

Social Media Usage Policy



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1 Introduction

- 1.2 Fire Fighters Charity recognises that social media is an intrinsic and valuable part of day-to-day life, and as such, many staff and volunteers have personal social media accounts.
- 1.3 Social media is essential to the success of communicating Fire Fighters Charity's work, as such there are official Fire Fighters Charity social media accounts.
- 1.4 It is important for staff and volunteers to interact with Fire Fighters Charity's online presence to help us engage with our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of Fire Fighters Charity's work; in practice this happens via Fire Fighters Charity's official social media channels and some staff and volunteers' personal social media accounts.
- 1.5 This policy sets out:
 - limitations to how social media can be used in relation to Fire Fighters Charity and its objectives, and
 - the acceptable parameters for use of social media by staff and volunteers (which include trustees, Company Members and Life Patrons) in both a professional and personal capacity.

It is designed to help staff and volunteers responsibly and positively support and expand our social media presence, while protecting the charity, its brand and reputation.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy outlines the acceptable parameters for use of social media by staff (including contractors and agency workers) and volunteers (including trustees, Company Members and Life Patrons), both in relation to the work of Fire Fighters Charity via Fire Fighters Charity's social media channels and in a personal capacity on personal social media accounts.
- 2.2 This policy applies to social media usage on both Fire Fighters Charity owned and personal or third-party equipment and devices.
- 2.3 This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, all other social networking sites (including any which may come into use in future) and all other internet postings, including blogs. Importantly, the scope of this policy includes use of MyFFC (My Fire Fighters Charity) – whether desktop or mobile app.
- 2.4 The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if issues relating to the fire service, suicide, politics and funding, the charity sector and Fire Fighters Charity's work are being discussed. While we encourage the use of social media, we require staff and volunteers to comply with the terms of this policy in their use of social media, whether in relation to Fire Fighters Charity and its objectives or otherwise.
- 2.5 Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.
- 2.6 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or for services, and we may amend it at any time.

3 Terminology

- **Social media** means web-based or digital technology, tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images, and video content), and network with each other virtually through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok and WhatsApp (and including any other similar platforms or tools which may come into use in future).
- **Channel** means a blog, micro-blog, wiki, social network, social bookmarking service, user rating service, instant messaging service and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, email or other existing or emerging communications platforms. A channel could also mean MyFFC.
- **Account** means a personalised presence on or inside a social media channel – whether or not the presence is personal to an individual or in a professional capacity relevant to their employment, professional body or other organisation.
- **RASCI** – A RASCI is a tool that is used to create a clear and visual understanding of roles and responsibilities in relation to a subject area. The acronym stands for Responsible, Accountable, Support, Consulted, and Informed and help categorise stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities in relation to a topic and related areas of work. Within the scope of this policy, the relevant RASCI is owned by the Director of Engagement, who has the right to delegate responsibility and to document this within the tool.
- **Staff**, within the scope of this policy, means anyone employed by the charity, including those on zero-rated contracts and in addition includes contractors, agency workers and Nursing and Physiotherapy students on a placement with the charity
- **Volunteer** means a person who formally gives their time, skills and experience to the charity and its work, either routinely or ad hoc and includes trustees, Company Members and Life Patrons

4 Acceptable use of Fire Fighters Charity’s social media channels by authorised Fire Fighters Charity staff and appropriate conduct

- 4.1 The Director of Engagement is accountable for setting up, managing, monitoring and mediating Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts in relation to both Fire Fighters Charity and user generated content. Only those authorised to access these channels by the Director of Engagement and in line with our RASCI is permitted to use or have access to these accounts.
- 4.2 Our Senior Marketing Executive and Social Media Coordinator check social media and addresses comments on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media channels Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. On evenings and weekends, we have a social media out- of-hours rota when necessary, covered by the whole of the Engagement team. Fire Fighters Charity’s social media channels are monitored directly on the platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and MyFFC) and through the social media scheduling tool Hootsuite and the social media monitoring tool, Meltwater.
- 4.3 Staff responsible for posting content on official Fire Fighters Charity social media accounts and channels should be an ambassador for our brand and reputation, ensuring they reflect Fire Fighters Charity’s positions and agreed perspective in what they post and using our tone of voice. Our brand guidelines set out our tone of voice that staff should refer to when posting content on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts.
- 4.4 All posts on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts should contain content that has a purpose and benefit for Fire Fighters Charity, and accurately reflects Fire Fighters Charity’s agreed position. If a staff member is in doubt about Fire Fighters Charity’s position on a particular issue, the Director of Engagement should be contacted for clarification in advance.
- 4.5 Responses made to posts or comments on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts should contain content that brings value to our audiences, answers their questions or helps and engages them.
- 4.6 Staff posting content to Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts should take care with presentation, ensuring there are no typos, misspellings, factual or grammatical errors and using only quality images.

- 4.7 Staff posting content to Fire Fighters Charity’s social media channels must never share confidential, sensitive or proprietary information about Fire Fighters Charity, its service users or clients, its staff or volunteers, its supporters or funders without prior written authorisation from the Director of Engagement. Even when such authorisation is given, staff must not post content about or which identifies service users or clients or volunteers or supporters without their express written permission.
- 4.8 If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify any individual over 18 years of age, staff and volunteers must ensure they have the written consent using our Image Permission Form of the individual before using them on social media.
- 4.9 If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff and volunteers must ensure they have the written consent (using our Image Permission Form) of each relevant parent or guardian before using them on social media.
- 4.10 In all instances, content on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts must comply with all applicable laws and regulatory requirements, including data protection legislation, and must not infringe any third-party intellectual property, privacy or other rights.
- 4.11 Staff and volunteers should not invite, authorise or encourage anyone to breach the law or infringe anyone else’s intellectual property, privacy or other rights to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights and permissions for content usage must be obtained before publishing material on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media channels, including, where relevant from a service user or the parent or guardian of a service user. Suitable credits should be given to media sources when relevant.
- 4.12 If staff or volunteers wish to share or retweet a third party post that includes a hyperlink/s e.g. to third party websites, they are responsible for ensuring the links are genuine and present no risk to Fire Fighters Charity audience members; our IT team can support with this.
- 4.13 Staff and volunteers should refrain from offering their personal opinions via Fire Fighters Charity's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing', 'reposting' or 'retweeting' or making use of emojis unless with the prior permission of the Director of Engagement.
- 4.14 Fire Fighters Charity is not a political or campaigning organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. The charity does not and would not hold or express a view on internal fire service operations, inspectorate or political matters or union activities. Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts should not contain political content.
- 4.15 Comments, messages and wall posts made on Fire Fighters Charity’s social media accounts by our communities are monitored by the Senior Marketing Executive and the Social Media Coordinator and other members of the engagement team when necessary. Fire Fighters Charity intends its social media accounts to be places of positive engagement and open discussion relevant to Fire Fighters Charity’s work. To this end, the Engagement team may moderate content, and may hide or delete comments that are considered unacceptable or inappropriate, including any that:
- are offensive or harmful
 - are abusive
 - are defamatory
 - contain inappropriate language or hate speech related to protected characteristics
 - reveal personal details of service users, clients, supporters, staff or volunteers, including addresses or phone numbers
 - contain advertising or are spam
 - are posted by known “trolls”
- 4.16 If a complaint is made on Fire Fighters Charity's social media accounts, staff and or volunteers should seek advice from the Director of Engagement before responding and they must ensure the timeliness of seeking such advice so as to ensure the appropriateness of our response and the management of risk. If the Director of Engagement is not available, then staff should speak to the Chief Executive. In all instances reference should be made to our Complaints Policy and related procedures.

- 4.17 Sometimes discussions on issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting promptly can be detrimental to the charity. The Engagement team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of Fire Fighters Charity so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, in accordance with our agreed approach to crisis communications the Engagement team will notify the Director of Engagement who will discuss with Senior Leadership Team colleagues immediately and agree a course of action, including outside of normal working hours. If any staff outside of the Engagement team, or volunteers, become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on Fire Fighters Charity's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Director of Engagement immediately.
- 4.18 At all times content on Fire Fighters Charity's social media accounts should be respectful and appropriate and treat others with kindness. Fire Fighters Charity's social media content must never include comments or imagery that include discriminatory or offensive language relating to any protected characteristics – including links to materials containing such comments or imagery.
- 4.19 In all relevant instances referred to above, if the Director of Engagement is for whatever reason indisposed, the Chief Executive should be contacted instead.

5 Acceptable social media use by staff and volunteers and appropriate conduct

- 5.1 There are currently no access restrictions to any social media sites using Fire Fighters Charity's IT infrastructure. However, when using the internet at work or during the course of carrying out the charity's business, it is important that staff and volunteers refer to the terms of their employment or other contract or the Fire Fighters Charity policies and procedures, whichever is most relevant.
- 5.2 Staff and volunteers are permitted to make reasonable and appropriate use of personal social media during their rest breaks. Usage should be limited, not interfere with their duties and comply with this policy.
- 5.3 We encourage staff and volunteers to share, like, repost and otherwise support tweets and posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, staff and volunteers might also see opportunities to comment on or support Fire Fighters Charity and the work we do. Where appropriate and in line with this policy, we encourage staff to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile.
- 5.4 There are instances where conflict may arise between personal use of social media and employment or volunteering at Fire Fighters Charity.
- 5.4.1 All staff and volunteers are expected to behave appropriately and in ways that are consistent with the terms of employment contracts their employment or other contract or the Fire Fighters Charity policies and procedures, whichever is most relevant, both online and in real life.
 - 5.4.2 In addition, those to whom it is relevant are expected to behave in ways that fall within the boundaries of professional standards set out by their professional body for example, the HCPC and/or NMC.
 - 5.4.3 In all cases staff and volunteers are expected to behave in line with our organisational values.
- 5.5 Staff and volunteers must not set up Facebook groups or pages, X (formerly Twitter) accounts or any other social media accounts on behalf of Fire Fighters Charity or which could appear to be on behalf of Fire Fighters Charity. By having official Fire Fighters Charity social media accounts in place, Fire Fighters Charity's Engagement team can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.
- 5.6 The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if issues relating to the fire service, politics and funding, suicide, the charity sector and Fire Fighters Charity's work are being discussed. Staff and volunteers should recognise that any comment, post or information they make public using their personal social media accounts could affect how Fire Fighters Charity is perceived. Staff and volunteers must make it clear in their content or otherwise clearly and proximately on their social media account when they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the charity.
- 5.7 Staff and volunteers must not post content to a personal social media account that purports to be on behalf of Fire Fighters Charity, or which appears to represent a position, policy or opinion held by Fire Fighters Charity except by express written agreement in advance with the Director of Engagement and in line with our most

relevant RASCI at the time (whichever requires written agreement by a more senior individual).

- 5.8 Staff and volunteers are forbidden to make or accept 'friend' or 'connection' requests using their personal accounts with anyone they reasonably know to be a service user of the charity, past or present, unless the individual is also an employee of the charity.
- 5.9 Staff and volunteers who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work at Fire Fighters Charity should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their Line Manager or the HR team and the Engagement team. Those in senior management and specialist roles in their field of expertise must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing Fire Fighters Charity's view.
- 5.10 Fire Fighters Charity holds relationships and/or works with several high-profile people and organisations, including the royal household, fire and rescue services, principal officers within those services, the Home Office, celebrities, journalists, politicians and major donors and funders.
- 5.10.1 Staff and volunteers must not approach high-profile stakeholders from their personal social media accounts to ask them to support the charity, as this could hinder any potential relationships that are being managed by the Engagement team and/or the Fundraising team and/or the Business Development team. This includes asking for retweets about the charity.
- 5.10.2 If a staff member or volunteer has any information about high profile people or organisations that have a connection to our cause, or if there is someone who they would like to ask to support the charity, they should speak to the Director of Engagement to share the details and to obtain agreement on next steps.
- 5.11 If a staff member or volunteer is contacted by the press on social media about Fire Fighters Charity or its work, they should talk to their Line Manager and the Director of Engagement immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.
- 5.12 While it can be helpful for some staff and volunteers to participate in social media using their personal accounts to engage with or grow our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of Fire Fighters Charity's work, staff and volunteers must bear in mind that Fire Fighters Charity is not a political or campaigning organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We recognise that staff and volunteers will have political views of their own and may engage in discussion online.
- 5.12.1 Staff should make it clear when posting on these topics using their social media accounts that their views are their own and *not* representative of Fire Fighters Charity and be clear in separating their personal political identity from Fire Fighters Charity. This would include refraining from tagging Fire Fighters Charity in such posts.
- 5.12.2 In the case of LinkedIn, where staff and volunteers are often clearly affiliated with Fire Fighters Charity, staff and volunteers are expected to hold Fire Fighters Charity's position of neutrality.
- 5.13 Staff and volunteers must never use Fire Fighters Charity's logo or trademarks, images or tagline in their personal social media content unless approved to do so in advance by the Director of Engagement.
- 5.14 Staff and volunteers must never share confidential, sensitive or proprietary information about Fire Fighters Charity, its service users or clients, its staff or volunteers, its supporters or funders on personal social media accounts, including WhatsApp, without prior written authorisation from the Director of Engagement.
- 5.15 Staff and volunteers must not share information or content about Fire Fighters Charity or Fire Fighters Charity's operations on their personal social media accounts except where that information or content has already been shared through official Fire Fighters Charity social media accounts.
- 5.16 Staff and volunteers must not post Fire Fighters Charity-related images, videos or other content, howsoever captured or obtained, on personal social media accounts, including WhatsApp groups, unless they have already been posted on official Fire Fighters Charity social media accounts or where the staff member or

volunteer has obtained the express written permission of their Line Manager *and* the Director of Engagement.

- 5.17 If any staff outside of the Engagement team or volunteers become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on Fire Fighters Charity's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Director of Engagement immediately.
- 5.18 If a staff member's duties permit or require them to speak or post on behalf of Fire Fighters Charity on a social media channel using their personal account, prior written approval must be sought and obtained for the content from the Director of Engagement and/or the Chief Executive.
- 5.19 As part of recruitment and selection processes, unless it is in relation to finding candidates (for example, if an individual has put their details on social media websites for the purpose of attracting prospective employers), the People team and/or recruiting managers should only conduct searches, either themselves or through a third party on social media in instances where these searches are directly and demonstrably relevant to the applicant's skills or claims which may have been made by a candidate in the recruitment and/or selection process. There should be no systematic or routine checking of prospective employees' online social media activities or presence, as conducting these searches during the selection process might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics - for example, sexual orientation or religious beliefs – may have played a part in a recruitment and/or selection decision. This requirement is in line with our Equal Opportunities Policy.

6 Unacceptable social media use by anyone

- 6.1 **Defamation:** Defamation involves making a statement or comment or publishing content (including on social media) that is false and adversely affects a person's reputation. Whether staff or volunteers are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they must not make or publish defamatory comments or content about individuals or other organisations or groups. Fire Fighters Charity reserves the right to take remedial action in line with applicable law and our policies and procedures.
- 6.2 **Copyright and other third-party rights:** It is imperative that all staff and volunteers abide by the laws governing copyright and other intellectual property and privacy rights when posting social media content. Staff and volunteers must never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without prior written permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright. Fire Fighters Charity reserves the right to undertake appropriate action in line with our policies and procedures if copyright and other applicable laws appear to have been infringed by a staff member or volunteer on social media.
- 6.3 **Discrimination and harassment:** Staff and volunteers should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Fire Fighters Charity social media channel or a personal social media account. This includes WhatsApp. For example:
- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, reassignment to gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
 - using social media to bully another individual
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content
- 6.4 **Unacceptable or inappropriate content:** Staff and volunteers must not post content on any social media that is or may be considered offensive, harmful or abusive to any person.

7 Disparagement

- 7.1 Fire Fighters Charity provides services to our communities without judgement. Staff and volunteers must not post sensitive information or disparaging or judgmental comments relating to service users or clients, or potential service users or clients or their families or loved ones, partner organisations or those who seek Fire Fighters Charity's care, support and advice on any social media account.
- 7.2 Staff and volunteers must not make or post any statement, comment or content on social media (whether on Fire Fighters Charity or personal social media accounts) that in Fire Fighters Charity's reasonable opinion will or may disparage, damage or bring into disrepute Fire Fighters Charity or its stakeholders or business partners, or their business operations or business interests, products or services, or any (potential) clients or service users. This includes disparaging statements, comments and/or content about Fire Fighters Charity, its

operations, its stakeholders, partners or anyone or anything else related to Fire Fighters Charity's interests. If a colleague has something they would like to flag or discuss, they should alert management directly.

8 Protection and intervention

- 8.1 The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the relevant social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the latest guidance available on the social networking site itself, for example, Meta (Facebook). However, if a staff member or volunteer considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to a member of the Senior Leadership Team immediately.

9 Responsibilities and breach of policy

- 9.1 Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy.
- 9.2 Inappropriate or improper use of social media carries serious professional and legal risk for Fire Fighters Charity. Participation in social media must be treated seriously and with respect.
- 9.3 Staff members who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from their Line Manager. For staff, breaches of this policy may incur disciplinary action; please refer to our Disciplinary policy and procedure.
- 9.3.1 The charity may require a staff member to remove or correct any content posted to their personal social media account which we consider to be in breach of this policy immediately, and any failure to do so may in itself lead to disciplinary action.
- 9.3.2 Where professional standards are relevant, the charity reserves the right to raise reportable breaches with the relevant professional body.
- 9.4 Volunteers who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the Director of People, Governance & Compliance. For volunteers, breaches of this policy may incur disciplinary action in line with Fire Fighters Charity policies and procedures, the Trustee Code of Conduct and/or the expectations set out in the Company Membership Information Guide and/or our governing documents.

10 Public interest disclosure

- 10.1 Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, if a staff member releases information through social media channels that is considered to be in the interest of the public, Fire Fighters Charity's Whistleblowing policy and procedure must be initiated before any further action is taken.

11 Monitoring of social media use

- 11.1 The charity reserves the right to monitor social media use by its staff and volunteers and to take remedial action in line with Fire Fighters Charity policies and procedures as appropriate.