

**Freedom of Information request:** Reference number FOI2025/00339

**Date of request:** 3rd April

**Request:**

1. What is the social media policy for LFB?
2. Are staff with high profile social media presence given additional opportunities compared to other firefighters who are not on social media (eg. Ukraine convoy, WFS weekend and tactical ventilation training)?

**Response:**

1. What is the social media policy for LFB? – Please find Policy 0944 – Social media policy for London Fire Brigade attached below. Please be aware that this policy is in the process of being updated.
2. Are staff with high profile social media presence given additional opportunities compared to other firefighters who are not on social media (eg. Ukraine convoy, WFS weekend and tactical ventilation training)? – The Communication department have confirmed that participation in activities such as Ukraine convoy, WFS weekend and tactical ventilation training is not influenced by whether or not firefighters have a social media presence.

We have removed the initial statement as it was a personal opinion that identified another individual and the FOI Act covers any recorded information that is held by a public authority.

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. For more information about this process please see the guidance we publish about making a request on our website:

<https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/privacy/>

## Social media policy for London Fire Brigade

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New policy number: **944**  
Old instruction number:  
Issue date: **29 May 2019**  
Reviewed as current:  
Owner: **Assistant Director, Communications**  
Responsible work team: **External Communications and Campaigns**

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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.

This is a policy that could affect you very frequently as many of us use social media daily.

If you have any questions about this policy please email [digital@london-fire.gov.uk](mailto:digital@london-fire.gov.uk).

# 2 Background

- 2.1 At London Fire Brigade we have built a successful social media presence through the official accounts. We have also trained and supported boroughs in developing their more localised social media presence.
- 2.2 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. This can range from being active on Twitter, Instagram or other networks every day, to using Facebook or LinkedIn occasionally. However you participate in it, whether you are very visible online and have a wide range of contacts, or if you have private, personal accounts where you connect with a small group of close connections, most people now have a presence online.
- 2.3 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, and that means all that we stand for. This policy will help you use social media more effectively and navigate potential pitfalls.
- 2.4 We recognise how important social media can be to people and how many of us rely on it to keep in touch with work contacts, friends and family. We support that whilst encouraging you to check if the content you share fits with the responsibilities of your role and the Brigade's values: Fairness, Integrity, Respect, Service and Trust F I R S T.

# 3 How we define social media

- 3.1 This policy covers all social media including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram, all instant messaging apps including WhatsApp, video and voice calling apps such as Skype, blogs, dating apps and all other social media sites.

# 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.

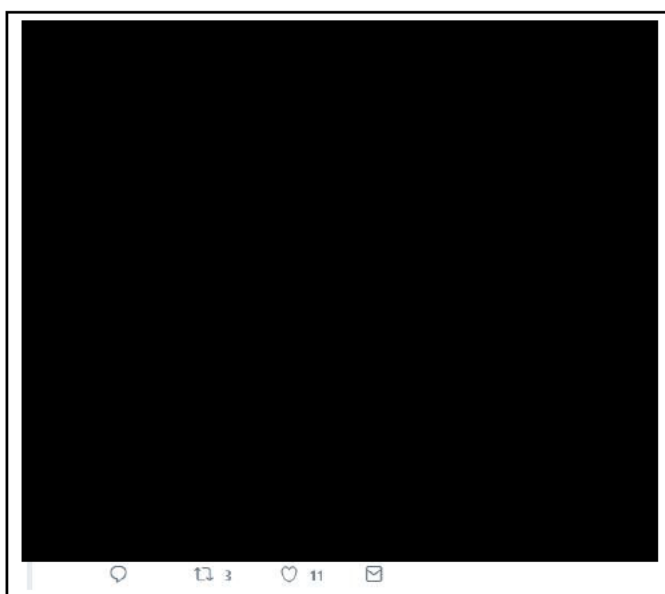
# 5 When does it apply?

- 5.1 Whether you use these networks frequently or occasionally, 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:**

- Do use it. Social media is now part of everyone's work life, and we encourage you to use it in the way we have recommended in this policy. Doing so could help you in your job and grow London Fire Brigade's network.
  - 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 (for example on Facebook) 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. It is also not allowed for commercial use (for example if promoting your second job or the commercial endeavours of friends or family).
  - Do think before you share. A good test is whether you would feel comfortable reading out your post to a room of 100 people.
  - 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.
- 5.4 Here are two examples of effective social media posts from London Fire Brigade staff in a work related, but personal capacity:





- 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. Other ways of using humour wouldn't be appropriate, for example putting a joke on Facebook that might cause offense or go against the core values of the Brigade.
- 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 even if you are posting in a personal capacity, for example if you refer to or post about any aspect of your job, or simply because your friends, family and wider contacts know what you do.
- Do ask for help. If you aren't sure how to use the platforms, need advice or are stuck, please ask the digital team in the communications department.
- 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 that official Brigade social media accounts.
- Do keep your social posts short, punchy and to the point with clear messaging and purpose. To be effective it is good to include what you would like people to do next, as in the example below.

- 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 and anything relevant to the brand could be found.
- Don't forget to read other documents relevant to your use of social media. This policy should be read alongside the policies referred to in section 16 below.

## 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 screenshot any examples and share with your line manager who should review and make contact with the line manager of the person you feel is in breach. Please also make the Digital Team aware – [digital@london-fire.gov.uk](mailto: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 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.

### Representing London Fire Brigade

- 6.7 If you would like to mention that you work at London Fire Brigade in your bio on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other platforms, we are happy for you to do that, but don't feel you have to. Either way, everything you share that enters the public domain could be seen to represent the views and values of London Fire Brigade.
- 6.8 Be aware that whatever you say on social media is available publicly and can be shared by others, even if you have tight security settings.
- 6.9 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 communications department 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.

- 6.10 We encourage you to retweet or share content that has been posted from the official London Fire Brigade accounts.
- 6.11 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 that 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, such as the Grenfell Tower fire and the terrorist incidents in 2017, can be an emotive issue for all staff, volunteers and contractors.
- 7.3 Such major incidents will be surrounded by 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.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 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. 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.
- 8.2 Fake news (i.e. news or stories on the internet that are not true) can be either deliberately false or only partially correct. It is well documented that sharing this content can influence others' opinions, especially when it comes from someone who is trusted, such as a firefighter. Therefore we recommend that you check if the story is true before posting, commenting or sharing it, for example by verifying if the story has been reported on the radio or in newspapers, if the website looks genuine or if you have heard of the organisation which has shared the story.

Not doing so could affect your credibility.

## 9 Talking to stakeholders on social media

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 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.

## 10 Content privacy

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 Images taken featuring Brigade staff or property:
- With the exception of content produced for official Borough twitter feeds, publication in any media, including social networking sites, of photographic or video material taken by staff whilst on duty or in uniform must be cleared by the Communications Department. Written consent of the people featured should be obtained. Forms are available on hotwire and in the appendix of [Policy number 301](#) - Capturing and managing images on behalf of the Brigade.

## 11 Safeguarding

- 11.1 If you have contact with children under the age of 18, whether through community visits or regularly with 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 who will note it and discuss with the child/young person where appropriate.

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

11.3 The same rules apply to working with vulnerable adults. Please ensure that you have read [Policy number 736](#) - Safeguarding adults at risk.

## **12 Social media and GDPR**

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

12.2 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.

## **13 Being human**

13.1 As well as posting about your work, we are happy for you to use social media to talk about your hobbies and interests where it is appropriate, relatable and relevant. For example, discussing your passion for running or the latest book you have read is another way to engage people.

13.2 We would advise against discussing any views or experiences on social media which are not aligned with London Fire Brigade's values, for example posting that you don't care about your work and what happens there today. Saying that all views are your own in your social media profiles does not prevent posts being associated with London Fire Brigade.

13.3 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.

## **14 Personal use whilst at work – what is and is not permitted**

14.1 We understand that staff, volunteers and contractors may wish to use social media for personal activities at the office or by means of our computers, networks and other IT resources and communications systems. We permit use during breaks. Use must not interfere with your employment responsibilities or productivity.

## **15 Branding of social media presences**

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

15.2 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.

15.3 The Communications team welcome applications for official social media accounts through the [process laid out on Hotwire](#).

## **16 Security risks**

- 16.1 We recommend keeping your passwords secure. Passwords should be a mix of characters and numbers and upper and lower case letters.
- 16.2 Hacking is a fact of life on social media. If this happens to you we advise changing your password immediately.
- 16.3 Be careful of phishing scams or ransomware attacks on social media. Do not click on suspicious links.
- 16.4 We recommend that you have secure passwords for your laptop, phone and other devices. Always set your devices so that they lock automatically when unattended.

## **17 Social media expertise**

- 17.1 The digital team lead on social media are based at Union Street.
- 17.2 We will be updating this policy as and when required.
- 17.3 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	13/02/2019	SDIA	12/02/2019	HSWIA	12/02/2019	RA	NA
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### 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

### 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