



Social Media (Prospective Adopters)

Policy and Procedure



‘Communication is important, so information should be accessible to everyone. People with sensory communication disabilities may need documents in easy read, large print, audio or Braille formats for example. Others may need face to face communication support through a; British Sign Language Interpreter, deafblind interpreter, lip speaker or note taker (as recommended by the NHS Accessible Information Standard). If someone speaks (or reads) a language that is not English, they will need to have the appropriate language-spoken language interpreter and / or text translator’.



1 Purpose

1.1 This policy is a guide for all Together4Children staff including their personal social media activities, and their social media activities on behalf of Together4Children in their day to day work

2 Underpinning Legislation and Guidance.

2.1 The following underpin this policy:

- [GDPR - General Principles](#)
- Regulatory of Investigatory Powers Act (2000) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/23/contents> together with the published codes of practice from the Home Office, Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO).
- HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/globalassets/resources/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics.pdf>
- HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-proficiency/social-workers-in-england/>
- HCPC Guidance on Social Media <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/guidance/guidance-on-social-media/>
- BASW Policy on Social Media <https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/basws-social-media-policy>

3 What can be considered Social Media?

3.1 Social media is the term used for internet-based tools used on a computer, on tablets/notepads, and on smart phones to help people keep in touch and enable them to interact. It allows people to share information, ideas and views. The following applies:

- Social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, Twitter, QZone and LinkedIn. These typically include having a 'profile page' usually in a personal capacity, but sometimes in a professional capacity too.
- Blogs - online journals or informational where a writer shares their views on an individual subject.
- Content sharing sites such as YouTube, Vimeo, Snapchat, Tumblr and Flickr.
- Product or service reviews on customer review sites e.g. Amazon.
- Taking part in online votes or polls.
- Taking part in conversations in private or public web forums/message boards

- Wikis - websites developed collaboratively by a community of users allowing any user to add or edit content e.g. Wikipedia, WikiHow.
- Podcasts – episodes or series of digital audio/video files which a user can download to listen to.
- Social bookmarking - a way for people to store, organise, search, and manage “bookmarks” of web pages.
- Any other internet-based tools/social media sites developed to enable people to share information, ideas and views.

4 Personal Social Media Use:

4.1 When using social media in a *personal* capacity all staff should ensure:

- Their online presence is professionally appropriate, and their online identity is safe.
- They maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries in their relationships with colleagues and those children, young people and families/carers that they work with.
- Personal communication and work communication are separate.
- That children, young people and family members/carers that they work with, are not accepted as ‘online friends’ in a personal network, or in any other way to create a personal relationship.
- They have appropriate security settings on any personal account.
- When using sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or when ‘blogging’ about a topic related to their work, that they consider the effects that their comments may have on the reputation of Together4Children or their managers/co-workers; and/or the impact their comments may have on the children, young people and family members/carers that they work with.
- They respect the privacy, feelings and confidentiality of others and as such, do not disclose details about work or people they work with online.

5. Personal Use of Social Media for Professional Purposes:

5.1 It is legitimate for staff to use social media platforms to contribute to online discourse regarding their work, or to network with other people. This has benefits in terms of getting news, finding resources, ideas for best practice and for networking with the wider professional communities in Early Help, Social Care, Child Care Law and Local/National Government.

5.2 When using social media in this way staff should ensure that they follow the principles outlined above.

6. Social Media Contact:

- 6.1 It is not appropriate to accept children/young people that we work with, or members of their families/carers, as 'online friends' in a personal network, or in any other way to create a personal relationship.
- 6.2 If someone, who is receiving a children's social care service, is 'trolling' a worker (i.e. being personally offensive, libellous or threatening on social media in any way), this must be reported to their line manager immediately. In the above situations, it is also advisable to report this to the police.
- 6.3 As an employer, Staffordshire County Council will update a risk assessment following such threats and will offer support to help a worker manage their personal social media/online safety.

7. Use of Social Media in Casework:

- 7.1 Use of social media in investigations refers to any instance where a worker accesses a social media account/profile of a person receiving children's social care services, to formally or informally gather evidence for any kind of investigation.
- 7.2 Further guidance on the use of social media to undertake such surveillance is available here: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/guidance/guidance-on-social-media/>
<https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/basws-social-media-policy>
- 7.3 If a social media account/profile is used on a one-off occasion to gather information or evidence, then no authorisation is considered necessary.
- 7.4 If a worker accesses a social media account/profile of a person receiving children's social care services, even if available to the public, on more than one occasion, they may be at risk of committing a criminal offence under the Regulatory Investigation Powers Act (RIPA) (2000). This action could also have implications for Together4Children.
- 7.5 Repeat or regular viewing of publicly available social media accounts, as opposed to one-off viewing, may constitute direct surveillance and will require authorisation under RIPA (2000). Without an RIPA authorisation, a person's social media account should not be regularly monitored, and information should not be viewed more than twice within a limited timeframe.
- 7.6 Social Workers completing social media checks on prospective adopters within Together4Children should gain consent via the Registration of interest Form. Once consent is gained the Social Worker can only access one social media account/profile, i.e. Facebook, Instagram or Twitter on a one-off occasion.
- 7.7 If a worker feels further viewing is necessary for an investigation, they should refer to the [RIPA codes of practice](#).

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- 7.8 Workers should not set up 'dummy accounts' to try and locate absent family members.
- 7.9 Should a worker breach the guidance within the policy, the affected Local Authority will investigate, report on and manage the incident in line with their local procedures, regulatory requirements, and responsibilities as a Data Controller.

