TRAFFORD
COUNCIL

AGENDA PAPERS FOR

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 20 March 2023

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Place: Committee Rooms 2 and 3, Trafford Town Hall, Talbot Road, Stretford, M32 0TH

A G E N D A	PART I	Pages

1. **ATTENDANCES**

   To note attendances, including officers, and any apologies for absences.

2. **MINUTES**   1 - 4

   To receive and, if so determined, to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2022.

3. **INDUCTION TRAINING FOR COUNCILLORS**   To Follow

   To consider a report of the Organisational Development and Learning Officer.

4. **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS**   5 - 14

   To consider the attached guidance.

5. **DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICERS REPORT**   Verbal Report

   To receive a verbal update from the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

6. **URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)**

   Any other item or items which by reason of:-

   (a)   Regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the Chairman of the meeting, with the agreement of the relevant Overview

and Scrutiny Committee Chairman, is of the opinion should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency as it relates to a key decision; or

(b)   special circumstances (to be specified) the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency.

SARA TODD
Chief Executive

Membership of the Committee

Councillors K. Procter (Chair), Mrs. P. Young (Vice-Chair), Dr. S. Carr, W. Frass, S.J. Gilbert, D. Jarman, D. Jerrome, S. Maitland, M. Mirza, A. New, D. Western, Mr. D. Goodman, Mr. C.E.J. Griffiths, Mr R. Brown, A. Rudden, N. Jackson and Mr M. Whiting.

Further Information
For help, advice and information about this meeting please contact:

Alexander Murray, Governance Officer
Tel: 0161 912 4250
Email: alexander.murray@trafford.gov.uk

This agenda was issued on **Friday, 10 March 2023** by the Legal and Democratic Services Section, Trafford Council, Trafford Town Hall; Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester, M32 0TH.

WEBCASTING

This meeting will be filmed for live and / or subsequent broadcast on the Council's YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjwbIOW5x0NSe38sgFU8bKg. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items.

If you make a representation to the meeting you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed. By entering the body of the Committee Room you are also consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If you do not wish to have your image captured or if you have any queries regarding webcasting of meetings, please contact the Democratic Services Officer on the above contact number or email democratic.services@trafford.gov.uk

Members of the public may also film or record this meeting. Any person wishing to photograph, film or audio-record a public meeting is requested to inform Democratic Services in order that necessary arrangements can be made for the meeting. Please contact the Democratic Services Officer 48 hours in advance of the meeting if you intend to do this or have any other queries.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT

Councillor K. Procter (in the Chair).

Councillors Mrs. P. Young (Vice-Chair), W. Frass, S.J. Gilbert, D. Jarman, D. Jerrome, S. Maitland and D. Western.

Co-opted Members: Mr. D. Goodman, Mr. C.E.J. Griffiths, A. Rudden and Mr M. Whiting.

<u>In attendance</u>

Head of Legal and Governance – S. Boyle
Senior Governance Officer – I. Cockill

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dr. S. Carr, M. Mirza and A. New.

1. **ATTENDANCES**

The Chair noted the attendances for the meeting and welcomed the newly appointed Members on the Committee.

2. **MINUTES**

> RESOLVED: That, subject to several typographical corrections, the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 March 2022, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. **MEMBERS ADDRESSES**

Further to Minute No. 10 of the meeting held on 15 December 2021, the Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer submitted a report advising that a consultation exercise had been conducted with elected members on the matter. The report presented the outcomes from the consultation and sought the Committee's views on three proposals for how the Council might proceed.

Considering the publication of Members' private addresses on the declaration of interests form the Committee believed personal safety, not only of individual Members but also their family was of primary importance. The Committee considered that disclosure of the residential property could lead to the member or co-opted member, or a person connected with the member or co-opted member, being subject to violence or intimidation.

**Standards Committee
22.9.22**

Members acknowledged that in technological terms the world had moved on and that there were various means for members of the public to communicate with elected members. Whilst the Committee recognised that some Members were comfortable publicising their home address, the consensus was in favour of a blanket ban.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the content of the report and the outcomes of the consultation exercise, be noted.

(2) That the Council be recommended to adopt a blanket policy whereby all Members' addresses are treated as sensitive interests and not made publicly available.

4. DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICERS REPORT

The Head of Legal and Governance provided an oral update as follows:

(a) Local Government Association (LGA) Seminar

The LGA had confirmed that it would fund a seminar with Members on a topic of the Council's choosing from a list of 14 topics to be determined. On confirmation of the topic themes, the Head of Legal and Governance would canvass members and arrange a seminar based on the consensus.

(b) Monitoring Officer Investigations

In the current Municipal Year to date, two matters had been investigated and both had been dismissed at the early assessment stage.

RESOLVED: That the oral update be noted.

5. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

Note: The Chair allowed consideration of the following matter as an item of Urgent Business to inform the Monitoring Officer's preparations for the review of the Code of Conduct.

Case Work Originating from Outside a Member's Ward

Councillor Jerrome highlighted the constitutional provisions for when Members encounter issues originating outside of their own ward and queried the mechanisms and training for the purposes of reminding Members, including realignment of the provisions into one section in the Council's Constitution.

Standards Committee – 22 September 2022

_____

In respect of the Members' Code of Conduct, the Head of Legal and Governance confirmed that a Member acting outside of their ward did not fall within the scope of which a complaint could be made and the expectation was that Members should adhere to the constitutional provisions. He also considered the possibility of a working group to look at as part of the next Code of Conduct Review.

> RESOLVED: That the Monitoring Officer be requested to consider awareness training, particularly with the impending Boundaries Review which could possibly affect Members' associations locally, and report back to the Committee.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and finished at 7.32 p.m.

This page is intentionally left blank

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media includes various websites such as Facebook and Twitter which are the two most popular social networking providers, video sharing websites like YouTube, a variety of blogs which enable users to post their own articles and allow visitors to leave feedback, discussion forums and other social networking platforms of communication that people can use for educational or other purposes.

In recent years a huge number of people around the world have become active users of social media. The rapid growth and widespread use of social media has changed the way many people communicate and share information instantly.

Social media has made it very easy for us to communicate quickly and easily with family, friends and acquaintances, as well as sharing experiences and letting others know of our opinions and beliefs. These opinions and beliefs may be about world events or local affairs, politics or religion, interests, affiliations, organisations, products, people, and a wide variety of other topics. Our conversations and comments can be closely targeted or widely broadcast to the point that depending on the subject, they can go viral.

DEALING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA ABUSE

Whilst social media offers tremendous opportunities to connect with people and to share views it also attracts users whose use of a keyboard disconnects them from usual social norms so that they resort to unacceptable abusive and offensive behaviour. Unfortunately, this means that social media is also widely used by abusers.

Many perpetrators 'hide' behind the fact that they may not be able to be readily identified, saying things that they wouldn't consider saying face-to-face, which could be regarded as cowardly.

Online abuse takes several forms, and victims are not confined to public figures. They can do any job, be of any age, gender, sexual orientation or social or ethnic background, and live anywhere.

Being the subject of such behaviour can be both intimidating and depressing.

This note offers some guidance as to how to deal with such individuals, who are generically referred to as "trolls", via your personal social media accounts.

Whilst the behaviour of a troll can be extremely upsetting to their victim, not all of those behaviours are sufficiently overt so as to contravene the rules of the social media platform on which the troll lurks or to engage the criminal law.

This guidance deals with self-help and possible legal solutions.

TROLLS AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGY AND TACTICS

The term "troll" is not linked to a description of mythical creatures who prevent access to bridges, but to a dictionary definition of a person who fishes, in this case a person who fishes for a response and attention.

There have been a number of studies of trolls which have attempted to establish why they behave as they do on social media. Those studies have tended to find that trolls have unusually high standards of what it means to be successful and have often failed to achieve those standards. This causes them to resent those they regard as being successful and to attempt to bully them. In such circumstances their goal is to confuse and upset the object of their attention.

Internet trolling is said to be strongly associate with narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy and direct and vicarious sadism.

TROLL TACTICS

Trolls use endless tactics to achieve their goals but there are nine common tactics employed, consciously or otherwise by trolls:

1. *Ad Hominem Attacks* – where the attacker attacks the personal characteristics of their opponent rather than the substance of the argument itself. A common example is to brand someone by their perceived beliefs or person traits to the exclusion of everything else.

2. *Whataboutery* – which is the tactic of responding to an argument by accusing the opponent or something they support of something worse. In many cases the "something worse" is disinformation or fiction, such as an unsubstantiated allegation. A common example of that is statements such as "Well I might have done this but look at what you are accused of doing".

3. *Sealioning* – This technique involves a troll asking relentless questions about the topic of discussion, even though the topic is likely to have been explained in detail. Although the troll will try to appear to be keen to learn and be civil, in reality their purpose is to keep their victim online and responding to the troll for as long as possible in an attempt to derail the discussion.

4. *Debate Obsessives* – This is the technique of luring victims into an endless debate, which is all the troll will say they desire to satisfy their perceived right of freedom of speech. Rather than wholesome debate, it is an attempt to waste people's time.

5. *Sockpupptery* – This is where one person controls several different social media accounts which they use to derail debates. It is a technique that is deployed in cyberwarfare and astroturfing campaigns to create a false perception of public opinion. It relies in part on the fact that not everyone on

social media is who they say they are and debates between two false identities who are in reality the same person.

6. ***Ardent Researchers*** – Common amongst conspiracy theorists, this genus of troll likes to make wild and inflammatory claims which have included allegations that COVID19 is a hoax or was caused by 5G masts and that people who believe otherwise are "sheeple". When challenged and asked to produce the scientific or other evidence the troll will respond by suggesting that "you do your own research".

7. ***The Strawman Fallacy*** – This is the technique of re-writing the argument that is the subject of discussion in a way which is ridiculously distorted or exaggerated which is then easier to defeat. It is often deployed when dealing with political or emotive subjects and may be adopted as part of a campaign of sock puppetry.

8. ***Tribalism*** – which is where the troll will seek to create conflict and division between different groups by engaging our natural tendency towards tribalism. It is commonly deployed against members of different voting groups, for example "leavers" and "remainers" and has also been deployed between "mask wearers" and the "unmasked" in circumstances where membership or otherwise of the group in question has little or no relevance to the issue being debated.

9. ***Hate Mongering*** – Is the act of attempting to stir up hatred by making racist or misogynistic remarks, the use of hate speech and sometimes threats of physical violence. This is most overt tactic in the troll's arsenal and almost always contravenes the rules of whichever social media platform they happen to be using.

DEALING WITH TROLLS

THE GOLDEN RULE – DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

Do not reply to a troll. Whether a troll's behaviour is the product of a desire to address their own inadequacies, or it is part of an attempt at spreading disinformation, they are rewarded by a response. Not only do responses feed their own egos, they also feed the algorithms that assess the popularity of the troll's account and how far their reach spreads. A response could also make the situation worse.

The golden rule is don't respond. Failing to respond denies the troll satisfaction and doesn't increase the popularity of their post, limiting the number people who will see their post. As trolls are greedy and desire attention, they will quickly transfer their attention elsewhere.

If you really must reply:
- Take a screenshot of it, use the image of that screen shot in a new post on which you post your reply. In that way any further comments will enhance your algorithms, not the trolls.

- Mute or block the troll immediately after you have responded so as to prevent them coming back on your post.

BLOCK, MUTE AND REPORT

All forms of social media allow you to block individuals from posting on your social media accounts. Some allow you an additional option of muting them. All forms of social media have a mechanism for reporting abusive or inappropriate material.

The method of blocking, muting and reporting posts differs on different platforms:

Facebook

In order to report a post on Facebook click on the three dots that appear next to the X in the top right- hand corner of the post. That will open a dropdown menu which should include a "Report" button. If you do not see that button, click on "More options". Once you have clicked on the "Report" option you will be presented with a selection of reporting options to choose from. Click on the most appropriate link and follow the instructions.

In addition, the first drop down menu allows you to block the account that generated the offensive content.

Instagram

Inappropriate contact on Instagram is reported by clicking on the three dots icon on the top right of the post which will provide a dropdown menu which includes the report option. A further menu will appear offering you a range of reasons for reporting the post.

If you want to block an Instagram user from viewing your timeline or profile and responding to your posts you must go the persons profile and click on the three dot icon, from which you will be given the option of blocking that person or reporting them to Instagram.

Snapchat

You can block a person who has sent you an offensive message by Snapchat by long clicking on their username. You will then be offered the option of blocking them and then after selecting that option you will be asked to give a reason for blocking them, which includes an option of being harassed by the blocked person.

TikTok

TikTok users can be blocked or reported by accessing their username and then clicking on the three do icon at the top right of their name and then using the drop -down menu.

Trafford Council Social Media Guidance

Twitter

Twitter also allows you to block, mute, or report offensive content.

Blocking an account prevents the blocked person from following you, viewing your tweets (unless they see a tweet of yours that is on someone else's timeline) or responding you your tweets. The blocked person will be able to discover that you have blocked them if they visit your profile page.
Muting removes a person's tweets from your timeline, but they can still follow you and send you direct messages. The muted person may still reply to your tweets and their replies may be seen by others.

You can access the option to block, mute or report a person from a message by clicking on the three dots at the top right hand of the posts. You can also block a person from their profile by clicking on the three dots icon there.

It would also be worth reporting the matter to the social network that was used. They will have processes in place for such situations and may be able to simply remove the content and even close down the person's account.

In appropriate cases, where an offensive post has been seen by others it is appropriate for them to report the matter too, as social media companies are influenced by the number of reports they receive.

SCREENSHOT OFFENDING POSTS

Whilst an individual post may not be sufficient to bring a troll into conflict with the rules of the social media platform concerned or to engage the civil or criminal law a course of conduct inappropriate may do.

It is therefore important to keep a record of what takes place which identifies the account from which the offensive behaviour came and what was said.

It is not uncommon for people who practice abuse on social media to have multiple accounts in different names to enable them to avoid the consequences of being banned or restricted by the social media companies. Screen shots can often identify those multiple accounts.

LEGAL RESPONSES

CRIMINAL OFFENCE

Whilst not all of the tactics deployed by trolls amount to criminal offences, some online behaviour will contravene the criminal law.

If a person sends you threatening, abusive or offensive messages via Facebook, Twitter or any other social networking site, they could be committing an offence.

Trafford Council Social Media Guidance

Such behaviours include harassment and stalking as well as making threats to kill or commit criminal damage. Offences may also be committed where an individual creates a parody account which they try to pass off as being genuine or photoshop images of their intended victim.

The most relevant offences are 'harassment' and 'malicious communications'. For harassment to be committed, there must have been a clear 'course of conduct'. That is, two or more related occurrences. The messages do not necessarily have to be violent in nature but would need to have caused some alarm or distress.

If there has only been a single communication, it's unlikely it would qualify as harassment, but could be considered a malicious communication. For such an offence to be committed, a message must be sent to another person, or sent via a public communications network, that is indecent, grossly offensive, obscene, threatening or menacing.

How to report online harassment, malicious messaging or distribution of private sexual images without consent

You can report harassment, malicious messaging or distribution of private sexual images without consent to police online or by calling them on 101.

The Police will confirm whether an offence has been committed, based on the full facts and your individual situation. To assist with the investigation, the Police urge you not respond to the message as it may encourage the sender and make the situation worse.

If possible, take a screenshot of the message so if it gets deleted later there will still be a record of what was said.

Again, report it to the social network that was used.

CIVIL ACTION

There may be cases where a civil injunction can be sought against a known offender to prevent them continue to target an individual.

To obtain an injunction the court must be satisfied that an individual has engaged in, or threatens to engage in, conduct capable of causing nuisance and annoyance to the victim.

You can take someone to civil court if:

- they've harassed you more than once - this includes stalking
- the harassment made you feel distressed or alarmed

The court can order the person harassing you to stop - this is called getting an 'injunction'.

If you are being harassed on social media via your own personal accounts, for reasons which are not connected to your role with the Council as an officer of member, as an individual you should seek independent legal advice in respect of an injunctions. Whilst the Council's legal team may not be able to provide you with legal advice, it can support you to get the independent advice that you need.

Where there are concerns that a troll's behaviour is targeted at you as a member or officer because of their role with the Council, specific advice should be sought from the Council's legal team who will consider any action we are able to take on your behalf.

You can contact the legal team via email at legal@trafford.gov.uk or you can contact Dominique Sykes, Director of Legal and Governance, or Emma Malpas, Head of Legal and Governance directly.

SPEAK OUT & SEEK HELP

MENTAL HEALTH

The directed behaviour of trolls is known to have an adverse effect on their victim's mental health.

Their attention is often inescapable unless you take action to block their offensive material from appearing on your timeline. It can create worry and embarrassment as to what other people might think about you.

Whilst your head might tell you that being trolled is a symptom of a troll's inadequacies, your emotional reaction may be different.

The Council can provide access to a range of support. Please see the Council's intranet pages for useful links such as:

http://cms.intranet.trafford.gov.uk/Health-safety-wellbeing/Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing.aspx

You can also contact HR colleagues who will help you to explore the support available.

COLLEAGUE SUPPORT

Talk to us, let us help you to deal with what you are going through. We are always available to provide help and support to anyone that has concerns about their exposure to online abuse.

Talk to someone that you feel comfortable with or if you prefer, contact Dominique Sykes, Director of Legal and Governance, or Emma Malpas, Head of Legal and Governance. It doesn't matter who you reach out to, it is just important that you get the help you need.

Across the Council we have a wealth of knowledge, expertise and experience. We will explore all ways in which colleagues across the Council can come together to support you to get the help that you need. You are not on your own.

This page is intentionally left blank

Trafford social media guidelines

Our social media channels provide the opportunity to provide the latest news stories and report live from events to ensure that you're kept up-to-date with what's happening in Trafford.

Everyone is welcome to participate in our social media channels and we encourage interaction and comments. That said, we want to make sure our online community remains a safe and friendly place to be for all.

The digital world is no different to the offline world when it comes to the diversity of people and the views they hold. That's why it's vital that we respect each other's opinions and refrain from using defamatory, racist, abusive, homophobic, transphobic, violent or obscene language.

To keep our social media channels friendly and welcoming to all, we reserve the right to block or ban a user.

In considering whether a user has breached our social media guidelines we will monitor our channels and adopt the following protocols:

Moderating content

- We will delete a comment if it is abusive, offensive and/or contains expletives. If an individual continues to behave in this manner they will be blocked
- We will ban a user when they are abusive, offensive or insult a member of staff, an elected member or another user on one or more occasions
- We will remove content copied from elsewhere, for which you do not own the copyright
- We will remove post that publicise an individual's personal information, such as contact details

This page is intentionally left blank