REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY AND POLICY

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for the revised Social Media Policy and associated Strategy and Guidance documents.

Information and Advice

2. Social media is the term commonly given to online tools, channels and interactive media which allow people to interact with individuals, groups or organisations by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, interests and asking questions or participating in online discussion and conversations.

3. Social media includes a range of channels - such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn – which are gradually replacing traditional media and mass communication methods. These tools present opportunities and challenges for the Council.

4. The Council recognises that large numbers of residents now want and expect to be able to interact with the Council (whether as individuals, groups or organisations)using social media channels. Social media is therefore a key method in the Council's Communications Strategy.

5. The Council also recognises that there are a number of risks with using social media and it brings professional responsibilities that all Council employees need to understand. The revised Social Media Policy (**Appendix 1**) provides a framework to manage such risks to ensure the benefits of using social media are maximised with minimum risk.

6. The benefits of using social media include:

   - Reaching more residents as many are already using social media channels, including both young people and older people as two key demographics
   - A two-way dialogue with residents to ensure more regular and higher quality feedback (e.g. customer feedback on improving services)
   - Encouraging residents to participate in democracy and be engaged in local issues
   - Lower transaction costs for the Council by residents accessing information and services online (e.g. rather than by calling the Council or accessing higher cost face to face services)
   - A free/very low cost method of communication, compared with using other offline channels such as hard copy publications

- Improved access to training and development materials for employees (e.g. training videos on YouTube).

7. Policy Committee approved the existing Social Media Policy in December 2012, but the latest best practice, technology improvements and legal guidelines have moved on since then and a new updated Policy, Strategy (**Appendix 2**) and Guidelines (**Appendix 3**) are required.

Social Media Policy

8. This proposed Policy ensures that social media activity is safe, appropriate, purposeful and legal.

9. This Policy has been developed in line with various best practice and guidance documents published by other local authorities, the Local Government Association (LGA), Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), the Government's Cabinet Office, Smart Insights and takes account of legal and regulatory requirements related to digital and social media.

10. The purpose of the updated Policy is threefold:

- To minimise the reputational, legal and governance risks to the council and its employees arising from use of social media by staff in a professional (work-related) capacity.
- To enable the safe use of social media for the purposes of communication, engagement, customer service and service delivery.
- To ensure a consistent approach is applied across the council, focused on achieving business objectives and improving customer satisfaction.

11. The Policy aims to achieve this by establishing a corporate approach, standards and guidance on the use of social media and to help manage risks around social media usage. It predominantly covers work-related use of social media.

12. The Policy recognises that the ability for anybody with Internet access to instantly publish to the world brings with it professional responsibilities and risks that all council employees need to understand, even if they only use social media in their personal lives rather than for work purposes. So the Policy also references how personal use of social media is covered separately by various ICT and HR policies and procedures – with further specific guidance around personal use included in the Social Media Guidelines document.

13. A key update to this Policy includes the commitment that the Council will make access to social and streaming media open by default from devices on the Council's network. This is to reflect the benefit that accessing social media can have to support the delivery of Council services and personal development activity by employees. A number of other councils have recognised this and opened up access to social and streaming media sites to employees, including Nottingham City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Derbyshire County Council. Usage will be governed by appropriate HR and ICT policies and procedures to ensure it is appropriate and beneficial to duties.

14. The other main updates to the Policy are to reflect a higher focus on effective risk management, including the following precautions, safeguards and monitoring for social media. Social media will be monitored by a number of services including:

- Communications and Marketing service – will monitor mentions of the Council using social media management tools for online brand and reputation management
- ICT service – will ensure access to inappropriate social media content is blocked, filtered and monitored where possible and appropriate (in line with the IT Security Policy) from the Council's network by using filtering and security tools
- HR service – will maintain relevant HR policies and guidance to ensure individual access to social and streaming media from Council devices is appropriate to official duties. All staff will receive basic awareness training on digital and social media through an elearning module which will be developed
- Line managers in all services – will ensure all relevant policies and guidance related to the professional and personal use of social and streaming media is understood by employees, plus will proactively address any performance or conduct issue around use of social media (seeking HR advice as needed)

15. The Policy will be regularly reviewed and any future updates will be brought back to Policy Committee for approval.

Social Media Strategy

16. This supports the Council's Communications Strategy and sets out the strategic approach to how Council will use social media more effectively to ensure it directly supports business objectives.

17. The Strategy outlines that there are three strategic aims to using social media:

- Achieve value for money and cost savings
- Increase positive reputation through customer satisfaction and service take-up
- Increase participation in the democratic process – including using social media to gather information to support improved service delivery

18. The Strategy sets out the following timetable for implementation:

Phase	Brief details	Timescale
Rationalisation and basic housekeeping – of existing social media counts	Delete old/unnecessary profiles Ensure appropriate branding Ensure digital team has access	End of October 2015
Implement content strategy across corporate social media accounts	Ensure content/publishing schedule is in place	End of November 2015
Communication of basic standards	Proactively communicate and promote the Social Media Policy and Social Media Guidelines	End of December 2015
Implementation of standards (for profiles not already meeting them)	Address with individual services as needed	End of January 2016

Support	Identify social media ambassadors Provide bespoke training to relevant individuals/services Establish digital elearning module for all staff to include social media standards	End of March 2016

Social Media Guidelines

19. This new document covers the practicalities of using social media. It has been specifically developed to provide full and comprehensive guidance around the standards expected in relation to both work-related and personal use of social media.

20. The Guidelines make clear the difference between professional and personal use of social media and include reference to:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Legal implications
- Monitoring of social media
- Specific guidance on professional use – including Council owned social networks, (including the process for requesting new social media profiles/pages and closing down accounts), guidance for employees working with children and vulnerable adults, contributions using a personal account and things to consider when running an online community
- Specific guidance on personal use
- Signposting and links to other relevant Council policies (e.g. Code of Conduct and ICT Email and Internet Use), as well as external sources of best practice.

21. The Guidelines will be kept updated on an ongoing basis.

Other Options Considered

22. Not updating the Social Media Policy is high risk as the existing Policy is out of date and inadequate to ensure the Council's safe, appropriate, purposeful and legal use of social media.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

23. To ensure the Council takes a strategic and effectively risk managed approach to using social media to deliver online services that are so good, that those that can, will choose to use them.

Statutory and Policy Implications

24. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications

are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

25. All expenditure attached with the social media Digital First work stream is contained within existing budgets. Any divergence from this position will be brought back before Members.

Equalities Implications

26. Equalities implications have been considered as part of compiling this report. Social media is one of many communications channels used by the Council, so is not exclusive to any protected groups. As there are no negative impacts on any protected group, an Equality Impact Assessment has not been deemed necessary.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

1)   Approves the Council's updated Social Media Policy and associated strategy and guidance documents.
2)   Receives a report in six months' time on the implementation of the new Policy.

Alan Rhodes
 Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Done/Clare Yau

Constitutional Comments (LM 1/09/15)

27. The recommendations fall within the terms of reference for Policy Committee.

Financial Comments (SEM 14/10/15)

28. The financial implications are set out in the report.

Human Resources Comments (GME 14/10/15)

29. The implications of the Policy, Strategy and Guidelines for employees are covered in the body of the report. The recognised trade unions have been engaged with and invited to comment through Central Joint Consultative and Negotiating Panel.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All

<u>Appendices</u>

Appendix 1 – Social Media Policy
Appendix 2 – Social Media Strategy
Appendix 3 – Social Media Guidelines