

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Guidance of Member Correspondence</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>8 March 2016</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Head of Law &amp; Monitoring Officer</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis</b>	<b>Tel: 29-1500</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

## **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring to the Audit & Standards Committee proposals for a new Guidance on Member Correspondence. The need for such a guidance was flagged up in the Standards Update Report to this Committee of 12 January 2016. A variety of complaints alleging failure to respond or respond promptly have given rise to an issue of general interest regarding what is or may be expected of Members in dealing with enquiries and correspondence from their constituents.
- 1.2 The aim of the guidance is to provide members with greater clarity regarding the expectations made of them given the ever-increasing volumes of correspondence they receive. Its objective is to provide Members with broad guidance to reduce the risk of complaints being made against them.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the committee approves the Guidance on Member Correspondence at Appendix 1. to this report
- 2.2 That the committee agrees that the approved Guidance be circulated to all members together with a covering letter which explains its objective.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 A recent complaint referred to in the update Report before today's Audit and Standards Committee involved an alleged failure to respond to a constituent's emails. The Council had previously received similar allegations although not through the formal standards process. Members will be aware that, in certain circumstances, such a complaint may, if proven, amount to a breach of the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Members which require Members to treat others with respect and/or not to do anything that may bring their office or authority into disrepute.

- 3.2 The Council does not, at the moment, have any guidance for Members regarding the expectations made of them in a context where correspondence received by both letter and email continues to increase. Public expectation is also changing with many anticipating instantaneous response to their queries.
- 3.3 It is for Members to decide how they deal with correspondence using their own judgment. This guidance is not intended to impose any additional new requirements, but instead to assist Members to avoid or minimize the risk of a complaint arising or unrealistic expectations being created. Members will note further that the guidance includes provision for dealing with correspondence which is frivolous or vexatious. This includes some guidelines on bringing to a close exchanges which are unproductive in situations where the member deems it necessary to do so.
- 3.4 The Guidance on Member Correspondence is attached at Appendix 1.1.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 As detailed in the report.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Consultation has recently taken place with the Independent Persons, who have made suggestions regarding the form and remit of the draft guidance.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Acceptance of the recommendations and adoption of the revised Social Media Protocol for Members may be seen as part of the ongoing direction of travel agreed by the committee at its meeting on 16/3/13 to ensure the availability of appropriate guidance on social media usage.

#### **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The proposed actions set out involve changes to working practices, codes, protocols and culture, all of which are expected to be achieved within existing departmental revenue budgets.

*Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld*

*Date: 26/02/16*

##### Legal Implications:

- 7.1 None other than stated at para 3.1 above.

*Lawyer Consulted: Victoria Simpson*

*Date: 10/02/16*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.2 There are no equalities implications arising from the report.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.3 There are no sustainability implications arising from the report.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.4 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from the report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.5 The adoption of appropriate protocols and policies set a framework for ongoing improvement to the council's corporate governance and lessen the risk of issues arising.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.6 The attached document aims to assist in the project to continually improve the Council's corporate governance and to ensure properly managed openness and transparency by its Members.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Guidance on Member Correspondence

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

1. None

### **Background Documents**

1. None

