

Report of ENE Area Leader

Report to Inner East Area Committee

Date: 5th December 2013

Subject: Social Media - A new way to engage?

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| Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Burmantofts & Richmond Hill, Gipton & Harehills, Killingbeck & Seacroft | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-In? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

Summary of main issues

1. This report provides members of the Inner East Area Committee with a paper from which to discuss the merits of establishing a social media presence in the form of a Facebook page.
2. That members of the Inner East Area Committee note the contents of the report and make comment where appropriate.

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide a discussion paper for the Inner East Area Committee regarding the establishment of a Facebook page.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Following on from a discussion at the Area Chair's Forum on 4th October, the Chair has expressed an interest in developing a social media presence, specifically a Facebook page, for the Inner East Area Committee in a bid to better engage with local residents.
- 2.2 Leeds City Council and the Area Support Teams in particular, regularly look at different methods of engagement outside of established working practices.
- 2.3 Social Media has been identified as one particular medium that could be used to better link into people who do not readily engage, communicate or interact with the council.
- 2.4 Given that Facebook is the fourth largest website in the world with a reputed 29 million users in the UK alone, this would seem an ideal tool with which to reconnect with local people.
- 2.5 Yet given this opportunity many in local government still seem reluctant to establish a corporate social media presence on Facebook bar a few isolated examples such as Coventry, Walsall and Worcester Councils.
- 2.6 Closer to home, here in Leeds the appetite appears much stronger. A number of individual service areas, such as the East North East Locality Team, already have a Facebook page and a pilot was run by the council's Senior Communication Manager in the summer looking at the potential for wider social media use.
- 2.7 However, at the time of writing, there are no obvious of like-for-like examples of Area Committees or equivalents from which to learn best practice.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 Whilst Facebook is free, easy to set-up and user-friendly to maintain in a personal capacity, the issue become less straight-forward when devising one from the perspective of a political entity such as the Inner East Area Committee.
- 3.2 Any site would need to be clearly defined, regularly updated and monitored to be truly effective. One key issue to be addressed would be allocating resources to do this once the page had been agreed to be set-up.
- 3.3 The Facebook page would also have to have clear guidelines as to when and how often it was being monitored. As a virtual shop-window for the Inner East Area Committee, a clear procedure for monitoring enquiries and complaints would have to be established.

- 3.4 Corporately, via customer strategy board, the council is looking to bring in supportive guidance around the response handling of social media, as the council has for other channels such as post, email and phone. This guidance will be based on the premise that responses to requests and queries made via social media are realistically expected to be covered in less than two hours in normal office hours.
- 3.5 In order to provide a resource to manage that expectation, and cover for staff absence and leave arrangements and actually produce meaningful and engaging content; it is likely that three members of staff will be required to be trained-up to cover the account and a rota set up.
- 3.6 Information shared on the site would have to be relevant, non-political and also subject to clearance procedures and embargos as would any other corporate communication. Again, the supportive guidance will seek to clarify this issue as instant publishing tools can sometimes lead to confusion and the premature release of sensitive or confidential information.
- 3.7 Understandably a key concern for Elected Members is online abuse. Given the broad remit of the Inner East Area Committee and the political nature of its make-up, interactions could take many forms, including abuse from anonymous sources. How the administrator(s) of the page should define and in turn address forms of on-line abuse is unclear above and beyond Facebook's own in-house reporting system.
- 3.8 A Best Practice Guide for Social Media is currently being drafted by council's Senior Communications Manager in conjunction with QA Ltd and is anticipated to be available in February 2014.
- 3.9 Corporate advice is to postpone the consideration of setting up a Facebook page until full guidance is available.

4.0 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 In drafting this report the author consulted with the council's Communications Manager for Press and Media Relations and the Senior Communications Manager for the council's Communications Team.
- 4.1.2 The current council guidance relating to the use of Social Media was considered during the drafting of this report.
- 4.1.3 This report is the first stage in the consultation with the Members of the Inner East Area Committee on the subject of setting up of a Facebook page.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 Any Facebook page for the Inner East Area Committee would be produced in English which could potentially alienate non-English speakers. Given the diverse make-up of the population of the Inner East area, this could prove to be a significant barrier to widespread engagement.

4.2.2 Access to IT continues to be a major obstacle to many people in the Inner East area, where computer ownership is statistically amongst the lowest in Leeds.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The priorities of the Inner East Area Committee are detailed in its Business Plan, Community Charter and the areas four Neighbourhood Improvement Plans. All of these documents directly link into the Council's 'Best City' priorities for Leeds, the City Priority Plan for 2011 – 2015 and the Vision for Leeds 2011 – 2030.

4.4 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.4.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

4.4.2 There is no exempt or confidential information.

4.4.3 In line with the Council's Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rules, agreed at Full Council May 2012, all decisions taken by Area Committees are not eligible for Call In.

4.5 Risk Management

4.5.1 Until it is known what resources are available to maintain and monitor the site, there would be a significant reputational risk to the Inner East Area Committee in establishing a Facebook page at the current time. This risk would primarily be a result of not meeting expectations around response times to any queries or questions raised by members of the public.

4.5.2 The diverse nature of the work of the Inner East Area Committee could give rise to a number of enquiries, both of a political and non-political nature. Given the lack of experience of staff in dealing with such issues in a social media setting, there is an associated risk until suitable training has taken place.

4.5.3 The content of the site would have to be of a corporate nature and work in tandem with established council clearance procedures. Until it is clear how these procedures will work in practice, there is the risk of the Facebook page inadvertently showcasing content that has not been cleared and/or crosses the political/corporate boundary.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 A Best Practice Guide for Social Media is currently being drafted by council's Senior Communications Manager in conjunction with QA Ltd and is anticipated to be available in February 2014.

5.2 Corporate advice is to postpone the consideration of setting up a Facebook page until full guidance is available.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 That members of the Inner East Area Committee note the contents of the report and make comment where appropriate.
- 6.2 That consideration for a Facebook page for the Inner East Area Committee be postponed until corporate guidance on social media has been finalised and circulated (anticipated February 2014).

7.0 Background documents

- 7.1 <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/council/Pages/Social-media.aspx> - Leeds City Council's current online guide to Social Media
- 7.2 Link to Facebook website: <https://www.facebook.com/>