

MPS Ethical Social Media and Online Communication Principles 2020

Social media is defined as any websites or computer program that allows people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer, mobile phone or other electronic device. These MPS principles apply to the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Tumblr, WhatsApp, Telegram and all other social networking sites, dating sites, internet postings and blogs. They apply to the use of social media for policing purposes as well as personal use that may affect the MPS in any way.



Social media platforms present a unique opportunity to promote a positive image of the MPS as well as providing an efficient way of sharing information, knowledge and best practice when used appropriately. Social media platforms should be used to engage positively with communities and build public trust. Our collective efforts on social media platforms should seek to build confidence in the MPS and you should therefore not undermine our organisation or the Police Service in the content you post. You should have regard to these principles, the Standards of Professional Behaviour and the Code of Ethics whenever you are using social media in a personal or professional capacity.



Occasional personal use of social media during working hours is permitted so long as it does not involve unprofessional or inappropriate content, does not interfere with your duties and responsibilities or productivity and adheres to these principles.



You should apply the same professional standards to your online communication as you would to your face-to-face, telephone or e-mail communications, whether on or off duty. Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of our other policies or the Standards of Professional Behaviour. If a social media post would breach any of our policies and/ or the Standards of Professional Behaviour in another forum, it will also breach them in an online forum.



Content, comments or posts on social media must not:

- Undermine operational, investigative or criminal justice processes (e.g. be in contempt of court),
- Contain information, imagery or video which is protectively marked, could breach confidentiality or data protection laws,
- Breach copyright laws (e.g. using someone else's images without permission),
- Divulge sensitive operational and covert tactics (e.g. public order tactics being deployed or covert techniques),
- Provide details of an investigation or operation (particularly those involving covert tactics) without SIO approval,
- Make defamatory or libellous comments or make discriminatory or bullying comments,
- Provide references for other individuals on social or professional networking sites, as such references, positive and negative, can be attributed to the organisation and create legal liability for both the author and the organisation,
- Be capable of bringing the Police Service into disrepute, damaging the reputation of the organisation and/or undermining public confidence.

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Your online associations must be considered in the same way as those people you meet in person and must be declared accordingly. If an online association falls into one of the categories listed within the Declarable Associations Policy, you must declare those you know of to the MPS. The Declarable Association policy defines an association as more than merely passing or casual (e.g. followers on Twitter would not be deemed an association).



Personal electronic devices (i.e. devices not supplied by the MPS) including mobile phones, tablets and laptops, must not be used to send operational police information. Police information must not be stored on or transmitted to personal devices via any means.



The use of messaging services to send police information (i.e. information which is security classified under the Government Security Classification), which operate through a central server, typically those provided by social media platforms e.g. Facebook Messenger, Twitter DM, SnapChat must not be used. Only those platforms approved by the MPS may be used. In any case, information should only be shared with those who require and have the authority to view it.



You should remain aware that the content of your private or group chats on messaging services might not remain private. All individuals have a responsibility to moderate their group conversations or leave those groups where the communications are unacceptable. If you are the group administrator, take care in selecting the membership and review regularly. Careful consideration is required when including those within a group who are outside of the organisation. Social groups must be kept separate from any groups that share operational information. If you share operational information via social media platforms or online communication services, you must consider your disclosure responsibilities under Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act (CPIA) 1996.



Whilst it is ultimately your decision, for your own personal safety, it is recommended that you do not disclose your position as a MPS employee. Whatever you decide, you should avoid disclosing any personal details, which may identify your home address, or other sensitive details about yourself. If you do disclose your association with the MPS, you must consider whether it is appropriate to discuss your role within MPS. You must never reveal the security clearances [vetting levels] of either yourself or that of other police service personnel. You should also make it clear in social media postings, or in your personal profile, that you are speaking on your own behalf and always ensure that your profile and any content you post are consistent with your professional image as a police officer or member of police staff.



Inappropriate content or messages posted by MPS personnel on social media platforms or messaging services must be reported or dealt with as you would if the behaviour had occurred offline. The Code of Ethics places a positive obligation on you to do so.



If you are in doubt about the use of social media platforms or messaging service apps, you should seek advice from your line manager. You may also wish to consider seeking advice from the DMC or DPS Prevention and Learning team where necessary.