

## BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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| <b>Committee</b>         | <b>EXECUTIVE</b>                                                                        | Item<br>14                     | Page<br>1 |
| <b>Report Originator</b> | Sue Lyons<br>Head of Democratic & Legal Services<br>Monitoring Officer                  | <i>Work Programme<br/>Ref:</i> |           |
| <b>Wards Affected</b>    | None                                                                                    | 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2015  |           |
| <b>Title</b>             | <b>PROTOCOL FOR THE USE OF HAND HELD ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND SOCIAL MEDIA BY MEMBERS</b> |                                |           |

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor James Burton**

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To bring before the Executive a draft protocol for the use of electronic devices and social media by Members during public meetings of the Council.

### 2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Standards Advisory Committee has on two occasions discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages of using electronic equipment and social media during council meetings. At its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014 the Committee recommended that a draft protocol on the use of social media by councillors during council meetings be drawn up for consideration by the Committee prior to being submitted to the Executive.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015, the Standards Advisory Committee considered the draft Protocol for the Use of Hand Held Electronic Devices and Social Media by Members. The draft protocol is set out at **Appendix A**, and reflects the issues raised by Standards Advisory Committee members, best practice and the legal position.
- 2.2 The Standards Advisory Committee recommended that:-

*“the draft Protocol be recommended to Executive and Council for adoption, subject to the following:-*

- The use of social media be not permitted in Planning and Licensing Committee meetings*
- Accessing social media sites during the meeting to give contemporaneous comment on the discussion prior to conclusion of the debate be not permitted*

### 3. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

If the Executive recommends that the Protocol should be included as part of the Constitution, then it will need to be approved by full Council.

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## 4. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

Adoption of the draft Protocol recognises the growing use of social media by councillors as an effective method to engage with their constituents and support local democracy.

## 5. FINANCIAL RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None arising from this report

## 6. HR IMPLICATIONS

None arising from this report

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There is no legal restriction on the use of electronic equipment and social media by councillors during council meetings. It is the case that greater freedoms have been given under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 to all those attending meetings to record meetings and interact through social media during meetings. The Department of Local Government, in its Guidance, states that;

*“The national rules do not prevent councillors from tweeting and blogging at meetings, so they should be able to do so provided it is not disruptive and does not detract from the proper conduct of the meeting. Whilst councillors are expected to comply with their body’s code of conduct, this should not prevent councillors from tweeting or blogging when appropriate.”*

- 7.2 There are risks, however, in using social media. Adopting a Protocol to provide guidance to members will assist to ensure that the use of electronic equipment and social media during meetings is appropriate. The public can be reassured that there are rules in place regarding the use thus reducing the risk of challenge to decisions and protecting the reputation of the Council and its Members.
- 7.3 The Protocol will comply with the Council’s duty under the Constitution to ensure that its decisions are open and accountable to local people.

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**8. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive:-

- (i) consider whether a the Protocol, once adopted, should form part of the Council's Constitution; and
- (ii) consider and, subject to any changes, either adopt the Protocol or recommend adoption to Council, if the Executive recommends that it should form part of the Council's Constitution.

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Background Papers:

Title of Document: N/A

Date: -

Contact Officer: Anne Ireson

Previous Reports/Minutes:

Ref: 14.STA.06

Date:20.10.14

Item A1 Standards Advisory  
Committee

Date: 28.9.15