

**Democracy and Standards Committee**  
**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

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<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Social Media Toolkit for Councillors</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Kamila Coulson-Patel, Chief Lawyer</b>

<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	Choose an item.
<b>Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? <u>Our priorities for the future   North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)</u></b>	Modern public services

## List of Appendices

### Appendix A – Draft Social Media Toolkit

#### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. To consider a draft social media toolkit to support councillors to use social media safely.

#### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1. Councillors have reported concerns regarding abuse and threats received on social media.
- 2.2. A social media toolkit has been prepared to support councillors to use social media safely which covers health and safety and how to deal with abusive behaviour on social media. The toolkit also covers considerations linked to the Councillor Code of Conduct. A copy of the text for the social media toolkit is shown at Appendix A.
- 2.3. Subject to agreement by Democracy and Standards Committee, the monitoring officer will arrange for the text to be presented as an interactive toolkit available to all councillors. It will also form part of the councillor induction programme.

### **3. Recommendations**

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3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- (a) Review and comment on the draft social media toolkit;
- (b) Agree the adoption of the social media toolkit for North Northamptonshire Council and direct the monitoring officer to make arrangements for this to be digitalised and available to all councillors and form part of the induction programme;
- (c) Review the social media toolkit in 12 months forming part of the work programme of the committee for 2025/26.

#### **3.1.1 Reason for Recommendations:**

- Members at both Democracy and Standards Committee and at full Council have highlighted the challenges faced by councillors on social media for their concerns regarding safety.
- The recommendation to adopt a social media toolkit assists in supporting councillors in the discharge of their role and provides guidance on how to navigate the online landscape when acting in their official capacity.
- It is recommended that this forms part of the updates to councillors through communication and form part of the induction to ensure that all councillors have an awareness of how to navigate social media in their official capacity and further guidance and resources available to them.

#### **3.1.2 Alternative Options Considered:**

- An option considered was to not create a social media toolkit. This was disregarded as members have previously highlighted the challenges faced on social media and the need for support on this topic.
- The option of signposting only to the Local Government Association Guidance was considered. Whilst this Local Government Association guidance is a very helpful tool, the adoption of this would not allow local revisions to reflect the arrangements at North Northamptonshire and therefore this option is not proposed.

## **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1. On 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024, the Democracy and Standards Committee considered the debate not hate campaign of the LGA and recommended its approval by full Council which took place on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024.
- 4.2. Arising from the adoption of the debate not hate campaign, the monitoring officer has worked to develop a social media toolkit to support councillors when using social media.
- 4.3. Whilst councillors hold public office and will be subject to higher levels of scrutiny and challenge, this should not amount to criticism personal in nature including threats to personal safety.
- 4.4. Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024 gave their own accounts of the public threats they have been subject to on social media. It was recognised that as holders of public office they are subject to scrutiny and challenge which is part of healthy democracy however they were able to express instances where this was without basis and became a personal attack including through social media.

## **5. Issues and Choices**

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- 5.1. A draft social media toolkit has been prepared which is shown at Appendix A. This is intended to equip councillors with guidance to navigate social media platforms.
- 5.2. The toolkit covers general and specific consideration, use of social media at meetings, Councillor Code of Conduct and how to deal with online abusive behaviour. The draft toolkit which has been developed through the best practice and guidance produced by Local Government Association (LGA).

## **6. Next Steps**

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- 6.1. Subject to approval by the Democracy and Standards Committee, the monitoring officer will arrange for the social media toolkit to be digitalised and available to all councillors.
- 6.2. The toolkit will also form part of the councillor induction programme to support new and existing councillors in the discharge of their role.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1. Resources and Financial and Transformation**

- 7.1.1. There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

### **7.2. Legal and Governance**

- 7.2.1. There is no legislative provision requiring the adoption of a social media toolkit however the council has a duty under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its councillors which this toolkit seeks to achieve.

### 7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The proposal to adopt a social media toolkit aligns with the council in meeting its commitments in the Corporate Plan 2021/25 specifically for modern public services. Specially to empower councillors in the effective use of the technology available to them and provide them with skills and knowledge to navigate social media.

### 7.4. Risk

7.4.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

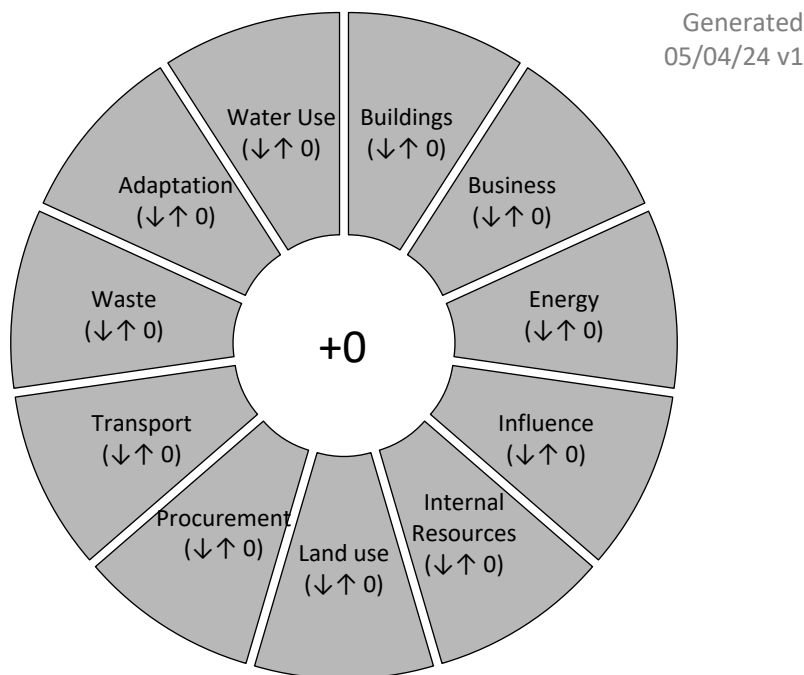
### 7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. The proposals arise from consultation on the debate not hate campaign considered by the Democracy and Standards Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024. There has been no direct consultation on the proposals to date.

### 7.6. Equality Implications

7.6.1. There are no equality implications arising from the proposal.

### 7.7. Climate Impact



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

7.7.1. There are no climate change impacts arising from this report.

### 7.8. Community Impact

7.8.1. There are no implications arising from this.

## 7.9. **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.9.1. There are no implications arising from this report.

## **Background Papers**

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7.10. None.