LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Social media policy for London Fire Brigade

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1 Introduction

1.1 This policy applies to all London Fire Brigade staff, volunteers and contractors who use social media. It covers how to use social media appropriately and successfully. This policy also applies to all London Fire Brigade official accounts. If you have any questions about this policy please email digital@london-fire.gov.uk.

2 Background

2.1 We know that many of our staff, volunteers and contractors are involved in social media in some form and have their own accounts, whether you use them for work or personal reasons.

2.2 Social media offers many benefits, including learning and growing relationships with the public that we are here to serve and communicate with. It can help the public, the media and politicians understand London Fire Brigade's day to day work, how we provide value for the public funding we receive and how we all make a difference to public safety. Even if you only use social media outside of work in a personal capacity, what you say online can be taken as a representation of London Fire Brigade's brand. This policy will help you use social media more effectively and navigate potential pitfalls.

3 How we define social media

3.1 This policy covers all social media including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, X, TikTok, and Bluesky, all instant messaging apps including Reddit, WhatsApp, blogs, and community apps like NextDoor. It also includes dating apps such as Bumble, Grindr, and Tinder.

4 Who this policy applies to

4.1 This policy affects everyone, operational and non-operational, working at London Fire Brigade. This includes all staff, volunteers and contractors, regardless of seniority.

5 When does it apply?

5.1 It's important to bear in mind that everything you say online is in the public domain, including through instant messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Even if you have the highest privacy settings, screenshots can be made of posts and shared with people who you might not want to see it.

5.2 This policy covers social media for both professional and personal use, whether in or outside of working hours, whether you access the platforms on London Fire Brigade's devices or your own.

5.3 No matter when, where or how you use social media, people, including the media, may interpret what they see about you online as a reflection of you and your job, even if you are not posting about work.

The London Fire Brigade checklist for using social media which all staff, contractors and volunteers should follow:

- **Don't use LFB, London Fire Brigade or London Fire Commissioner in your profile name.** Only official accounts are permitted to use this wording. It is fine to refer to your employer in your profile description but adding LFB/London Fire Brigade to your 'handle' or profile name can mislead the public into thinking you are communicating in an official capacity.

- **Do take due care about using your uniform in profile photos on social media.** We know that our staff, volunteers and contractors are proud to work at London Fire Brigade and if you wish to use a photo of yourself in uniform in your profile picture then we support that as long as firefighters are fully dressed and not shown undertaking activities that would be inappropriate in uniform, such as drinking alcohol. However, using photos of yourself in uniform is forbidden on dating sites or apps such as Tinder or Grindr.
- We understand many firefighters have second businesses. It isn't appropriate to promote your business while wearing your uniform.
- Think before you share.
- **Do be proud of your work and the difference you are making.** We encourage you to talk about achievements such as community work, awards, achieving competencies and support for London Fire Brigade campaigns. Please note that no names or photos should be shared from safety visits or this will be a breach of GDPR.
- **Content creation at work.** Subject to the approval of your Station Commander, you are allowed to film at Station including in the yard and gym. Filming mobilising and travelling to shouts is acceptable as long as it is hands-free and does not impede your ability to work. Please ensure anyone who appears in your content has given permission to be there. Filming at incidents is strictly prohibited. (see 7 Incidents).
- **Don't hide your personality.** Humour and having fun on social media is fine if it is positive and professional, e.g. posting about sharing a joke with local residents at a community open day at your fire station. Do be wary of posting jokes that may cause offense or are not in line with the Brigade's values.
- **Do use common sense.** If you are not sure of whether you should post something, either don't post it or check with your manager. This applies to your own posts but also to commenting on others. People can easily identify you as working for London Fire Brigade.
- **Do ask for help.** If you aren't sure how to use the platforms, need advice or are stuck, please email digital@london-fire.gov.uk.
- **Don't post about or share images (including selfies) or videos from incidents.** In the worst case scenario doing so could result in families receiving difficult news before they hear it from the police or impacting an ongoing investigation. The only exception to this rule is the official Brigade social media accounts.
- **Do be careful about swearing.** We encourage you not to swear on social media because of London Fire Brigade's work in the community and with young people, such as visiting schools. Always consider if the language and images you are using are appropriate to the context. People will search for London Fire Brigade on social media.
- **Group messaging apps**. Group messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Discord, while not accessible to the public, are still a form of social media. We understand that some watches use messaging apps as their preferred method of communication. Please conduct yourselves within these groups in the same way you would on any public-facing social media channels. Bear in mind that any post can be screenshotted and shared with others outside your group. WhatsApp chats have been used by the press and as evidence in tribunals. If using messaging apps, any group in which you share watch or work-related information, must be open to all members of staff to join. Exclusion from work-related work chats could be perceived as bullying.

6 Misconduct on social media

6.1 Social media should not be used in a way that breaches any of London Fire Brigade's policies. Misconduct of this kind on social media could lead to disciplinary action.

6.2 If you believe you have witnessed a breach of this policy, please speak to your line manager who should review and make contact with the line manager of the person you feel is in breach. if necessary, make the Digital Team aware – digital@london-fire.gov.uk.

6.3 This policy should be read alongside Policy number 485 - ICT Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), Policy number 425 - Contact with the media and online communications, Policy number 305 - Safeguarding children, and Policy number 426 - Politically restricted posts and standing for elections.

6.4 The points below apply to everyone regardless of whether they are posting from a work or personal account. Unacceptable behaviour in private time using personal accounts can still be treated as misconduct, as it is largely in the public domain.

6.5 Breach of this policy may result in staff, volunteers and contractors being required to remove social media posts and may also result in disciplinary action.

6.6 For example, you shouldn't use social media to:

- Damage the reputation of London Fire Brigade or bring it into disrepute.
- Defame or disparage London Fire Brigade, its stakeholders, suppliers or other professional contacts.
- Harass or bully anyone including other staff, volunteers or contractors in any way.
- Unlawfully discriminate against other staff, volunteers, contractors or third parties, or breach our Equality and diversity policy.
- Breach our data protection policy.
- Breach our ICT acceptable use policy.
- Breach any other laws or ethical standards, e.g. using social media in a false or misleading way.

6.7 If you would like to mention that you work at London Fire Brigade in your social media bio, we are happy for you to do that, but remember, everything you share that enters the public domain could be seen to represent the views and values of London Fire Brigade. For dating apps, we are happy for you to mention that you're a firefighter but would advise against identifying that you work at the London Fire Brigade.

6.8 All of us are involved in sensitive work every day and you should not post about anything which isn't in the public domain, for example press announcements that have not yet been shared with the media. Please ask the press team if you are not sure if something has been disclosed. It is the responsibility of managers to remind their teams if the projects they are working on are sensitive and team members are not allowed to post about them on social media.

6.9 Please make sure you have read Policy number 425 - Contact with the media and online communications. Staff, volunteers and contractors should not post on social media about incidents.

7 Incidents

7.1 Any emergency incident attended can be very emotive for the individuals involved, London Fire Brigade staff should not post details of incidents on their social media accounts. The only exception to this rule is the official Brigade social media accounts. As stated below and in Policy number 425 - Contact with the media and online communications, only those with a press liaison officer tag or those authorised by the incident commander can take images at an incident while the incident is in progress.

7.2 Major incidents can be an emotive issue for all staff, volunteers and contractors. Such major incidents could lead to inquests, investigations or public inquiries, and while related news or media coverage may be difficult for individuals, all staff, volunteers and contractors are advised to read the guidance and communications that will normally be issued internally in relation to these incidents. We all have a vital role to play in ensuring any public inquiry and police investigation is as effective as possible, helping survivors, families and everyone involved to get the answers they need. We recognise that London Fire Brigade staff are protective of our brand and keen to correct misinformation. Nevertheless, posting about major incidents such as the Grenfell Tower fire on social media will make it harder for an inquiry to do its job, helping survivors and families understand the circumstances that led to the fire.

7.3 Comments made on social media can be taken out of context and used by journalists or other stakeholders. Therefore, we advise that all London Fire Brigade staff, volunteers and contractors avoid discussing such major incidents on any social media platform. This includes not posting personal views about the subject, commenting on others' posts, liking or sharing content.

8 Fact checking

8.1 All Brigade staff, operational and non-operational, volunteers and contractors have high levels of trust from the public, making it especially important that you check that content that you share online is true before you share it.

9 Social Media and AI

9.1 While you may use AI to help write social media posts or edit imagery, AI should only be used as a supportive tool. AI should never be the sole author of social media content on our channels and should always be checked by a human.

9.2 For text posts, you may wish to use AI to draft alt-text, generate content ideas, or research suitable hashtags. However, you should not publish text that has been 100% AI generated. AI outputs are subject to bias, mistakes and hallucinations - where results are nonsensical or made up - and should always be checked. AI-generated content may not be appropriate for the Brigade's audiences and will likely need redrafting to match our tone of voice.

9.3 AI can be used to improve existing imagery, by colour correcting, adjusting lighting or blurring out details such as number plates. It can also be used to generate image ideas or create moodboards. We do not publish images or videos fully generated by AI, unless there is a specific need that cannot be met by existing photography or illustration or by taking new human-created imagery. We should always declare that an image has been generated by AI to ensure copyright, intellectual property, and GDPR elements have been accounted for.

10 Talking to stakeholders on social media

10.1 Some London Fire Brigade non-uniformed and non-operational staff (for example those working in policy teams or in community safety) as well as those in senior operational roles (such as Station Commanders and Borough Commanders) may wish to use social media to build their networks and talk about their jobs. This could involve technical developments in fire safety or tweeting from work events and conferences. We encourage this provided they follow the guidance in this policy.

10.2 Conversations on social media can build and strengthen relationships. However, if you are involved in a discussion that becomes a heated argument or includes controversial content, we advise you to let your manager, and the press team, know. For example, this could include

criticism from someone influential, such as a journalist or politician, a serious allegation about an incident from a member of the public, or physical threats. If this conversation takes place on the evening or weekend and becomes very negative, then it may be necessary for you to let your manager and the officer of the day know out of hours.

10.3 Difficult conversations should be moved away from social media. If you want to continue the conversation move to a more private format for example to phone or email, with the aim of resolving the issue.

11 Content privacy

11.1 We refer you to the guidance on photos and images in Policy number 425 - Contact with the media and online communications, which says that the following points refer to images and photos taken at incidents which are then used for the purposes of press and PR:

- Only those with a Press Liaison Officer tag or those authorised by the Incident Commander can take images at an incident while the incident is in progress.
- Images taken within a property or on private ground can only be used once written permission is gathered from the owner. Permission forms are available from the Communications department.
- Identifying details such as car number plates, family photos or house numbers should be obscured in the image before it is put into the public domain. Communications can help with this.
- Publication of any unauthorised photos or video could have seriously damaging consequences for the Brigade. These cases may lead to disciplinary action.

11.2 Images taken featuring Brigade staff or property:

- With the exception of content produced for official Borough X feeds, if you wish to run a public social media profile featuring photographic or video material taken while on duty or in uniform we suggest getting in touch with the Digital department. Written consent of the people featured should be obtained for GDPR purposes. Forms are available on Hotwire and in the appendix of Policy number 301 - Capturing and managing images on behalf of the Brigade.

12 Safeguarding

12.1 If you have contact with children under the age of 18, whether through community visits or regularly with Fire Cadets, you must follow the advice in Policy number 305 – Safeguarding children. As mentioned in that policy, you must only communicate with children in matters directly involving a Brigade activity, using authorised Brigade social media accounts only. If a child initiates personal contact unrelated to any Brigade activity such contact must be reported to a line manager or youth engagement scheme leader immediately who will note it and discuss with the child/young person where appropriate.

12.2 Videos and photos of children should not be used on social media.

12.3 The same rules apply to working with vulnerable adults. Please ensure that you have read Policy number 736 - Safeguarding adults at risk.

13 Social media and GDPR

13.1 Please do not use the email addresses of any social media connections for unsolicited communications.

13.2 If you wish to add the social media account details of any social media connections to a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, that connection will need to supply their permission first.

14 Being human

14.1 We would advise against discussing any views or experiences on social media which are not aligned with London Fire Brigade's values. Saying that all views are your own in your social media profiles does not prevent posts being associated with London Fire Brigade.

14.2 Certain roles at London Fire Brigade are politically restricted (see Policy number 426 - politically restricted posts and standing for elections). If you are in a politically restricted post you should not post about, like, comment or share any political content on social media, and think carefully about the impression you give from the accounts that you follow. If you feel that your social media presence could reveal conflicts of interest, please discuss this with your line manager. They won't stop you unreasonably but may want to discuss potential risks.

15 Branding of social media presences

15.1 The Communications team welcome applications for official social media accounts. Email us at digital@london-fire.gov.uk.

15.2 Your social media account handle should not incorporate the name London Fire Brigade, LFB or London Fire Commissioner unless explicit agreement has been provided.

15.3 Breach of this policy may result in staff, volunteers and contractors being required to remove social media posts and may also result in disciplinary action.

16 Social media expertise

16.1 The Digital team lead on social media and are based at Union Street.

16.2 We will be updating this policy as and when required.

16.3 All staff, volunteers and contractors will be made aware of this policy and it will be flagged as part of the induction for new team members.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	13/02/19	SDIA	L - 12/02/19	HSWIA	12/02/19	RA	NA

Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Page 7, para 9.1	Role to rank change made.	23/07/2020
Page 4 Page 5, para 6.2 Page 9, para 15.3	Removed out of date image. Added clarity about what to do in the event of you seeing social content that is in breach of the policy. Added information about how to apply for an official LFB social media account.	03/08/2020
Throughout	Policy wording clarified, and content updated to reflect new social media platforms.	16/07/2025

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Social media	Fact finding
Images	

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	**FOIA exemption**	**Security marking classification**