

To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 14 March 2012

By: Trudy Dean, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
Peter Sass, Head of Democratic Services

Subject: Use of Social Media: Streaming of Questions into Committees

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary This report invites the Committee's views on extending the Council's use of technology at council meetings, with a view to introducing the use of social media to better engage with members of the public

1. Background

1.1 The County Council has embraced the use of communication technology in order to promote interest in the democratic processes and workings of local government in the County. Of particular significance in this regard is the Council's webcasting service, which has proved popular since its introduction, together with the committee management system (modern.gov), via which the Council's Forward Plan, Committee agendas and reports, Member contact details, etc, are published, maintained and available publicly via KCC's website.

1.2 Members of the Council have requested that consideration be given to providing technology that would enable questions to be raised by members of the public as Council and Committee meetings are taking place via e-mail and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

1.3 Members' attention is drawn to a resolution passed by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 23 September 2009, which resolved that it would ***"request that consideration is given to allowing Overview and Scrutiny Committees to introduce more innovative ways of seeking the views/evidence of service users, perhaps by involving the media and increasing technology."*** Despite this, no report has been brought forward since that date for Members' further consideration.

1.4 The County Council is currently in the process of reorganising its governance arrangements and it may be considered premature to attempt to address these issues until the technological needs can be fully assessed. Alternatively, Members may consider that this Committee's consideration of the matter need not be delayed because of this and that work by officers should be initiated without further delay to explore the options available.

1.5. The Leader of the Council wrote to the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on 6 March 2012 as follows:

“With regards to interacting with the public in new and innovative ways, very happy to get officers to do a discussion paper on how we might innovate and develop a new role to enable senior politicians to interact with the residents of Kent. I would again suggest this might be appropriate for the meeting before the end of April or nearest scheduled date.”

1.6 Other local authorities are already making use of this type of technology, some of whom have the same webcasting system as KCC uses, e.g. Cornwall Council, and if the Committee is minded to explore the opportunities that exist through new technology, learning from the experiences at other local authorities will be important.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is invited to note the position and recommend action accordingly.

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