes a section on social media. It asks everyone to read the social media policy..

6.7 Risk Management

There are a number of risks involved in using social media. However, the policy provides guidance in managing these risks.

6.8 Equality & Diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed to accompany this updated policy. There are no major issues arising, although the point is made that communication via social media is not for everyone, with significant numbers of our residents not using social media on a regular basis or indeed at all.

6.9 Best Value

None

7	Appendices to the Report

Appendix 1:   Social Media Policy for Employees and Members

Previous Consideration

None.

Background Papers

Equality Impact Assessment

Social Media Policy
for Employees and Members of the Council

January 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Social media is an essential means of communication for many and will only grow in its use. News consumption, particularly for younger people, is via social media rather than by newspapers, the radio and television.

1.2 Despite concerns about online bullying and fake news; social media sites have opened up a multitude of opportunities for people to have conversations across communities, among friends, within shared interest groups, to celebrate achievements, develop careers and to share news as it happens.

1.3 Councils (and indeed many councillors) have recognised the benefits of social media as a means of communicating with residents and a multitude of different stakeholders, not least that we must be part of social media communities if we are to remain relevant to the lives and work of the residents and organisations we serve and work alongside.

1.4 Together we can use social media to inform people, to influence thinking and to explain when things sometimes go wrong, or to pass on important information in an emergency situation.

1.5 To get the best out of social media, and to try and avoid some of the pitfalls mentioned, the next section describes five principles employees and Members should all adopt when using social media.

2. Principles to adopt when using Social Media

You should follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

Be respectful – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Make sure that you respect people's confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.

Be credible and consistent – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.

Be honest about who you are – it's important that any accounts or profiles that you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.

Be responsive – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you can't. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner but don't feel you have to respond to every comment made as this can be time consuming and could be counter productive if you get into an argument online, where to just let an adverse comment `go` may be wiser. Basically, be selective and use your judgment when it comes to commenting or responding online.

Be confident – don't be scared of participating. Follow these rules and seek further guidance if you need it. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, pause to think about it. Feel confident in what you say before you say it – and say it as clearly as you can.

3.   What this policy is about

3.1   This policy is for employees and Members of Cannock Chase Council. This includes agency, temporary and contract staff working for the Council on its behalf; apprentices, students on work placements and volunteers working with us on projects. It explains:

- **Why the Council uses social media (Section A)**

- **What this policy means for employees including personal use of social media (Section B)**

- **Guidance for Members when using social media (Section C)**

- **Guidance for employees using or posting on Council owned social media accounts (Section D)**

It includes some practical "do's and don'ts" for employees and Members.

3.2   This policy is informed by, and reinforces, the following other policies:

- Council's Disciplinary Procedure for employees
- Technology Service Policies
- Code of Conduct for Members
- Code of Conduct for Employees

3.3   When reading this policy you need, therefore, to be aware of the above policies as they help to inform it.

3.4   For the purpose of this policy, social media is defined as: "All online space where people are interacting, sharing information and/or having conversations".

3.5   Social media refers to a variety of digital ways of communicating which have sprung up within the past twenty years. These include blogs, podcasts, social networking sites such Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and WhatsApp and video hosting sites such as YouTube.

3.6   The do's and don'ts and guidelines covered by this policy should apply to whichever social media platform you happen to be on, whether it is Facebook, WhatsApp or platforms yet to be introduced.

Section A - Why the Council uses social media

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council uses social media to:

i) To promote the Council and proactively communicate with the public online.

and

ii) Post information online, enter into conversations and positively promote and defend the Council's reputation.

1.2 Social media offers a highly targeted way of communicating key messages to both existing and new audiences. The Council is able to inform people quickly and directly. The Council is able to converse with its customers in real time which can resolve queries often quickly and efficiently. The Council is able to consult the public as an alternative to conducting face-to-face surveying.

1.3 Social media also offers new ways of gathering information and in building contacts and establishing relationships.

2. Key objectives of the Council in using social media

2.1 To create an effective presence for the Council across social media.

2.2 To extend the reach of the Council's messages online.

2.3 To build on existing, and to create new relationships, with key audiences including the public, journalists, key stakeholders and policy makers.

2.4 To act as the informal/human voice of Cannock Chase Council and promote understanding of its key messages in a new way.

2.5 To demonstrate a commitment to exploring new ways of working.

2.6 To monitor what is being said about the Council online and react where necessary to messages of dissatisfaction and promote positive responses. At the same time correcting factual inaccuracies about the Council and its services where these become known to us.

3. How the Council is represented on social media

The Council has corporate accounts for Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Linkedin. It also participates in a WhatsApp group for communications professionals working in the public sector across Staffordshire.

By agreement there are currently several departmental accounts operating as follows:

- Twitter (Building Control – as a shared service with Stafford Borough Council, and Community Safety Partnership);
- Instagram (Economic Development - to promote Cannock Chase as a visitor destination).

Section B - What this policy means for employees including personal use of social media

1.   Introduction

1.1   This part of the policy concerns employees who use social media in the workplace during a break period or outside of work in a personal capacity.

1.2   As the use of social media grows, the line between what is public and private, personal and professional can be blurred. It is important therefore that employees are aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their professional role or the Council's image and reputation.

1.3   Even if you do not expressly name the Council as your employer on social media, this policy will still apply if a connection with your employment can reasonably be made.

1.4   Specifically the Council will not tolerate any of the following activity on social media if it can be connected to you as an employee of the Council:

- abusive or threatening behaviour
- inappropriate comments or material that may be regarded as discriminatory
- false or misleading statements that could have a negative affect on the Council's reputation
- inciting or supporting somebody to commit crime or other unlawful acts

This could include content you share or like as this could suggest you approve of that content.

2.   Some do's and don'ts

2.1   Do be aware that the information you post on your social media profile can make you identifiable to service users - as well as people you know in a private capacity. This includes setting up an online profile and the use of photographs (especially if you are wearing a Council uniform or display an image linked to the Council's work); as well as providing details of your occupation, employer and work location.

2.2   Do avoid any potential conflicts of interest with your Council role.

2.3 Do be aware of who you are directly sharing information with on social media and who you might be a `friend` to or `linked` with on social media sites.

2.4 Do ensure that any `clients` known to you through your work, where there could be a conflict of interest, are not linked to you through social media.

2.5 Do make your social media account settings as private as possible.

2.6 Do avoid criticising the Council as your employer if you happen to `wear another hat` such as representing another organisation, as a volunteer or in a paid capacity, whose role and work may be linked or associated with the Council.

2.7 Don't use Council email addresses and other official contact details for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through such media.

2.8 Don't use Council email addresses and other official contact details for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through such media.

2.9 Don't use personal social media to raise or discuss a complaint or grievance about the Council, your manager, colleagues etc. If you have a complaint, you should use the Council's formal grievance procedures.

2.10 Don't make derogatory comments about colleagues on social media.

What happens if things go wrong?

You should always show respect to others when using social media and ensure that your actions do not have a negative impact on the Council's reputation.

Mistakes happen – if you post something you don't mean to, or get a message or response wrong, tell your line manager and the Policy and Communications Team immediately to agree remedial action and to minimise embarrassment and reputational damage.

Anyone who feels that they have been subject to cyber bullying or offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague through any digital communication network should inform their line manager who will take advice from HR and investigate the matter as appropriate.

3. Rights and responsibilities

3.1 **Employees have a responsibility to:**
- Avoid behaviour that may cause an individual to feel the subject of harassment or bullying
- Familiarise themselves with this policy and employee guidelines on the acceptable use of social media
- Act responsibly when using online media for work and personal use
- Report instances to their manager, if they are subject to abuse

Managers have a responsibility to:
- Familiarise themselves with this policy and employee guidelines to using social media
- Take prompt action to stop any harassment or bullying they become aware of, whether a complaint has been raised or not
- Ensure staff are aware of this policy and employee guidelines
- Support employees who are the subject of abuse through existing practices
- Ensure all complaints/allegations are dealt with fairly and consistently, and in accordance with other employment policies where appropriate

HR staff have a responsibility to:
- Provide support and advice to managers and employees on the operation of the policy and guidelines, where necessary

Policy and Communications has a responsibility to:
- Maintain the Council's social media policy and manage its corporate accounts

IT has a responsibility to:
- Monitor use of social media, access to inappropriate content and reporting any abuse

3.2   The Council's internet access policy allows the following access to social media at work:

- You can access the web (and therefore social media use) at work on Council owned equipment
- This is for reasonable and limited personal use only, however this is only during break periods, and at specific other times at the discretion of your line manager
- Reasonable use means social media activity that is lawful and ethical, that does not adversely affect your productivity, and does not make unreasonable use of limited Council resources

However, **you must not**

- Access social media websites for personal use from the Council's computers or devices during working time. This includes Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Instagram, Whatsapp as the most popular ones but all such sites.
- Leave social media sites running `in the background` while working
- Use social media sites to make derogatory comments about other organisations/individuals in relation to their employment/work activity, or to disclose any corporate information/data
- View or download anything via social media that others find offensive
- Download anything via social media that is likely to be covered by copyright which includes, but is not limited to, music and software

- Access chat sites, instant messaging sites or forums via social media on Council owned equipment except if you have been authorised to do so on Council business
- Access file sharing sites via social media such as Dropbox and iCloud unless authorised to do so
- Access social media content that is offensive, tasteless, contains harassment, promotes illegal activity, is hateful and discriminatory, is violent, concerns hacking and proxy avoidance, contains pornography and adult material, leads to software downloads or involves Peer to Peer and sharing sites
- Post information on cases you might be working on, or involved with, in your Council work and your Council responsibilities
- Post personal information about Council clients or employees from your Council work

3.3 The Council has no intention of routinely monitoring employee's social media outside of work by means of `social listening` but does expect all employees to be mindful of posting or sharing any information or images on personal and other social media accounts away from work that could bring the Council into disrepute as your employer or that damages the reputation of the Council.

3.4 However, it should be noted that all Council IT systems can be monitored in accordance with IT policies including the email and internet policies, so personal privacy cannot be assumed when using the Council's network.

3.5 Postings made on a personal account may attain a wide readership and will therefore be considered public rather than private; in particular if an association with the Council is referenced or mention of the Council's name or services is referenced. Publically accessible postings may be investigated if there is a suspected breach of this policy.

3.6 All employees must maintain the standards expected of them as an employee of Cannock Chase Council and keep to their contractual obligations and conduct themselves appropriately when in an online environment, just as they are expected to when representing the Council in the office and in the wider world. Failure to do so could result in disciplinary action.

3.7 Social media activity that could lead to disciplinary action includes, although not exclusively:

- Posting, liking, retweeting comments or content that may be construed as derogatory or involve bullying such as derogatory comments and bullying relating to sex, gender-reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion, belief or age
- Uploading photographs on a social networking site that creates the same effect

3.8 Employees whose post is `politically restricted` need to be particularly vigilant in their social media use. Overall, politically restricted postholders are restricted from canvassing on behalf of a political party or for a person

who is, or seeks to be, a candidate for election to a local authority, the House of Commons or the European Parliament. When using social media, such postholders should not be a `friend` of or to `follow` a Member.

3.9   Employees who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work for the Council should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager. If a blog makes it clear that the author works for the Council or on a Twitter or Facebook account for example, then a simple and visible disclaimer such as "these are my personal views and they may not necessarily reflect the views of Cannock Chase Council" may be sufficient.

3.10   In exceptional circumstances, copies of posts from employees may be made and retained by the Council, in line with relevant Council procedures. These copies will be held for a period dependent on the type of investigation they are subject to.

Section C - Guidance for Members when using social media

1.   Introduction

1.1   This part of the policy concerns Members and their use of social media. Using social media is a good way for Members to communicate and engage with residents at a ward level or, more widely, if a leadership or portfolio role on the Council is held.

1.2   When using social media Members must ensure they use it sensibly and responsibly. The use of social media must not adversely affect the Council as it carries out its business, damage the Council's reputation or violate any Council policies.

1.3   As Members will appreciate there are risks in using social media, which include disclosing confidential information, breaching safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals, and encountering bullying or `trolling` (where a person starts an argument or upsets people by posting inflammatory material online to provoke emotional responses or to disrupt normal discussion, often for their own amusement).

1.4   Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility as a Member to report these, just as employees are asked to. Also, please do be aware of your own safety when placing information on the internet and do not publish information which could you leave you personally vulnerable.

1.5   Sometimes Council officers are quoted on social media sites by members of the public. This could be following a phone discussion or email conversation between an officer and a member of the public, via a Council report or media coverage. For more senior officers this is an accepted part of the role but if Members see any junior officers being mentioned on social media, most likely as the result of a phone or email conversation, it would be really helpful - if

they are able to do so - to politely ask the public not to use that officer's name on social media, in order to protect their privacy.

2. Rights and responsibilities

2.1 The Council is not responsible for Members own accounts. Members are personally responsible for the content they publish on social media accounts whether this is on their own accounts or in contributing to a discussion on social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action for which the publisher will be personally liable.

2.2 As social media sites are in the public domain, it is important to ensure that Members are confident of the nature of the information they publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without consent, used in a different context or further distributed.

2.3 It is therefore strongly advised that councillors separate their personal business from their councillor business by only including personal information and posts on personal accounts, and councillor and Council business on a social media site that is clearly branded as coming from a councillor.

2.4 Members may make social media posts that represent their views as a councillor and it is recommended that social media accounts used on councillor business are therefore clearly labelled as coming from a councillor. It should be made clear that views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the whole Council. This could be expressed in the social media profile of the account holder.

2.5 Members must not share confidential information they are in possession of as a councillor on social media, or indeed in other situations. This includes publishing or reporting on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports.

2.6 Members must not post comments or content appearing to commit the Council to a particular course of action outside of the Council's approved decision making process. Members also have no authority to commit the Council or Council officers to a course of action or change of policy via statements made on their personal / councillor social media accounts.

2.7 Members must not post information on cases they may be working on, or involved with, in their Council work and responsibilities.

2.8 Members must not disclose the personal details of others such as home addresses and telephone numbers on social media sites. Members must not post any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

2.9 Members are encouraged to be transparent when using social media and not post misleading or inaccurate information.

2.10 Members must refrain from using the Council's logo, or any other Council related material on a personal account or website.

2.11 Inappropriate use of social media can damage the Council's reputation and could lead to allegations being made regarding potential breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members.

2.12 As such, Members must not engage in activities on the internet that might bring the Council into disrepute. This includes making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender-reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion, belief or age; or to bully another individual.

2.13 Copyright laws still apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is a breach of copyright. Members should avoid publishing anything they are unsure about or should seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.

2.14 It is strongly advised that Members make use of the privacy settings on social media accounts if they do not want their social media to be accessed by the press or public.

2.15 Any Member receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their social media should report it to their political group leader, the Monitoring Officer and/or the police.

2.16 In exceptional circumstances, copies of posts from Members may be made and retained by the Council, in line with relevant Council procedures. These copies will be held for a period dependent on the type of investigation they are subject to.

2.17 Members must work within the confines of the latest version of the Technology Service Policies document at all times.

2.18 Members are also advised to consult the Local Government Association's social media best practice guidelines which can be found at www.local.gov.uk/councillors-and-social-media

Section D - Guidance for employees using or posting on Council owned social media accounts

1.   Introduction

This part of the policy concerns employees (and any apprentices, students on work placement, and volunteers working with us) who are given authorization to use social media in the course of their work promoting the Council's news and activities or who post content on Council social media sites. The section refers to:

a) accounts which are either corporate accounts operated by the Council centrally

b) departmental accounts operated by individual departments of the Council with the agreement of the Policy and Communications Team

c) individual employees given temporary access to a corporate account(s)

2.   Rights and responsibilities

2.1   The Policy and Communications Team is in overall control of the Council's social media activities.

2.2   All accounts used to conduct business on behalf of Cannock Chase Council must be authorised by the Policy and Communications Team. These accounts remain under the ownership of Cannock Chase Council at all times.

2.3   Accounts should be in the name of Cannock Chase Council or a particular department or campaign. A list of authorised users of each account should be kept for auditing purposes and made available to the Policy and Communications Team. All accounts must be password protected with the password only available to the authorised account users.

2.4   The Policy and Communications Team has the authority to close down any Cannock Chase Council operated account which it feels is inappropriate, is being abused or has the potential to cause damage to the Council's reputation, or to remove an individual employee who has been given temporary access to a corporate account(s).

2.5   If a Cannock Chase Council operated account is seen to remain inactive for a significant period of time the Policy and Communications Team will review this with the service manager and may ask for it to be deactivated.

2.6   The branding of any Cannock Chase Council operated account must be approved by the Policy and Communications Team and fall within the existing guidelines on the use of brand identity.

2.7   All Cannock Chase Council operated accounts will allow themselves to be joined/linked to all other Cannock Chase Council operated accounts.

2.8   All Cannock Chase Council operated accounts will make it clear that they are an official account run on behalf of the council. We will never hide our identity or pretend to be another individual or organisation.

2.9   Individual employees given access to a corporate account(s) will be issued with a short statement (which they sign) that sets out how they can use the account(s) prior to using it. This will include specific do's and don'ts applicable to the employee's role and how they intend to use the corporate account(s). This will sit alongside this policy. Access will be withdrawn if the account is used in a manner which contravenes the statement. Access will always be temporary and will be reviewed after an agreed length of time, when it will be either removed or extended depending on Council needs.

2.10 Corporate account users, departmental users and individual employees should never use social media to `spy` on service users covertly, even if your privacy settings allow you to do this, as this could contravene Article 8 of the Human Rights Act. To make sure you stay within the laws you must take notice of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIPA) procedural guidance. If you think taking covert action is necessary you should get advice from Legal Services.

3.   Getting the tone of voice right

3.1 Both the Council corporate accounts and the departmental accounts will be anonymous (i.e. they will not be in the name of any single officer). With the possibility of multiple people acting as a single entity it is therefore important to develop a `tone of voice` which will be recognisable as that of the Council's digital presence.

3.2 Comments made on Cannock Chase Council operated accounts will conform to all other Council policies at all times.

3.3 The voice will reflect the nature of social media and will therefore be informal:

   • It will be positive
   • When responding to negative comments it will be firm but polite and factual
   • Should the need to apologise ever arise this will be done in a sincere manner
   • Slang will not be used as a matter of course but may be used where it is deemed appropriate by a member of the Policy and Communications Team
   • High standards of spelling and grammar will be maintained at all times
   • Jargon free English will be used at all times
   • Swearing is not permitted under any circumstances
   • All posts will stay within the libel laws of England at all times. There is no exception to this rule. If you are unsure what the laws are please ask a member of the Policy and Communications Team or a member of Legal Services.

4.   Managing Content

4.1 Content will be created manually. The Council will not use bots or computer generated content. That said, applications may be used to time delay the publication of certain manually created posts when appropriate to give the impression of regular use. A single post may also be distributed across more than one platform; however, this should be done on a case-by-case basis and not automatically for every post.

4.2 Content will be updated regularly. For guidelines on how frequently you should be posting to particular sites see 5.2 below.

4.3 All posts will be timely and relevant. Bearing in mind the high speed at which social media operates, the Council will not write about `old news`.

4.4   Press releases will be distributed via social media but described in a less formal manner.

e.g. A press release about funding opportunities for local clubs and organisations would be tweeted as:

"Could your club benefit from a cash injection? Check out the latest pot of funding being offered at xxxx."

4.5   Reponses to posts made at the Council by others online will be made in a timely manner which reflects the speed of social media.

4.6   If it is necessary to consult an employee who is an expert in a particular field before responding to a post then a holding post must be made to the person we intend to respond to.

4.7   If a complaint is made about the Council or any of the services it provides via social media the complainant should be redirected to the appropriate area of the Council website to make this complaint officially and to ensure it is monitored correctly. This can be found at: https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/council/about-council/customer-feedback-help-us-get-it-right

4.8   Confidential and sensitive information will not be posted online. If unsure whether something should be published, an employee should make certain it can be before doing so.

4.9   The Council will signpost things it feels maybe of interest/provide benefit to the community in the manner appropriate to each particular social media site.

4.10   The Council will forward on posts made by others in the manner appropriate to each social media site but only where it is deemed appropriate to do so bearing in mind the challenges of not promoting or endorsing products or services and our obligations under Purdah during elections etc.

4.11   The Council will use link shortening tools where appropriate. The free and recommended tool to use can be found at www.bitly.com

4.12   Copyright will be respected at all times.

5.   Use of Social Media

5.1   All platforms on which the Council has a presence will be used regularly. The Policy and Communications Team will remove or ask for the deactivation of any Cannock Chase Council operated account which is not used for more than a month and for which they deem there has been no adequate justification for this having been the case.

5.2   The below are guidelines for use of the corporate accounts (on each of the main types of social media platform). Departmental and other accounts are not required to follow the below but must observe 5.1:

* Twitter: At least one or two tweets per day (these should be sent at differing times and this does not include retweets or replies)
* Facebook: At least once a day
* Instagram: At least two per week (you must work to make photo opportunities happen)
* YouTube: Every time a video is available (you must work to make video opportunities happen)

5.3   The cross promotion of posts is encouraged at all times. For instance, flag up a new video that has been posted on YouTube by a post on Twitter etc.

5.4   Please note that excessive work related use of social media by employees running Cannock Chase Council operated accounts should be avoided.

5.5   Facebook accounts can either be in the name of an organisation or an individual. Be aware when posting replies to posts from the public and when commenting in groups outside the remit of the Council's own Facebook page that you could be identified individually. Please seek guidance from the Policy and Communications Team if you are unsure how your proposed post may appear.

5.6   Be aware that content on social media sites may be subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Please also be aware of your responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 2018 which all employees are expected to be familiar with. If in doubt about data protection/GDPR and FOI requests and social media use please seek advice from the Council's Information Manager based in the Policy and Communications Team.

5.7   All information and responses posted as an employee are public statements and count as a Council record and are evidence of the Council's work. They may be used as a reference at any time in the future and employees are therefore responsible for anything they say online.

5.8   Employees must not disclose any politically sensitive information on social media. This can include matters that are being considered or debated, or are due to be, by the Council or Cabinet or a committee (or are awaiting a decision). Seek advice from your line manager if in doubt.

5.9   If someone from the media contacts you about posts you have made on social media you should talk to your manager and the Policy and   Communications Team should be contacted.

6.   Requesting a department branded social media account

6.1   Departments can request the setting up of a social media account where social media use is appropriate to the work area. They should think carefully

about the social media tool they want to use and whether it is appropriate. If so, they must then make a business case to the Policy and Communications Team which would need to cover the following:

- What do you want to achieve?
- How does using social media fit within your wider communications and marketing strategy for your service?
- Who do you want to reach?
- Who might you be excluding by using social media?
- Do you have sufficient staff resources to manage and monitor the site including responding to questions and feedback within the Council's recommended response times?
- How will you deal with responses and those that might be negative?
- Are those using social media on behalf of your project/service good at communicating online?
- Identify the risks and plan to mitigate them
- Work out your return on investment (ROI) including how you will evaluate your social media activities
- Have an exit strategy

If in doubt seek advice from the Policy and Communications Team.

6.2 The Council logo will be used to identify all official Council accounts unless decided otherwise by the Policy and Communications Team.

6.3 Backgrounds of any pages hosted by the Council will be manipulated to conform to the Council's digital branding as much as possible and will use corporate colours.

6.4 If a person does run a Cannock Chase Council operated account in their name, in doing so they accept the public nature of this and the fact it may expose them to comment and criticism from members of the public.

6.5 While not wanting to get involved in the day-to-day running of departmental accounts, the Policy and Communications Team will nevertheless have the right to access all departmental accounts.

7. Campaigns

7.1 Specific campaigns being run by the Council may need their own accounts, identities and pages created. This will be done with the approval of the Policy and Communications Team. Apart from the branding of the pages, all campaigns which incorporate a social media strategy will conform to the guidelines above and will be considered Cannock Chase Council operated accounts.

8. Running an online community

8.1 When you set up a Council affiliated group, page or discussion form, you are responsible for administering and moderating user contributions.

8.2 Your role is to encourage discussion, set user expectations, create and follow the rules, check the content of everything posted and respond to feedback.

8.3 As the administrator of an online community, you should follow these basic guidelines:

- Make sure you publish the rules of engagement in a prominent place
- Apply the rules fairly and consistently
- Respond to questions and feedback quickly. Social networks move quickly, and a delay of more than 48 hours could cause frustration
- Make sure you have time to proactively encourage participation. The biggest threat to online communities is a lack of activity.

9. Emergency procedures

9.1 If for any reason the Council's emergency procedures are invoked no member of staff other than a designated member of the Policy and Communications Team should post anything on any Cannock Chase Council operated account.

9.2 All rights to use Council owned social media accounts on Council computers will also be temporarily revoked (please note this includes laptops, PDAs and other devices when both inside and outside any Council owned building). This is to ensure that in an emergency situation messages are consistent and delivered centrally only.

9.3 Those in charge of Cannock Chase Council operated accounts may be asked to post a single holding message on the accounts they control. This should be done at the first available opportunity after being asked to do so. A second email will be sent out when the emergency procedures are no longer in force and social media use can return to normal.

10. Purdah and elections

During Purdah, which is imposed for election periods, all employees must follow the issued Purdah instructions published at the start of a Purdah period. This is particularly important when using Council operated social media accounts given the rise of social media as a political campaigning tool. Basically, you need to be ultra careful when communicating via social media and avoid anything that is party political. Furthermore, you should not promote individual Members of the Council during this period.

11. Social media monitoring

11.1 Employees and Members need to be aware that the Council may use social media monitoring tools to enable it to make the most effective use of social media. Tools enable the Council to search the social media `sphere` using certain terms of reference. This can also be done manually without the need for a software tool.

11.2 Social media monitoring will be under the sole control of the Policy and Communications Team. Should any department wish for a term to be added to those searched for, then they should contact the Policy and Communications Team who will consider their request.

Written by the Policy and Communications Manager