



Social Media and Internet Messaging Policy and Guidance

POLICY STATEMENT.

This policy and guidance has been implemented to provide structure and clarity in the use of social media and internet messaging forums by officers, staff and volunteers of Wiltshire Police.

Social media and internet messaging services are constantly evolving. For the purposes of this policy Social Media and internet messaging refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and on networks and internet messaging services. This includes, but is not limited to; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Periscope, LinkedIn, blogs, WhatsApp, Signal, Line, and any other existing social media platform. It will also apply to any new social media internet messaging services that may be developed.

Reference to social media and social networking in this policy should be taken to include internet messaging services and any internet based communication channels.

Wiltshire Police Social Media Accounts:

Effective communication can have a significant impact on the achievement of operational or corporate objectives, in particular community engagement. It has a direct impact on our reputation as a Force and our relationships with staff, stakeholders, customers and the public.

Before using a Wiltshire Police social media account for communication purposes, the employee should ensure that it is the most appropriate channel for the message or dialogue. If in doubt, please contact the Strategic Communications and Engagement Department (SCE).

Using social media is a very positive tool, however, it can potentially create a number of risks to both the users and the wider reputation of the organisation. For this reason, only Wiltshire Police authorised social media accounts set up by the SCE will be used for the sharing and communication of Wiltshire Police Information. A list of the current approved

social media platforms can be obtained from the SCE. Personal social media accounts **MUST NOT** be used for the sharing or communication of Wiltshire Police Information.

Preserving the confidentiality of personal and operational information is critical to all online engagement. Breaching security or disclosing official, personal or operational information without authorisation is considered a serious disciplinary offence and may be a breach of the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) and/or [Official Secrets Act 1989](#).

Wiltshire Police has imposed the following rules and responsibilities for anyone using a Wiltshire Police social media account:

- All new accounts must be authorised by the Strategic Communications and Engagement Department and set up in line with guidelines
- The Strategic Communications and Engagement Department reserves the right to deny an application for a Wiltshire Police social media account or access to an existing one and carries the final decision over whether an application is accepted
- Force Facebook pages must be administered only through a dedicated account set up for this purpose and not by officer's or staff members personal Facebook accounts
- Accounts set up specifically to administer a Wiltshire Police Facebook page must not be used for any other reason.
- Wiltshire Police Facebook users must only post on the Facebook page they are an editor for and must not accept or make friend requests to other Facebook users.
- Wiltshire Police Facebook accounts are limited to:
 - the main Wiltshire Police account
 - the main Wiltshire Police Facebook account
 - one Facebook page per policing team geographical area, administered by local officers
 - one per department with a community engagement focus (considered on a case by case basis)
- Wiltshire Police Twitter accounts are limited to:
 - the main Wiltshire Police account
 - one account per policing team geographical area (i.e. CPT or equivalent)
 - one account per department with a community engagement focus (considered on a case by case basis)
 - Inspectors, Senior Command Team and Hub superintendents
 - other requests will be considered on a case by case basis
- Wiltshire Police Instagram accounts are limited to:
 - the main Wiltshire Police Instagram account
 - Youth Engagement Instagram account
- All Wiltshire Police social media accounts for policing team areas must be named in the format of '*area name*' *Policing Team* e.g. Calne Neighbourhood Team, North Swindon Response Team
- Any Wiltshire Police account left unused for a month or more is subject to review and could be automatically shut down by the Force for inactivity

- Anyone reporting a crime via a Wiltshire Police social media account should be strongly advised:
 - that reports of crime cannot be taken over social media
 - to call 101 in a non-emergency or 999 in an emergency
 - Wiltshire Police social media channels are not monitored 24/7
 - Wiltshire Police have no control over the security and confidentiality of messages sent through Facebook Messenger

This information **must** also be included as standard in 'About Us' or 'bio' sections of individual social media accounts or pages and must not be changed or deleted

- Facebook's 'Call to action' will direct people to sign up for Wiltshire and Swindon Community Messaging (www.wiltsmessaging.co.uk). This must not be changed without consulting the Corporate Communications and Engagement Department
- The use of Wiltshire Police social media accounts must be for work purposes only, including all forms of interaction via that medium, and in line with the Strategic Communications and Engagement Department [Social Media Guidance](#). Additional advice on what can or cannot be communicated or shared can be found in the [CPT Social Media Guide](#)
- It may be necessary on some occasions to send photos and videos to Strategic Communications and Engagement for branding and compression before they are able to be posted online. Please contact SCE for further information on the use of photos and videos
- Any photos posted by a Wiltshire Police employee or volunteer to a Wiltshire Police social media account can be reused by Wiltshire Police without your consent. For example shared on another Wiltshire Police social media account, or used in Internal Communications etc.
- All Wiltshire Police accounts are regularly monitored and each carries an audit trail for all activity
- Any officer, staff member or volunteer using social media for covert or intelligence-led policing purposes must refer to the Wiltshire Police guidance on 'Covert Use of Social Media' and consider seeking the guidance of the Covert Authorities Bureau. See also: [Open Source and Internet Based Research and Investigation Policy and Procedure](#)
- All policing intelligence gathered by any officer, staff or volunteer must be officially submitted and recorded through the Niche Record Management System. If you require assistance in doing so, please seek guidance from the Wiltshire Police Intelligence Unit
- Behaviour through the medium of social media will be treated in exactly the same way as any other behaviour and assessed with reference to the Police Standards of Professional Behaviour, the Code of Ethics and the Competency and Values Framework. Any breaches of these standards or code will be investigated and appropriate disciplinary sanctions will be issued to individuals. This may include:
 - Any use of racist, sexist, homophobic, sexually explicit, abusive or otherwise objectionable language.
 - Any posting considered likely to incite violence, attack or offend others, contain swear words or other language likely to offend, break the law or condone unlawful

activity, describe or encourage activities which could endanger the safety or well-being of others, or be seen to impersonate someone else.

- Any other behaviour which has the potential to damage the reputation of Wiltshire Police
 - Wiltshire Police reserve the right to permanently remove any user of their social media sites if deemed appropriate and reasoned to either protect the Force's reputation, the fellow users of the sites or the person(s) posting
- If a member of the public needs to be blocked from a Wiltshire Police social media account, the Strategic Communications and Engagement Department should be consulted and informed. For further information see [Blocking Someone from Force Social Media Guidance](#)

All content posted on social media sites is considered to be in the public domain. Terms and conditions on sites usually include the waiving of any copyright. It is the responsibility of the employee, who is posting, to ensure that the content is appropriate and, as far as possible, does not contain a breach of copyright. Best advice is: if in doubt do not post the content. Any concerns regarding copyright should be raised with the Strategic Communications and Engagement Department.

No material classified above 'Official' under the [Government Security Classification](#) should be posted on **any** social networking site (business or personal). Attention must be paid to any 'handling requirements' attached to any document classed as 'Official' or 'Official-Sensitive'.

Once a message, image or video has been published to social media anyone can re-use it or share it, including the press, *even if deleted afterwards from your timeline, or sent in a 'private' capacity (i.e. through direct messaging, or equivalent)*. Always consider this when sharing content online.

Officers and staff are not permitted to post any social media content which shows their desk space, computer screens or whiteboards etc.

Any officer, member of staff or volunteer found to be in breach of the above could be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

To request permission to use a Wiltshire Police social media account, please contact the Strategic Communications and Engagement Department by emailing ecomms@wiltshire.police.uk.

Posting Political Opinions on Social Media Channels:

Police officers must abide by paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 of [The Police Regulations 2003](#) which limits their involvement in politics. Officers should not, either on a work or personal social media account, talk about political matters or share political views. This includes retweeting, sharing or liking messages of a political nature as this could be considered as endorsing an originator's views.

The majority of police staff are not subject to any restrictions in law in participating in politics unless they are in a politically restricted post (see [Politically Restricted Posts Policy](#)).

However, all police staff are still expected to uphold their own similar standards of professional behaviour (set in Police Staff Council Joint Circular 54 and incorporated into the [College of Policing Code of Ethics](#)).

These standards state that public confidence in the police depends on police staff demonstrating the highest level of personal professional standards of behaviour, and that staff should behave in a manner, whether on or off duty, which does not bring discredit on the police service or undermine public confidence in policing.

It is commonly understood within social media that sharing, retweeting or liking of messages is often considered as an endorsement of an originators views, even if you do so out of satire or in irony. To help you stay safe, this policy recommends that you always consider what you share, retweet or like.

This neutrality requirement applies to all members of staff during any Purdah period (the time between the announcement of an election or referendum and the final results).

Personal Use of Social Media:

Wiltshire Police recognises an individual's right to a private life and understands that social networking sites are a way for people to maintain contact with friends and family. Personal social media accounts must not be accessed via a Force issued mobile device.

How much information you share about yourself is very much a personal decision but working for Wiltshire Police brings with it responsibility. All officers and staff are accountable for any information placed in the public domain, even if it is on a privately held account.

As an employee of Wiltshire Police you are expected to conduct yourself appropriately both on and off duty, and should always consider the consequences of sharing information with others. You have a duty to ensure that inappropriate use of information through any personal social media sites and internet messaging services does not jeopardise:

- The safety of any officers and staff
- The organisation's reputation or public confidence
- The confidentiality of any assets retained by the organisation

All officers and staff are required to ensure that they:

- **DO NOT** use their Wiltshire Police email address or telephone number(s) to register for any personal or private accounts
- **DO NOT** use any personal social media accounts to promote or detail policing work, provide details of an investigation or operation or to divulge sensitive operational or covert tactics
- **DO NOT** use any messaging services for example Facebook Messenger, Twitter DM, Snapchat, TikTok etc. to send police information classified under the [Government Security Classification](#)
- **DO NOT** share police information with those who do not require or have the authority to view it

- **DO NOT** conduct themselves on any social media platform in a way that is detrimental to Wiltshire Police
- **DO NOT** participate in any interaction which would damage working relationships between officers, staff, partners agencies, members of the public, or other stakeholders
- **DO NOT** make offensive comments about the service provided by Wiltshire Police including officers, staff, partners agencies, members of the public, or other stakeholders
- **DO NOT** make offensive comments of a discriminatory nature about anyone
- **DO NOT** make insulting, abusive and bullying comments on public social media accounts or on closed team chat groups (e.g. WhatsApp)
- **DO NOT** share official information about Wiltshire Police, its officers, staff, partners agencies, members of the public, or other stakeholders
- **DO NOT** discuss private information about others that they have learned through their work
- **DO NOT** discuss operational or otherwise sensitive matters on privately held social media sites or internet messaging services
- **DO NOT** share their security clearance level on any social networking site
- **DO NOT** use personal social media accounts to carry out searches on persons of interest; including suspects, victims, witnesses or missing people
- **DO NOT** post or publish any written or pictorial material obtained or gathered during the course of their duty or work
- **DO NOT** display any photograph or image of themselves in Wiltshire Police uniform in circumstances likely to undermine the reputation of Wiltshire Police
- **DO NOT** post any pictures that show work desk space, computer screens or whiteboards etc.
- **DO NOT** post sexually inappropriate photographs on dating sites (including pictures of officers in uniform)
- **DO NOT** join any group or organisation likely to undermine the integrity or impartiality of the officer or staff member
- **DO NOT** post or share any material, or links to any material that is intentionally offensive or illegal
- **DO NOT** breach copyright laws for example using someone else's images without permission

The public expects all members of the police service to act as role models and it is clear that, although we all have a right to a private life, we also have a responsibility to act appropriately to protect our own integrity and that of Wiltshire Police and the police service as a whole.

Any officer, member of staff or volunteer found to be in breach of the above could be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Whilst there is no intention to restrict any reasonable exercise of your rights and freedoms, it is expected that you will conduct yourself in such a way as to avoid bringing Wiltshire Police into disrepute or compromising its effectiveness or the security of its operations or assets.

Given the current climate with regards to terrorism and threat levels, careful consideration **MUST** be given before disclosing any private information that may compromise your safety or that of your family, friends, associates or employer.

It is advised that you consider the following guidance on ways to protect your job or role, identity and reputation:

1. Whilst it is ultimately your decision, for your own personal safety, it is suggested that you do not disclose your position as a Wiltshire Police employee or officer. Whatever you decide, you should avoid disclosing any personal details which may be used for identity theft, or to identify your home address, or other sensitive details about yourself or your family.

Certain social media sites, including Facebook and LinkedIn, allow users to formally identify themselves as employees of an organisation. Users should carefully consider the risks associated with doing this.

2. Do ensure that you make use of the privacy settings available on social networking sites. However, you must be aware that social networking websites are a public forum and should not assume that entries on any website will remain private.
3. If you do disclose your association with Wiltshire Police, you must consider whether it is appropriate to discuss your role within Wiltshire Police. **Never** reveal the security clearances [vetting levels] of either yourself or that of other police service personnel.
4. Regularly review the content of both your work and personal on-line profiles.
5. You may accept payment or other inducement for your own material produced away from your Wiltshire Police employment, provided that this has been officially registered and approved as a business interest and the material does not in any way relate to policing. Failure to register and obtain approval for a business interest may result in formal disciplinary action being taken. For more information on business interests refer to the [Business Interest SharePoint](#) site and the [Business Interests and Additional Occupations Policy](#).
6. You should also bear in mind that publicly visible personal social media accounts may be monitored by members of the community where you work, media, defence legal representatives, terrorist and organised crime groups. Criminals and others may seek to use the internet and social media to identify personal information about Police officers and Police staff with a view to embarrassing, discrediting, harassing, corrupting or blackmailing them or their families.
7. Be extra vigilant, when liking or sharing posts etc., that you have a clear understanding of who has raised the post and it is appropriate for you to offer an opinion.

Further advice can be found in **Section 8 - Keeping your private life private** [page 7] of the [ACPO Guidelines on Safe use of the Internet & Social Media](#).

POLICY AIM.

The aims of this Policy and guidance are as follows:

1. To provide officers, staff and volunteers with clear regulations in relation to the application for, setting up and use of any Wiltshire Police social media account.
2. To clarify the responsibilities of all officers, staff and volunteers when using Wiltshire Police and/or personal social media sites.
3. To allow specific members of Wiltshire Police the opportunity to set-up and manage a Wiltshire Police social media account
4. To incorporate and maintain the College of Policing Competency and Values Framework for Policing when using social media.
5. To ensure all Wiltshire Police social media use is primarily utilised to prevent crime and protect the public in line with our Force 'Purpose and Mission'.
6. To provide a framework for all officers, staff and volunteers when using Wiltshire Police and/or personal social media accounts.
7. To provide guidance and advice empowering officers and staff to keep themselves and their families safe when using personal social media sites.

APPLICABILITY.

This policy and guidance is applicable to Police officers and staff including Special Constables, PCSOs, agency staff, temporary staff, volunteers and contractors who are either using or planning to use a Wiltshire Police and/or personal social media account.

RELATED DOCUMENTS and Authorised Professional Practice.

[Acceptable Use Policy](#)

[Government Security Classification Policy](#)

[Cyber Security Policy](#)

[Media Policy \(APP on Media Relations\)](#)

[Open Source and Internet based Research and Investigation Policy](#)

[ACPO Guidelines on Safe use of the Internet & Social Media](#)

[College of Policing Competency and Values Framework](#)

The College of Policing authorised professional practice carries information on the use of social media under the section entitled: '[Engagement and Communication](#)'.

DATA PROTECTION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION.

Any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual recorded as a consequence of this policy will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and the [Data Protection Policy](#).

All information contained in the Wiltshire Police Social Media Policy is available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY IMPACT.

This policy has been drafted to comply with the principles of the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010. Members of Wiltshire Police administering this policy are responsible for ensuring that in its application, those to whom the policy applies, shall not receive less favourable treatment because of their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

This policy has been subject to an equality impact assessment. A copy of the impact assessment can be obtained by contacting the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team.

^ **Revision History**

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
5.0	23.04.2025	Scheduled Review: Department names changed to reflect current Force structure. Restriction on posting any social media content which shows officers/staff desk space, computer screens or whiteboards added. Posting Political Opinions on Social Media Channels section updated to reference Police Regulations and Politically Restricted Posts Policy.
5.0	24.05.2025	Policy Statement: Reference to Signal and any other social media platform added.