

**POLICE AND CRIME  
COMMISSIONER FOR  
LEICESTERSHIRE**

**ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND  
COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE**

PAPER MARKED

**E**

Report of: **CHIEF CONSTABLE**  
Subject: **SOCIAL MEDIA**  
Date: **FRIDAY 24 MARCH 2017 – 2.00PM**  
Author: **DETECTIVE INSPECTOR REME GIBSON**

**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members of the steps the organisation is considering in addressing private / personal social media usage by staff.

**Recommendation**

2. It is recommended that members discuss the outcome of this report. Provide any views on matters arising from their consideration.

**Background**

3. Social Media usage on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp, by staff on Police held accounts is something that is widely encouraged by the organisation. It is a means of instantly interacting with large sections of the community in real time for the prevention and detection of crime, to monitor events, gather information and engage key influencers. Likewise, public expectation and the delivery of key messages can be managed in relation to major incidents through improved message delivery and rumour management.
4. The Force has a Social Media Intranet policy<sup>1</sup> which offers guidance to police officers and staff who intend to use social networking sites in their professional capacity to represent the force. There is also an Internet Access and Social Networking Procedure<sup>2</sup>, which provides guidance to individuals who may wish to access the internet whilst at work for reasonable private use. The latter section of this procedure specifically provides guidance in respect of the *personal* use of social media. The guidance is broadly split

<sup>1</sup> <http://hq95t029/cms/section.asp?id=2828>

<sup>2</sup> <http://hq95t029/library/procedures/internet%20access%20and%20social%20networking%20procedure%20appendix%201%20pr%20o57.1.pdf>

## NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

between preserving officer / staff safety, the risks of unauthorised disclosure of information, breaching trust or confidence and bringing discredit upon the service.

### Current Position

5. Some staff within the organisation are currently subject to misconduct proceedings with regards comments on their private social media accounts. Indeed this is a national trend across Forces with more officers exposing themselves to unacceptable behaviour whilst using seemingly private forums
6. Misconduct hearings have the capacity to be held in a public arena and as such, the comments of individuals acting in a private capacity but who are still bound by the Standards of Professional Behaviour could cause reputational damage to the Force and a loss of public confidence.
7. We have a set of Standards of Professional Behaviour<sup>3</sup> to which all staff are subject, covering a range of behaviours including Discreditable Conduct and Challenging and Reporting Improper Conduct.
8. The Code of Ethics<sup>4</sup> also makes direct reference to confidentiality, acknowledging the benefits of social media but also highlighting potential risks.
9. The Code explicitly states that staff should use social media responsibly and safely, ensuring that nothing published on line could be perceived by the public or policing colleagues to be discriminatory, abusive, oppressive or otherwise incompatible with policing principles.
10. Article 10 of the Human Rights Act, Freedom of Expression should be borne in mind when balancing the behaviour of individuals in a private capacity against the Code and Standards of Professional Behaviour.
11. Newly appointed staff are given a briefing from the Professional Standards Department with regards to, amongst other things, behaviour off duty both on and offline and how that may impact on organisational reputation and public certitude.
12. Existing members of staff have recently been given advice with regards their personal safety when posting on social media in response to the heightened security state. They should also be aware of the publications highlighted above, alluding to conduct whilst off duty in respect of social media usage. It would however appear they may not be, given the increase in reported cases of potential discreditable conduct online.

### Current Reporting Mediums

13. If a member of staff is concerned about comments or posts made by colleagues on personal social media accounts, they may speak with their line manager, report directly to a member of staff in PSD or report anonymously to PSD using an internal website called *Bad Apple*.

---

<sup>3</sup> Standards of Professional Behaviour available from [www.college.police.uk](http://www.college.police.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Code of Ethics: A Code of Practice for the Principles and Standards of Professional Behaviour for the Policing Profession of England and Wales – [http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Ethics/Documents/Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_Changes.pdf#search=standards%20of%20professional%20behaviour](http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Ethics/Documents/Code_of_Ethics_Changes.pdf#search=standards%20of%20professional%20behaviour)

## NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

14. *Bad Apple* allows the user to interact with PSD from an unidentified platform, whilst allowing PSD to ask further questions of the user relating to the issues they are reporting. An assessment of the facts can then be made with regards severity and further action.

### The National Picture

15. Given the vast array of language used in today's society, some of which may not be instantly identifiable as being derogatory or undermining to an individual or group of persons, it is often difficult to assess particular cases. Nationally, there appears to be no consistency between Police Forces despite the issue of social media usage becoming an area of threat.
16. As a result, there too is disparity between discipline outcomes, with some staff being dismissed in one Force area and others receiving differing sanctions in another for comparatively similar comments.
17. A HMIC report regarding integrity matters<sup>5</sup> outlined its disappointment nationally to find limited monitoring of private social media usage and concluded that it expected Forces to look for indications of misconduct or corruption on private accounts through more rigorous proactive monitoring procedures.
18. With the issues of Human Rights, resourcing, finances and fairness balanced with the need to protect the organisation from significant harm from its personnel's actions and opinions in a social media context, the panel are invited to discuss how it feels the organisation should best protect itself and its staff, and indeed whether it is appropriate, justified and proportionate to conduct such proactive steps.

### Implications

**Financial:** None

**Legal:** Human Rights Act 1998

**Equality Impact Assessment:** Considered

**Risks and Impact:** As noted throughout report

**Link to Police and Crime Plan:** None at present

**Communications:** Internal only.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/police-integrity-and-corruption-2015.pdf>

# NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - Social Media Internal Policy for the use of social media networking sites in their professional capacity.

Appendix B - Standards of Professional Behaviour

Appendix C - Code of Ethics

Appendix D - Article 10 Freedom of Expression, Human Rights Act 1998

## **Background Papers**

None

## **Person to Contact**

Detective Superintendent Martyn Ball, Professional Standard Department,  
tel: 0116 248 5136, email [martyn.ball@leicestershire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:martyn.ball@leicestershire.pnn.police.uk)

Detective Chief Inspector Simon Hurst, Professional Standards Department,  
tel: 0116 248 5202, email [simon.hurst@leicestershire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:simon.hurst@leicestershire.pnn.police.uk)

Detective Inspector Reme Gibson, Professional Standards Department,  
tel: 0116 248 5055, email [reme.gibson@leicestershire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:reme.gibson@leicestershire.pnn.police.uk)