

PFCC Decision Report

Report reference number: 053/2020

Classification: Not protectively marked

Title of report: Social Networking Policy

Area of county / stakeholders affected: All PFCC staff

Report by: Pippa Brent-Isherwood (Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer)

Date of report: 14 April 2020

Enquiries to: Darren Horsman (Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement)

1. Purpose of the report

To approve the updated Social Networking Policy.

2. Recommendations

That the updated Social Networking Policy attached at Appendix 1 is approved for adoption.

3. Benefits of the proposal

Clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media sites to ensure that they are used effectively as part of the PFCC's wider approach to communications, and that their use does not expose the PFCC to security risks, reputational damage or breaches of the Data Protection Act. The updated Social Networking Policy attached for approval at Appendix 1 therefore provides a structured approach to social networking and aims to ensure that:

- A consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained relating to the use of social media;
- Information held by the PFCC and their staff remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media;
- The use of social media is effective, lawful and does not compromise the computer systems or networks owned or maintained by the PFCC or Essex Police, and

- The PFCC's reputation is not damaged or otherwise adversely affected by the use of social media.

4. Background and proposal

The Social Networking Policy has been reviewed and updated as part of the PFCC's ongoing policy review plan. In particular, the policy has been updated to cover social media usage by staff both in an official capacity and outside of work.

The policy will be reviewed again in three years' time, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, regulations or best practice.

5. Alternative options considered and rejected

The PFCC could chose not to adopt the updated Social Networking Policy, and therefore effectively to "hold over" on the existing policy. This course of action is not recommended as the current policy is not as comprehensive as that now proposed for adoption, so may not provide staff with sufficiently clear guidance as to the standards expected of them, particularly when social networking on behalf of the PFCC.

6. Police and Crime Plan

Effective use of technology – including information and communications technology – is one of the underlying principles of the Police and Crime Plan.

7. Police operational implications

The policy has been reviewed alongside comparable Essex Police policies to ensure consistency, given that the PFCC's staff use communications equipment and technology issued by Essex Police, and are largely bound by its terms and conditions of employment.

8. Financial implications

There are no financial implications associated with this decision.

9. Legal implications

Members of staff are legally responsible for anything they write or do online. Anything they say or do could be interpreted as representing the views of the PFCC where they could be identified as being a member of the PFCC's staff, and the PFCC may be liable for the actions of staff whose comments or content posted on social media, even in a private capacity, are closely connected with their work environment. The updated policy attached for approval at Appendix 1 therefore makes clear that the law of defamation applies to social media in the same way as to other written and spoken communications, and that the PFCC and / or any individual may be sued for damages if a person or business considers that their reputation has been or may be damaged as a result of their actions on social media.

Adherence to the updated Social Networking Policy attached at Appendix 1 will also help to safeguard the PFCC against information security risks and breaches of the Data Protection Act.

Finally, the updated policy reminds all staff other than the Deputy PFCC that they are politically restricted under Schedule 16 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, and should have due regard to this in their use of social media.

10. Staffing implications

This policy applies to all PFCC staff, whether permanent or temporary, both inside and outside of working hours.

It is every manager's responsibility to ensure that the policy is adhered to by their staff. As such, they may review and investigate the use of social media by their staff whenever a complaint or concern is raised.

Failure to comply with the policy may result in disciplinary action being taken.

11. Equality and Diversity implications

The updated policy attached for approval at Appendix 1 forbids staff from making remarks about any individual which are offensive or discriminatory, or otherwise contrary to the provisions of the Equality Act 2020 and associated legislation, via social networking sites or other online media.

12. Risks

No risks have been identified in connection with this decision. The updated policy attached for approval at Appendix 1 identifies a number of risks associated with the use of social media and seeks to mitigate these.

13. Governance Boards

The updated policy attached for approval at Appendix 1 was discussed at the PFCC's SMT on 14 April 2020 and approved in principle for adoption by the PFCC.

14. Background papers

Appendix 1 – Social Networking Policy v1.4

Report Approval

The report will be signed off by the OPFCC Chief Executive and Treasurer prior to review and sign off by the PFCC / DPFCC.

Chief Executive / M.O.

Sign:



Print: P. Brent-Isherwood

Date: 14 April 2020

Chief Finance Officer / Treasurer

Sign:



Print: Elizabeth Helm

Date: 21 April 2020

Publication

Is the report for publication?

YES

NO

If 'NO', please give reasons for non-publication (Where relevant, cite the security classification of the document(s). State 'None' if applicable)

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.....N/A.....

If the report is not for publication, the Chief Executive will decide if and how the public can be informed of the decision.

Redaction

If the report is for publication, is redaction required:

1. Of Decision Sheet?

YES

2. Of Appendix?

YES

NO

NO

If 'YES', please provide details of required redaction:

.....
.....N/A.....

Date redaction carried out:

Treasurer / Chief Executive Sign Off – for Redactions only

If redaction is required, the Treasurer or Chief Executive is to sign off that redaction has been completed.

Sign:

Print:

Chief Executive/Treasurer

Decision and Final Sign Off

I agree the recommendations to this report:

Sign: 

Print: Roger Hirst

PFCC

Date signed: 24 April 2020

I do not agree the recommendations to this report because:

.....

Sign:

Print:

PFCC/Deputy PFCC

Date signed: