

Waltham Forest - Social Media Protocol

Purpose: The purpose of this protocol is to clarify what Waltham Forest considers to be the professional responsibilities of social workers and social work students, in relation to the increasing use of social media. Where this policy refers to risks associated with the use of social media such as health and safety of staff, or using social media to carry out surveillance other Council policies will also apply and must be adhered to.

LBWF recognises the opportunities and challenges social media presents for social workers in their practice and the possible risks both for social workers and service users, particularly young people or other vulnerable people. This policy may need to be updated as the dynamic nature of social media evolves.

LBWF encourages the positive uses of social media for networking, communication and developing inclusive practice. Social media can enhance communication and be used as a positive tool in social work. LBWF believes that good practice in social media is no different from that in any other form of communication. Social workers should ensure they maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries and take responsibility for recognising ethical dilemmas presented by the use of different types of social media.

The virtual world provides social workers with many real-life issues and there will be many professional dilemmas that arise for social workers, regardless of their area of practice. For example, it may be that a looked after child in your care is using social media to contact their birth family in defiance of a contact order, or that you find your picture, name and address has been posted on the internet by a hostile group or individual. Social workers may also never have used social media themselves, but may still find themselves confronted by practice dilemmas due to other people's use of social media. LBWF recognises that new technology changes power relations and places a responsibility on professionals to consider its implications for their practice, their services and for the interests of service users. Social workers need to be aware of and knowledgeable about technological developments and understand the impact, use and advantages as well as possible ethical concerns and risks in relation to themselves, the people they are working with and the local authority.

The growing use of social media means that social workers need to reflect on the changing nature of communication and how this impacts on practice issues at the heart of social work, particularly the collection and use of information about and by individuals and how to maintain the service users right to a relationship of mutual trust, privacy, and confidentiality.

LBWF's policy will be reviewed regularly and will contain useful links which will enable access to the latest advice, guidance and examples of practice.

Context: The evolution of social media has enabled social workers across the world to share knowledge and information, debate critical issues, provide support and connect with others who share interests. It helps social workers keep up-to-date with developments in policy, social work and related professions. This is contributing to the development of social workers professional identity as an international profession based on values of human rights and social justice.

Social workers are increasingly likely to participate in on-line communities of people, including service users, who have a common interest in policy and practice issues. Social media can help individuals and organisations to better understand, engage with and respond to people. It can contribute to making services more transparent and accountable. The use of social technology and social networking enables people to collaborate, build relationships and share information and resources.

Proactive engagement in social media can provide a facilitative platform for achieving social work's main objectives of greater equity and enhanced social justice and an opportunity for challenging power imbalances and exclusion imposed by structural hierarchies. It can reclaim power through creation of new spaces for dialogue and a more dynamic social interaction. In the same way that online tools and social media have changed how people run their social lives and enjoy entertainment, technology has the capacity to bring about a radical shift in care services and change how families care for people alongside work, family, community and social lives.

Social workers will need to be competent in using technology, for solving problems and using it creatively, for example, care packages can be coordinated between workers and family members using online 'apps', and reviewing and purchasing care or sharing records online. E-professionalism is a term that is starting to be used, which goes beyond online communication. It involves the ability to understand and use social media and also how to develop and manage the online persona of an individual based on the meaning of their online postings and interactions, including blogs, images, videos, tweets, and more.

While digital technology provides a wealth of opportunities, there are also online risks where gathering and collecting data which is private information could become intrusive surveillance. Social workers need to take these risks into account, along with risks that can lead to harm and abuse when using social media and when assessing risk and working with children, families and adults. Where there are safeguarding concerns over vulnerable children it is both lawful and best practice to review information, gather information and record information. Where however there is a need for repeated targeted use of online activity it is important that the Council has oversight of this and staff should therefore consult their managers/seek legal advice regarding whether the proposed actions/actions being taken amount to directed surveillance that requires either a Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) or non- RIPA authorisation under the Councils RIPA policy.

Social media is being used in safeguarding investigations and social workers need to consider the ethical implications of obtaining information through these channels. Social media and future technological developments should be acknowledged and considered when planning future practice and legislation to protect and empower children.

Whilst it is the responsibility of an individual to set privacy settings to protect any unwanted access to their private information, it would not be right to regard this as being “open source” or simply being made public and available. The person whose information it is has a reasonable expectation of privacy so interference with that privacy could be unlawful. Repeat viewing of “open source” sites by social workers may constitute what is called ‘directed surveillance’ and if done covertly (i.e. without the knowledge of that person) then this would be ‘covert surveillance’. The issue for the Council is ensuring that any covert surveillance is properly authorised, recorded and, most importantly, legally justifiable. The Council has a framework for this type of use of covert surveillance which is similar to the statutory framework established by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act which is called obtaining a non-RIPA authorisation. This ensures proper oversight and scrutiny of this type of surveillance and protects all parties concerned.

While young people’s ‘offline’ and ‘online’ worlds are often merging, the behaviours and safeguards of the ‘real’ world are not always applied in a ‘virtual’ world where friends can be added at the click of button and information shared in an instant.

EU Kids Online is a research project which surveyed 25,000 children and their parents across Europe to understand the true online risks and opportunities. It defines the risks young people might be exposed to online under three key headings: content, conduct, contact and sometimes a fourth commerce.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) has issued “Advice on child internet safety” and The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has led on producing the advice and guidelines together with the Department for Education. An independent parliamentary inquiry found strong support for an Opt-In filter for adult material on the internet, which would offer the best protection for children online.

Social media and social networking sites (SNS) are now part of modern life and as such social workers need to understand how they work and manage potential risks to their personal security, their own families and those who they work with. Social media is a public domain and social workers should be aware that while on-line they are still representing the profession and the agency and should be aware of how they could be viewed by society/service users/ colleagues/other agencies/the media/ governing bodies.

Definition:

The terms “social media” and “social networking” are often used interchangeably to refer to web-based tools and technologies that support online communication and information sharing. Social media is, in effect, a publishing and broadcasting medium and includes:

- ✓ **Blogs – writing a blog or commenting on people’s blogs**
- ✓ **Micro-blogs such as Twitter**
- ✓ **Social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Ning, and having a personal profile page on one of the social or business networking sites**
- ✓ **Content-sharing services, such as Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo**
- ✓ **Product or service reviews on retailer sites, or customer review sites**
- ✓ **Taking part in online votes and polls**
- ✓ **Taking part in conversations on public and private web forums (message boards)**
- ✓ **Wikis are websites developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add and edit content**
- ✓ **Podcasts**
- ✓ **Social bookmarking, such as Delicious**
- ✓ **Location based services (e.g. Foursquare)**

Policy: LBWF encourages the positive uses of social media, to which social workers should apply the values and principles of the Code of Ethics particularly developing professional relationships, upholding the values and reputation of the profession, maintaining professional boundaries, sharing information appropriately, maintaining confidentiality, managing and assessing risk and challenging discrimination. LBWF recognises the opportunities and challenges social media presents for social workers in their practice and the possible risks both for social workers and service users, particularly young people or other vulnerable people.

1 Social workers should understand the potential benefits and disadvantages of social media for their practice and for service users.

2 Social workers should ensure that their online presence is professionally appropriate.

3 Social workers should use social media as a positive platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge and to promote the social work profession, being aware that they are acting as ambassadors for social work when they are on-line.

4 Social workers should apply the same principles, expectations and standards for interacting and communicating with people online as in other areas of practice.

5 Social workers should maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries in their relationships with service users and colleagues, recognising that not to do so could be detrimental to themselves, their careers, service users, other individuals and employers.

6 Social workers and students should ensure that personal communication and work communication are separate. For example, it is not appropriate to “accept” service users and their carers as online ‘friends’ in a personal network, as it creates a personal relationship outside of the workplace. It could also be used as evidence in conduct hearings. For students, the same issues about boundaries and confidentiality are relevant and the same precautions should be taken with regard to placements. Discretion should be used in relation to using university networks to ensure there is a distinction between personal and professional communication.

7 Social workers should be responsible for understanding how to use social media, checking personal security settings and the implications of social media being a public and permanent record. Good “e-professionalism” requires the use of private channels (for example, email, phone) for any interaction or information that can have privacy implications.

8 Social workers need to be vigilant to keep their own identity safe and that of friends and families. Social workers need to consider the implication and risks of putting personal information on sites such as work, contact details and photos of work colleagues and family members and should not do so if they think their privacy and safety will be compromised. They may want to ask family and friends to bear this in mind when posting information, as for example inappropriate pictures could open them up to criticism or pictures of their family online could create difficulties.

9 Social workers should share information appropriately and be responsible for what is posted, using their professional judgment. When tweeting or blogging about a topic related to the profession or work, social workers should consider the effect of their comments on their reputation and that of their employer. Social workers should also think carefully about how their postings could affect service users and their own careers and not bring the profession into disrepute. It may be useful to consider adding a disclaimer that the views expressed are not necessarily the views of the employer and interact in such a way that what you say and do could stand public scrutiny.

10 Social workers should take into account when assessing and managing risk, and when they have a duty of care or are acting in “loco parentis”, whether children and vulnerable people are at risk through their use of social media and manage this responsibly and appropriately, whilst recognising that social networking is part of modern life. For example, working with families and carers to protect service users from posting and viewing inappropriate or pornographic material or having harmful contacts which may put them at risk or subject them to bullying or abuse.

11 Social workers, in their practice, should support service users of all ages to use social networking with awareness of its potential and risks.

12 Social workers have a duty to act in the best interests of service users and consider people’s right to respect, privacy and confidentiality whilst also managing and assessing risk within a legal framework. Social workers have a responsibility to consider the use of social media as part of safeguarding investigations but need to be mindful of the ethical and legal implications. It is important to work with those professionals who are best placed to

undertake the task of scrutinising social media and to ensure it is in the service user's best interest.

13 Social workers should discuss and reflect on particular dilemmas related to the use of social media in specific situations as part of professional supervision. Decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis and take into account the best interests of those concerned.

14 Social workers should make use of the potential for continuing professional development through social media, for example by accessing learning materials, through online discussions and information sharing. Within the current fast-evolving socio-economic and policy contexts, it is important that social workers keep abreast of relevant developments in social work and related professions. Social media can facilitate this process and raise practitioners' awareness. For instance; the BASW provides a knowledge hub through which social workers can access a variety of learning opportunities and updates on social media.

15 Social workers need to be aware of the benefits and pitfalls of using social media for learning and ensure that time allocated to involvement in social media and web searches is managed and appropriate whilst at work. For example; social workers need to be aware that social media is not peer reviewed so some information may be misleading or inaccurate.

16 Social workers should be competent in social media to enable them to navigate this fast-changing arena. Learning about social media should be an on-going process with sufficient time and training to become e-professionals and use it effectively in their everyday practice. Social media training and engagement should be a core component of the social work curriculum and continuing professional development to enable people to become "e-Professionals".

The use of social media & information governance procedures

Social media (for example: WhatsApp) can only be used by social care staff for 'keep in touch' conversations and not assessment style conversations. Current information governance procedures stipulate that any messages or modes of communication exercised through social media platforms, and other similar mediums; should be subject to a 'screen shot' and be stored in Mosaic under the relevant case file.

Waltham Forest staff are **not** permitted to use their personal social media accounts for work or work-related purposes. In instances whereby the use of social media accounts are deemed appropriate and necessary for such purposes, this protocol stipulates that dedicated social media accounts must be established in this regard.

General guidelines –

- Remember you are responsible for the data on your electronic communication device
- DO NOT behave in a way that could suggest that you are trying to develop a personal relationship with a child or vulnerable adult
- DO NOT post any content that could be deemed defamatory, obscene or libellous
- DO NOT post comments that exhibit or appear to endorse grossly irresponsible behaviour or law breaking of any kind

? Appropriate

1. Set your privacy settings for any social networking site.
2. Ensure any technological equipment, (including your mobile phone) is password/ PIN protected.
3. Consider having professional online accounts/ identities if you wish to have online contact with service users, their families and other professionals.
4. Make sure that all publicly available information about you is accurate and appropriate
5. Remember online conversations may be referred to as 'chat' but they are written documents and should always be treated as such.
6. Make sure that you know the consequences of misuse of digital equipment.
7. If you are unsure who can view online material, assume it is public. Remember - once information is online you have relinquished control.
8. Switch off Bluetooth
9. When you receive any new equipment (personal or private) make sure that you know what features it has as standard and take appropriate action to disable/

✗ Inappropriate

1. Give your personal information to service users -children/ young people, their parents/ carers. This includes mobile phone numbers, social networking accounts, personal website/ blog URLs, online image storage sites, passwords etc.
2. Use your personal mobile phone to communicate with service users. This includes phone calls, texts, emails, social networking sites, etc.
3. Use the internet or web-based communication to send personal messages to children/young people
4. Share your personal details with service users on a social network site
5. Add/allow a service user to join your contacts/friends list on personal social networking profiles.
6. Use your own digital camera/ video for work. This includes integral cameras on mobile phones.
7. Play online games with service users.
8. Obtaining personal information covertly, i.e. in a way that is calculated to ensure that the person subject is unaware that this is or may be taking place unless this has been properly authorised under the Council's RIPA procedures.
9. Creating a false identity for the purposes of covert surveillance unless authorised under the Council's RIPA procedures which requires Court authorisation.

Social Networking

Facebook and Twitter are the most well known packages but other packages include BEBO (Blog Early, Blog Often), MySpace, Yahoo, LinkedIn and MSN. These are not exhaustive. Remember: **Host privacy settings often change – keep track of yours.**

Don't use your personal social network profile to communicate with or share images or take images of children/ young people and their parents/ carers

Either using your personal or organisational equipment

Don't accept children and young people/ parents and carers as friends on your personal page.



Consider creating a professional profile in agreement with your manager/ organisation.

Young people may have several profiles themselves (personal and one for parents to see) so will appreciate this approach.

Make sure that you don't have links to your personal profile (this defeats the object!)



Make sure your security settings are not open access - set to family and friends only

Don't accept people you don't know as friends – they could be service users. Go for quality not quantity.

Be aware that belonging to a 'group' can be a 'back door' into your profile.

May affect your relationship with service users in addition to affecting your professional status through professional body concerns about bringing the profession into disrepute.

Breach of AUP may make you vulnerable to harassment, bullying or allegations. Disciplinary/ capability processes may be instigated.



You have an open access profile that includes inappropriate personal information and images e.g. holiday snaps, hen nights

You accept service users as friends on your personal profile once work is completed. Other service users may gain access to your profile.

You collect 'friends' including people you don't know in real life.

You use your personal profile to communicate with service users without your manager's knowledge or permission.



What should be in place?

- The AUP should explicitly state that children/ young people and their parents/ carers should not be accepted as friends and include sanctions for the breach of this policy.
- The AUP for the organisation should include guidelines for creating/ monitoring a separate professional profile if this is considered an appropriate way of working.
- The AUP is part of the induction process and includes advice about the need for a professional online presence

Note regarding poor practice: Using social media in contravention of this policy may be in breach of the Council's employee Code of Conduct and information governance procedures and be liable to disciplinary action.