

# Documents which support the Constitution

## Part F

### Social Media Protocol for Councillors

#### Introduction

1. All ~~Councillors~~ ~~Members~~ of the authority are required to act in accordance with the ~~Councillor~~~~Member~~ Code of Conduct whilst acting in their official capacity. Any Councillor's use of social media platforms may be deemed to be acting in an official capacity if the circumstances would lead a reasonable person to conclude that this is the case. An objective test would apply and, as such, a Councillor's view on the matter is instructive but not conclusive. It is therefore advisable for Councillors to apply the guidance in this protocol at all times when using social media platforms.
2. Blogging and social media networking are effective methods for ~~C~~eouncillors to interact with constituents and support local democracy. Used effectively, they can engage those who would not normally have access to local ~~C~~eouncillors and politics. However, it is not always clear whether such activities are covered by the Code of Conduct. This guide is intended to assist ~~Councillor~~~~members~~ in complying with the Code, – promote high standards and ensureing that the use of online media is well received.
3. ~~Councillors~~~~You~~ should reflect carefully on the content and tone of communicationsthink about what you say and how you say it and apply the same considerations as communications in person or by email or letter. Acceptable conduct and standards are constantly evolving and Councillors should be mindful of the diversity of views and opinions, particularly on sensitive subjects, ~~– in just the same way as you must when making statements in person or in writing.~~
4. ~~You will also need to think about whether you are seen to be, or give the impression that you are acting in your official capacity as a councillor. If you do give the impression that you are acting in your official capacity whilst blogging or using social media, such activity will be caught by the Code.~~
- 5.4. ~~C~~individual councillors are permitted to have their own official social media sites as ~~Councillor~~~~Members~~ of Surrey Heath Borough Council and should be aware that any communications, on such sites, wouldmay be in an official capacity. but in these they must conform to the protocols of the Council.
- 6.5. ~~If Councillors are likely to be deemed to be acting in an official capacity if any communications on you have a private blog~~ relate you must bear in mind that if you refer to council business or could be interpreted as relating to council business. in it, you may be viewed as acting in your official capacity.
- 7.6. ~~To assistmake sure Councillorsyou to~~ comply with the Code of Conduct whilst acting in an official capacity, you are requested to observe the following guidelines should be observed:

#### Do

- Consider whether there is a~~you~~ need to set appropriate privacy settings for ~~a~~your~~ blog or networking site ~~– especially~~ for a~~if you have a~~ private, non-political blog.~~

- ~~Delete any~~Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts ~~from others on any~~your blog or page ~~and remove them as soon as possible, to avoid the perception that you condone such views~~
- ~~Be aware that the higher your profile as a Councillors that have leadership roles or responsibilities, a greater degree of scrutiny and significance may apply to social media communications; this reflects the Nolan principles embedded in the Code of Conduct, in particular leadership. These principles are set out in Annex 1, the more likely it is you will be seen as acting in your official capacity when you blog or network~~
- ~~Ensure you use council facilities appropriately; and be aware that any posts you make using Council facilities will be viewed as being made in your official capacity/ and or an inappropriate use of Council resources.~~
- ~~Councillors should be~~Be aware that by publishing information that you could not have accessed without your position as a councillor, you they will be seen as acting in any official capacity if they publish information on social media platforms that could only have been accessed in their position of Councillor.
- ~~Make political points, but be careful about being too specific or personal if referring to individuals. Personal comments about individuals may be outside the boundaries of political freedom of speech and expression. An attack on individuals may be seen as disrespectful, whereas general comments about another party or genuine political expression is less likely to be viewed as disrespect.~~Give due consideration to comments about individuals. Personal comments about individuals may be outside the boundaries of political freedom of speech and expression. An attack on individuals may be seen as disrespectful, whereas general comments about another party or genuine political expression is less likely to be viewed as disrespect.

### Don't

- Blog in haste.
- Post comments that may be deemed inappropriate you would not be prepared to make if otherwise sent by email or letter~~n writing~~ or made in person~~face to face~~
- Use council facilities for personal or party political blogs.
- Refer to or republish on any social media platform any information ~~identified by the Council as confidential or exempt~~in any Social Media Channel

### When the Code of Conduct may apply

~~8-7. Councillors Bear in mind the Code when you blog or use social networking sites. You should pay particular attention to the following values and behaviours identified~~paragraphs in the Code:

- Disrespect
- Bullying
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Disrepute
- Misuse of authority resources

~~9.8.~~ It is difficult to give definitive advice on the application of the Code as each blog and social networking page is different. The content of a blog or other social networking tool and the circumstances surrounding its creation will determine whether or not it might be covered by the Code.

~~10.9.~~ Ethical use of online social media is not limited to what is covered in the Code. ~~Councillors are encouraged to respect the principles of the Members' Code of Conduct, which can be found at Part 5, Section A of the Constitution.~~ While ~~communications~~ your conduct may not be a breach of the Code, ~~they~~ it may still be viewed as less than exemplary and attract adverse publicity for ~~the~~ your office of Councillor, political party/group and the Council. The Nolan principles of Leadership an integrity are paramount in all communications with Councillors and promote high standards of conduct. It is expected that Councillors observe these principles at all times when using social media when acting in their capacity as a Councillor.

### Derogatory comments

~~11.10.~~ On occasion, ~~C~~eouncillors might find themselves the subject of offensive or defamatory remarks on other people's' blogs or networking sites. The following approach is advised in such circumstances, and applies equally to any form of publication:

- Pursue a policy of indifference to such remarks, but any response should avoid theif you do wish to respond, do not be tempted ~~into~~ retaliation because this wouldyou may risk breaching the Code. You could ask the blog owner/person could be asked making ~~the remarks~~ to remove the remarks m from the site.
- If the person making the comments is a local authority, town or parish ~~C~~eouncillor, discuss the situation with the Monitoring Officer. It might be the case that the Councillorperson has breached the Code by making the remarks, and it could be appropriate to make a complaint to the Monitoring Officer.
- Aside from any possible breaches of the Code ~~of Conduct~~, the matter is usually deemed private between yourself and the individual. The Council cannot provide legal assistance for pursuit of a claim through the civil courts, but seeking you may decide that you wish to take independent legal advice may be a consideration.

### Use of Media Devices during Council Meetings

~~12.11.~~ With the exception of meetings of the Planning Applications Committee, the Licensing Sub Committee, Standards Hearing Sub Committees, or the Full Council when considering major planning applications, CouncillorMembers may use media devices for any purpose.

~~13.12.~~ At meetings of the Planning Applications Committee, Licensing Sub Committee, Hearing Sub Committees or the Full Council, when considering major planning applications, the decision-making CouncillorMembers may only use media devices to access meeting papers and for note-taking. Other CouncillorMembers in attendance at these meetings may use media devices for any purpose.

~~14.13.~~ At all meetings, during the consideration of exempt items, CouncillorMembers may only use media devices to access meeting papers and for note-taking.

## Interaction with the authority'sSHBC social media accounts

~~15-14.~~ The Council has its own official social media channels, predominantly on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/surreyheath](http://www.facebook.com/surreyheath)) and Twitter ([www.twitter.com/surreyheath](http://www.twitter.com/surreyheath)). Councillors are encouraged to share those posts onto their own social media accounts, adding accompanying comments if they so wish.

~~16-15.~~ Councillors should never disclose exempt information. Councillors should not add extra information beyond that in anythe social media post/press releases as this could potentially compromise the Council, or even result in legal action.

~~17-16.~~ Councillors should not add any party-political comments in relation to a Council social media post that is advocating support or opposition for any political party or group.

~~18-17.~~ Council press releases are written by officers, and express the official Council position as democratically decided, including quotes from the Leader or Portfolio Holder. Related social media posts are not therefore an online debating chamber, and Ccouncillors are encouraged (but not compelled) to use their own channels instead.

~~19-18.~~ Officers reserve the right to remove any comments (including those by Ccouncillors) that may be deemed offensive or abusive in the view of the Monitoring Officer, or other appropriate officer.

## Annex 1

### Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

### Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

### Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

### Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

### Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

### Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

### Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.