



Mesh

0125 Social Media

ORDER NO. 01/25

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE SOCIAL MEDIA

1 STRATEGY

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) supports the innovative use of Social Media (SM) and recognises the role it can play in education, engagement and collaboration.

WMFS believes that its staff, Fire Authority members and volunteers should be empowered and involved in sharing and promoting the diverse and varied work carried out throughout the organisation in pursuit of its vision of "Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier".

2 RESPONSIBILITIES

WMFS operates a 'common sense' stance in regulating conduct on SM and treats electronic behaviour as it would non-electronic behaviour.

However, this framework sets out the basic principles and values which are expected of all WMFS staff, Fire Authority members and volunteers.

SM advice and training is available by contacting the Corporate Communications (Comms) team.

2.1 Platforms, Equipment and Security

SM is the term commonly given to websites, online tools and other Information Communication Technologies (ICT) which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. SM involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement.

SM encompasses many variations of online media, examples include:

- Blogs, micro-blogs (Twitter)

- Podcasts, 'wikis' (such as Wikipedia)
- Message boards, social book marking websites (Reddit)
- Social networking sites (Facebook)
- Video sharing sites (such as Vine and Snapchat)
- Media content sharing websites (such as Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram)

Whilst chatrooms may not be classed as SM the same principles are applicable when identifying yourself as an employee of WMFS.

The brigade uses corporate SM management software to plan, schedule, monitor, and analyse posts, trends and developments. All brigade accounts, both corporate and local, should be plugged in to the software upon their creation.

In rare circumstances, Comms may remove content that poses a risk to the brigade, an individual or the community. Similarly, for major or unusual incidents, such as those involving terrorism or staff deaths, Comms may centrally coordinate communications on local accounts.

All accounts should have a named individual that Comms can contact with queries or feedback, should the need arise. Should the individual change, Comms should be informed so that the centrally held record can be updated.

The organisation's facilitation of access to SM from any device, anywhere at any time requires staff awareness of ICT policies regarding usage, security and data protection which can be found in:

[INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE](#)

[INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECURITY](#)

3 ACCOUNTS

3.1 Corporate

FDS Officers and Fire Control are authorised to update official WMFS accounts on behalf of the Service.

Those with access to official corporate accounts should only use it in line with their duties at incidents. All other aspects of managing these accounts are the responsibility of Comms, e.g. 'following' accounts, liking Tweets, changing pictures or biographical details, out-of-hours content, etc.

Training exercises or events should not be added onto a corporate account unless pre-agreed with Comms to prevent any clashes with pre-scheduled content.

For covering incidents on SM out of hours, please contact Comms for advice.

Staff should not create or delete any WMFS SM sites (station/department-based or otherwise) without the approval of Comms. This is to ensure that appropriate levels of support and service can be provided and maintained.

Staff using WMFS SM accounts have a responsibility to provide useful and engaging content to followers regularly, which portrays WMFS in a professional manner and reflects our Organisational priorities, aims, objectives, and core values.

3.2 Personal

Any staff, Fire Authority members, volunteers or contractors with a personal SM account/s should presume that their followers may associate them with WMFS, regardless of whether or not they make the connection explicitly clear, e.g. in biographical details, messages or imagery.

The account holder should be aware that, by association, any inappropriate use of SM could compromise the organisation – e.g. its reputation, effectiveness or security - bring it into disrepute, cause distress or offence.

Disclaimers do not excuse inappropriate online behaviour.

3.3 Content

Whether on WMFS or personal accounts, staff must be mindful not to:

- Originate or share/repeat the content of other SM users which might be defamatory or otherwise inappropriate (e.g. which might compromise a police investigation or court case). This can apply to words, photos, graphics/imagery, video and sound. Repeating defamatory content is as potentially actionable as the original publication
- Incident victims should not be identified (directly or indirectly) without prior consent
- Criticise or argue with colleagues, stakeholders, partners or the wider public
- Post content which could be deemed discriminatory, unlawful, abusive, obscene or harmful. This includes sharing, repeating or posting links to such content

- liking, favouriting or following profiles or accounts that could be perceived to be posting inappropriate comments or material of the nature above which could bring the Service or the individual staff member into disrepute
- Discriminate, bully, harass or intimidate via SM
- Disclose or comment on any confidential or sensitive information, including financial or commercial, relating to WMFS, its partners or suppliers
- Post any information or content that is copyright protected, without the permission of the copyright owner
- Comment and/or speculate on the affairs of other organisations and partners
- Where staff have concerns by a post made by either Comms or a member of the public on a brigade platform, e.g. public comment on Facebook, they should contact Comms who will respond accordingly

The above list or examples of inappropriate SM use is non-exhaustive

4 CONDUCT AND MONITORING

Monitoring will only be undertaken by staff that have been authorised to do so (Corporate Communications) and who will be mindful of the need to be able to justify the use of monitoring, showing that the benefits outweigh any possible adverse impact, as well as the balance between employee responsibilities to their employer and the rights of individuals.

Comms staff will regularly evaluate WMFS SM accounts and produce reports, with an aim to developing SM presence and interaction with our wide-ranging audiences and diverse communities.

Inappropriate content or posts, whether in work or personal time, may give grounds for complaint to and/or disciplinary action by the employer, which could lead to action under civil and criminal law.

Breach of this Policy may be regarded as a disciplinary offence. Serious breaches may be regarded as gross misconduct. In the case of WMFS staff, the WMFS Code of Conduct and Core Values will apply:

CODE OF CONDUCT

In the case of Fire Authority members the appropriate 'Standards' procedure applicable to Fire Authority members applies:

[WMFRA Committee Management Information System \(CMIS\)](#)

If in any doubt, contact a member of the Comms team who will be able to give appropriate guidance.

Information for dealing with press and media organisations can be found in:

[MEDIA RELATIONS](#)

[5. KEY CONSULTEES](#)

Strategic Enabler – Response

Strategic Enabler – Strategic Hub

FBU / FOA / Unison

Strategic Enabler – PSS

[6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT](#)

The Initial Equality Impact Assessment did not raise any issues.

[7. RESPONSIBILITY AND REVIEW](#)

[7.1 Responsible SET Member](#)

Strategic Enabler for Corporate Communications