

## **Report of the Head of Communications**

### **Social Media Policy and Process – a Review**

#### **Summary**

1. This report describes implementation of the social media policy and process, and impact to date, and also provides an update on the media protocol.
2. This is in accordance with the request by the then Audit and Governance Committee which was consulted on draft versions of both documents at its meeting on 21st June 2017. Members asked for an *'update report on the implementation of these policies be brought back to committee'*.

#### **Recommendations**

3.
  - a) To note progress of the implementation of the social media policy and process and next steps.
  - b) To note progress of the media protocol.

#### **Background**

4. In October 2019, the Parliament's Human Rights Committee found a rise in threats to MPs, from letters, meetings and social media <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/human-rights-committee/news-parliament-2017/democracy-freedom-of-expression-report-published-19-20/>. Recommendations include :

- social media companies devoting significantly more resources to ensuring their platforms are safe

- responsibility for preventing and taking down harmful content must lie more squarely with those who profit from it
  - social media companies need to respect the laws of the countries in which they operate
5. The council's social media policy and process reflects these recommendations and those of the Centre for Countering Digital Hate [www.counterhate.co.uk](http://www.counterhate.co.uk), which provides practical tips to deal with such behaviour.
  6. The City of York Council has 81 social media accounts managed by 53 officers. The Communications Team is responsible for corporate sites, the gritter twitter account and has access to some others in case of emergency.

<b>Account</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Instagram</b>
Number of accounts	17	61	3
*All followers	23,104	127,153	1,494
*Corporate followers	8,892	42,400	1,043
%corporate followers	38%	33%	69%

(\*data collated June 2019)

7. The draft Social Media Policy was shared with Audit and Governance (A&G) committee on 21 June 2017:  
<http://modgov.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=437&MIId=9776&Ver=4>
8. The decision to publish was made as a non key routine officer decision as per the council's constitution. As per paragraph 1: for information/comment prior to approval by the Chief Executive.
9. Following consultation with the previous administration and Scrutiny members, the social media policy and process was developed, with the current versions of the City of York Council social media policy and process approved by the Chief Executive in her decision of 10 April 2018. They are available here:  
[www.york.gov.uk/downloads/download/2479/social\\_media\\_policy\\_and\\_process](http://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/download/2479/social_media_policy_and_process).

10. The social media policy and process has attracted some negative attention. There has been challenge on social media surrounding whether the policy and process infringes an individual's human rights or, via a Freedom of Information request, challenging the legitimacy of the approval process.

## **Implementation**

11. The council e-communications policy has been updated to reflect the social media policy and process.
12. HR policies are being updated to recognise the duty of care between the council and employees as a result of negative social media interest.
13. The legal position has been confirmed. No human rights are restricted. The council is not restricting what people choose to say about the council, only what they say on council social media accounts.
14. Council corporate social media accounts have been updated to make clear the council website ([www.york.gov.uk](http://www.york.gov.uk)) is the source of information about the council, with social media accounts used to engage residents/stakeholders only.
15. A social media plan has been drafted to propose management of the 81 social media accounts. This includes providing a common approach to evaluating impact and managing inappropriate behaviour.
16. Throughout 2018 training took place with officers and members to provide an update about the new policy and process, explain account holders responsibilities and the steps people can take to mitigate the impact of negative social media activity. This training was repeated for new members in June 2019.
17. Corporate social media sites are monitored by Meltwater on the council's behalf, with monthly evaluation reports shared with Executive and CMT. This includes sentiment and volume, with information from blocked accounts included, see below quarterly report:

	Qtr 3 18/19	Qtr 4 18/19	Qtr 1 19/20	Qtr 2 19/20
Positive	69%	58%	64%	64%
Negative	31%	42%	36%	36%
Social reach (m)	57.4	41.7	39.3	35.9
Social volume (k)	12.89	12.19	12.38	11.04

## Managing inappropriate behaviour

18. Since April 2018, the Communications team maintain a record of accounts which are blocked and/or social media posts that infringe the policy and as a result, receive a first warning.
19. In September 2019, the first social media panel was held. It was chaired by the Corporate Director Economy and Place, who was joined by an independent member and the Head of Communications.
20. At the social media panel, blocked accounts were reviewed. It was agreed that:
  - Where accounts were no longer live, no further action could be taken.
  - Where accounts no longer infringed the policy, they were unblocked and account holders were contacted to confirm.
  - Where accounts continue to infringe the policy they remain blocked. Accounts are contacted where these details are available to inform them of this decision and how their contacts with the council will be managed
21. The majority of York residents use social media appropriately and constructively. Since the panel was held, no further posts have led to the recommendation to block an account but a small number have been contacted with a first warning, because of:
  - Threatening or offensive comments directed at an officer.
  - Providing personal information about an officer.
  - Providing personal information about another resident.

22. These accounts either reposted the post without the inappropriate comment or deleted the post.
23. In addition, with the policy and process providing guidance, a few accounts have been contacted to request a repost as a result of inappropriate language.
24. By having a policy and process in place, officers have a framework to address inappropriate comments quickly.

### **Next steps**

25. Audit and Governance Committee are asked to note the below next steps:
  - a) Given the low number of residents who infringe the policy and because since implementation, all have positively responded to a first warning, we will continue with the implementation of the social media policy and process.
  - b) However, with 81 different social media accounts, to ensure the management of social media is consistent across all accounts, we will progress a review and implementation of the plan to manage council social media accounts.

### **Media protocol**

26. The media protocol is an internal protocol that confirms the principles which govern the approach taken by the communications team to publicise the work of the council when responding on behalf of a joint administration.
27. At the Audit and Governance Committee, 27 June 2017, the draft media protocol was discussed, with suggested edits provided by committee members.  
<http://modgov.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=437&MIId=9776&Ver=4>
28. The media protocol was updated to reflect these comments and published following Chief Executive approval.
29. It was updated again in October 2019 and published following approval by the Chief Executive.  
[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/15268/media\\_protocol\\_-\\_october\\_2019](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/15268/media_protocol_-_october_2019)

## Risks

30. Managing social media activity on council social media accounts is perceived as infringing human rights – The Parliament Human Rights Committee has demanded more of social media owners and the council policy reflects this.
31. The volume of inappropriate comments leads to an onerous process that is impossible to resource – there are only a handful of residents who are either unaware of the policy, and quickly respond when contacted, or continue to attempt to divert resources from higher priorities and would continue to do so without a policy in place.
32. Council employees are uncomfortable responding to or using social media – the policy provides a framework that supports officers appropriately respond to inappropriate comments, with training in place for new officers.

## Council Plan

33. This policy and process supports the council plan.

## Specialist Implications:

34.

- **Financial:** no financial implications
- **Human Resources (HR):** HR policies are being updated to reflect the social media policy and process
- **Equalities:** The policy and process is applied equally to all residents and as a result, has not required an Equality Impact Assessment. All data published in this report is covered by the council Communications Privacy Statement:  
[https://www.york.gov.uk/info/20247/website/2263/communications\\_privacy\\_notice](https://www.york.gov.uk/info/20247/website/2263/communications_privacy_notice)
- **Legal:** Human Rights Legislation and the Malicious Communications Act are reflected in the council social media policy and process

## Contact Details

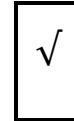
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Report  
Approved



Date 25/11/19

### Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Legal and Governance – Suzan Harrington  
Social Media Panel – Neil Ferris  
HR – Trudy Forster

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

**All**



**For further information please contact the author of the report**