

Present:	Councillor Adrianna McNulty (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Liz Bushell, Geoff Ellis, Laura McWilliams, Ric Metcalfe, Lucinda Preston, Christopher Reid and Loraine Woolley
Independent Person(s):	None.
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Hilton Spratt

40. Confirmation of Minutes - 30 September 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019 be confirmed, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Liz Bushell's name in the list of those members in attendance.

41. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

42. Social Media Policy

Steve Welsby, Communications Manager:

- (a) Presented a report which provided the Ethics and Engagement Committee with an opportunity to consider a new Social Media Policy which incorporated aspects such as the Council accounts available for use, employee wellbeing, the best use of social media, personal accounts and use of social media by elected members.
- (b) Explained that social media had grown at a rapid pace and had changed the way people and organisations communicated, enabling people to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.
- (c) Explained that corporate websites were often no longer the first point of call when people wished to ask questions, so it was necessary to go beyond the use of traditional forms of communicating online to meet the needs of residents and stakeholders.
- (d) Explained that messaging could be done instantly and could be far-reaching, which would bring many benefits but also a number of risks.
- (e) Explained that the new Social Media Policy laid out how the City of Lincoln Council would use social media, outline responsibility for channels, state the authority's procedures and help staff and elected members manage risk.
- (f) Reported that sections 12 and 13 of the document should be re-numbered as sub-headings (a) and (b) respectively, with the subsequent headings throughout the document being re-numbered accordingly.

- (g) Reported that a new member of the Communications Team with significant experience in social media would be commencing their role in February 2020.
- (h) Invited members' questions and comments.

Councillor Thomas Dyer, as an experienced user of Facebook and Twitter, expressed some concerns regarding the draft document. Rather than a policy document he felt as though it was an advisory or guidance document as it was not clear or prescriptive enough about how social media should and should not be used. He added that this was particularly concerning from the perspective of staff as there was a section within the document regarding the possibility of incorrect or excessive use leading to disciplinary action. It was very important, therefore, that the policy outlined clear rules and procedures rather than terminology which could be construed as advice or guidance.

Councillor Dyer highlighted that the document included information on communications governance, information relating to staff and information relating to members. He therefore suggested that the document be split into these three sections to make it clearer, or even create standalone documents for each respective section.

Councillor Dyer asked who had written the document and whether it had been created from a Local Government Association template.

Mr Welsby confirmed that the document had not been produced using a Local Government Association template but had been written by him based upon examples from other local authorities recognised as delivering good practice.

Councillor Dyer was supportive of the re-numbering of paragraphs 12 and 13 to become sub-headings as this made sense in the context of that section of the policy document.

Under the section 'best use of social media', Councillor Dyer was concerned about verbal consent being adequate enough to enable photographs and videos to be posted on social media, with written consent ensuring that there was an audit trail. He felt that with verbal consent it could be one person's word against another's that consent was actually given to the posting of the photograph or video.

Mr Welsby explained that written consent was more complicated with larger groups of people, so the consent required would be dependent upon the circumstances at the time. Photographs of children, for example, even in large groups would require the written consent of all parents prior to a photograph or video being posted.

A section under the heading 'personal accounts' included top tips for personal accounts when used by members of staff or elected members. One of the tips referred to being positive if commenting on a Council issue. As a member of the Council's opposition, Councillor Dyer explained that there would naturally be times when he would post negative comments about the authority.

Mr Welsby agreed that this section should be solely for members of staff and not elected members.

Councillor Dyer reflected on the headings 'personal use of social media at work' and 'excessive use of social media at work'. He was of the opinion that these two sections contradicted themselves, as one section had a zero tolerance on the use of personal social media during working hours, not including breaks, whereas the other section stated that employees should not spend an excessive amount of time while at work using social media.

Mr Welsby agreed to seek clarity from the Council's Human Resources Team with a view to making these two sections consistent with each other.

Referring to the section entitled 'Councillor use of social media', Councillor Dyer felt that this should be more explicit as to what members should and should not do, rather than using terms such as 'it is advisable' or 'Councillors may'.

Councillor Dyer understood that a member's personal social media account and their Council social media account should be kept separate in order that it was clear when they were acting in an official capacity as an elected member.

Councillor Dyer sought clarity as to politically restricted posts and whether there were limitations as to what individuals in these positions could post on their social media accounts.

It was noted that certain positions, such as the Council's Corporate Management Team and Monitoring Officer, were classified as politically restricted posts, with another category of sensitive posts sitting beneath them in the Council's structure. There were limitations as to what people in these positions could post on social media, from a political perspective, and any instances of this occurring should be reported to the Council's Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Dyer asked how this was policed, claiming that he had been informed of this occurring during the recent Parliamentary General Election.

It was reported that any known instances should be reported to the Monitoring Officer who, in consultation with the Human Resources Team, would take necessary action.

Councillor Dyer asked, in respect of the promotion of personal financial interests, whether political fundraising would count in this category.

Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Leader of the Council, said that members should not use their standing for their own private gain in whatever form that private gain took.

Mr Welsby agreed to add further clarity around this aspect of the policy.

In view of the points he had raised, Councillor Dyer felt that the policy should be revisited and offered to work with the Communications Manager on a revised version.

Councillor Lucinda Preston, regarding the advisory context of the wording in the policy, explained that it was very difficult given that legal and ethical frameworks had not caught up with technological frameworks in society. She added that most people used a degree of common sense and caution and would be able to apply the advice as set out.

Under the section entitled 'to block or not to block', Councillor Reid highlighted that there appeared to be a different approach to dealing with racist content if the user contacted the authority on Twitter as opposed to Facebook. He questioned why the two accounts were not consistent in dealing with people using such behaviour.

Mr Welsby understood that you could hide this content on Facebook but you could not do the same on Twitter. Councillor Reid reported that you could now hide content on Twitter in the same way. Mr Welsby agreed to amend this aspect of the policy.

Under the 'best use of social media' heading, Councillor Reid questioned the advice provided in the document where it stated 'the council will have a personality and be human ...' He was concerned people would misinterpret this and fall foul of having too much of a personality.

Mr Welsby explained that this was about being engaging as opposed to being too formal or dry in delivering content.

Under the same heading it stated that the council would not 'post content which would embarrass the council, councillors or members of staff' and questioned whether this may sometimes be necessary. He gave an example whereby the Council may need to apologise for a mistake it had made, which itself could lead to embarrassment.

Mr Welsby said people should be able to use their own initiative and common sense to establish whether or not the content they were posting could be perceived as embarrassing the council, councillors or members of staff.

This section of the policy also stated that the council would not 'try to cover up mistakes or post false or misleading information'. Councillor Reid was of the view that this should be turned into a more positive aspect of the policy, perhaps appearing from another perspective in the 'the council will' part of this section.

Under the 'councillor use of social media' reference was made that no indemnity from the council would be available with regard to the content posted by members. Councillor Reid questioned the use of this wording.

It was noted that this wording had been added in consultation with the Council's City Solicitor.

Councillor Metcalfe was pleased that there had been considerable discussion on this matter from members and felt that a lot of the comments made could be incorporated into a final revision of the policy. The policy had to be clearer about the things people were required to do. The suggestion to split the document in three separate parts should provide greater clarity regarding communications governance, use of social media by staff and use of social media by members.

RESOLVED that draft Social Media Policy be revised, taking into account the comments raised at this meeting.

43. Promotion of the role of Members and Committees (Verbal Report)

Graham Watts, Democratic and Elections Manager:

- (a) Referred to minute number 37 of the previous meeting where suggestions had been put forward regarding the publicity of committees, the role of councillors and the different services provided by the City Council and County Council.
- (b) Invited members to discuss these suggestions further.

Steve Welsby, Communications Manager, in undertaking some research with other authorities had identified that the City Council was not alone in seeking to proactively promote engagement in this way, which provided the authority with an opportunity to take a lead. He referred to journalism students in the city who often contacted him and he always encouraged them to attend meetings themselves in order that they could see first-hand the business being considered.

Councillor McWilliams made the point that people were not going to attend something if they did not know what it was about. She suggested a more modern and innovative way of promoting the role of members and committees through something such as a 60 second video clip, which could be a short and sharp visual way of engaging with and informing residents.

Councillor Lucinda Preston felt that it would be worthwhile engaging with schools, particularly secondary schools, who often had spare slots at assemblies or other sessions to promote democracy.

Councillor Geoff Ellis, in his previous role of Chair of this Committee, had often made contact with secondary schools for this purpose as part of Local Democracy Week but had not received any responses. He agreed in principle but in practice he reported that this had proven to be more difficult than anticipated.

Councillor Preston felt that the timing of Local Democracy Week in October may be one of the reasons for a lack of engagement by schools as this was a busy period for teachers. She suggested that schools would still be worth pursuing, but perhaps at a different time of the year.

Councillor Ellis agreed with this point and in addition suggested engagement with University and College students in the city.

Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Leader of the Council, highlighted that an important aspect of engagement was what people were going to get out of it. As part of his work at the University of Lincoln Councillor Metcalfe was regularly asked for interviews by students, which were almost always related to an assessed piece of work. The motivation for students in that respect, therefore, was that the information would help them with their degrees.

Councillor Tom Dyer emphasised that there was more to democratic involvement than young people and suggested that meetings of the Council's Executive, and meetings of the Council itself, should be held at different locations throughout the city in order to encourage people to attend.

Councillor Christopher Reid asked whether there had been much engagement as part of the Council's participation in #OurDay, which was a national social media event promoting local government. He also suggested posting videos from outgoing members to provide an insight from their perspective of having served as an elected member.

Mr Welsby reported that there had been huge engagement as part of the #OurDay event, which had proved to be very successful. The Council would also be participating this year.

Councillor Metcalfe made the point that there was also value in promoting the Council as a significant employer in the city, with people not necessarily knowing or understanding the interesting and important jobs that the City Council provided.

Mr Welsby shared an example of an innovative promotional video that could be utilised by the City Council whereby a person walked down the high street and all of the different services provided by the City Council or County Council were pointed out, making it clear who was responsible for what and highlighted some City Council services that were not necessarily appreciated as being services delivered by the Council.

RESOLVED that the points raised by members be considered as part of the development of promotional and engagement activities undertaken by the Communications Team.

44. Code of Conduct: Cases Review (Verbal Report)

Graham Watts, Democratic and Elections Manager, provided the Ethics and Engagement Committee with a number of recent examples of Code of Conduct cases where breaches had occurred from across the country.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.