

# Social Media Protocol

**For clinical and non-clinical staff employed or work with/alongside the x  
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board**

## Introduction

These guidelines cover the use of social media by clinical and non-clinical employees and those that work with /alongside the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB), including non-executive directors and GPs, hereafter referred to as staff.

The ICB recognises that its staff have every right to a private life that is distinct and separate from their working lives. This distinction can sometimes become blurred through the use of social media and other digital communication activities. These guidelines are therefore intended to provide some advice to all staff, to ensure that their online activities do not interfere with their working lives.

Staff should be aware that failure to follow these guidelines may result in a disciplinary investigation, and ultimately disciplinary action, in accordance with the ICB's disciplinary policy.

*Did you know?* The High Court rules that whatever is posted on social media is deemed to be in the public domain so whatever you post is deemed to be publicly accessible.

## Guidelines

These guidelines should be followed by all staff, including any interns, apprentices and volunteers, as well as interim and agency staff. These guidelines cover normal working hours, but also extend to personal time when any public reference to the ICB is made.

The guidelines apply across all social media platforms, including but not limited to:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Flickr
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Smart phone applications e.g. Snapchat, WhatsApp, Social Media Usage

The ICB encourages staff to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media as part of their work. During work hours, social media activity should be limited to where it is directly related to your role, or current project. It is not appropriate for example to use Facebook or smart phone applications during working hours for personal use. Creating new social media accounts on behalf of the ICB must be agreed by the Communications and Engagement Team / Executive Team.

Staff/departments wanting to post news items on existing social media accounts should contact the Communications and Engagement Team who will support you.

## @StaffsICB

The ICB currently have social media accounts for Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with 'StaffsICB' as the name, as well as a YouTube account called 'Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB'.

## Content

Sources for content include:

- Press releases published on the ICB website
- Local and national health campaigns linked to the ICB's priorities
- Pictures and videos
- Engagement and consultation opportunities at the ICB or other related health bodies e.g. NHS England
- Updates and live messages from ICB Board meetings, including papers on the website
- Updates on corporate events
- Asking and answering questions about services
- Crisis communications – statements
- Highlighting health related issues
- Forthcoming events
- Questions for consultation purposes
- Links to positive media coverage

## Questions, complaints, media requests, personal issues and FOI/SARS requests

If appropriate, the ICB will respond to any questions, complaints, media requests and personal issues raised in posts by acknowledging the message and directing the enquirer to the appropriate channels of communication via our website, or an opportunity to talk to someone direct if required.

*Did you know?* We reserve the right not to respond to posts or tweets based on the nature and content of the message.

Subject Access Requests (SARS) or Freedom of Information (FOI) requests can also be received via social media, so long as the request is made in a written form. If a SARS or FOI request is received it must follow the same process and timescales.

## Dos and Don'ts

### Etiquette

When sending posts, the following should be considered:

- Be human: people like to talk to people, not robots! Be personable and let your personality shine through.
- Keep content relevant to the CCGs' brand image.

- Don't ignore mentions. It's important to engage with your audience as people like to feel loved. Don't be afraid to send an appropriate response to negative posts. This excludes any trolls and off-topic negativity though!
- Don't engage with trolls. A troll is someone who posts offensive, divisive and controversial comment who is often off-topic. A troll should also be reported.
- Only retweet/like messages from reliable sources and relevant to your account. Retweets aren't necessarily endorsements, but people do need to be careful about who/what they're retweeting. For example, a message the user agrees with coming from a negative/anti-NHS source should be avoided.
- Messages consisting purely of capitalised letters makes your message come across as angry, so avoid completely.
- Pay attention to what is happening. Regularly check your timelines and send out messages frequently.
- Find and follow others.
- Avoid NHS jargon and keep complex language to a minimum.

## Privacy Settings

It is important to take precautions when using social media as anyone can access and use social media, meaning that a small minority of users will take the opportunity to promote extreme views or cause trouble.

You should carefully consider who you allow to join your network and disclose personal information to.

*Did you know?* Adjusting your privacy settings on a social networking site will restrict who can access your profile and will therefore prevent strangers finding out personal information about you.

## Personal Opinions

If you choose to identify that you work for the ICB on a personal social account you should be aware that members of the public may associate your personal thoughts, actions and behaviours with the ICB and indeed the wider NHS. Any comments made on social media about colleagues, managers or patients stand to be linked to the workplace.

## Behaviour/Bullying and Harassment /Equality and Diversity

Personal accounts that are not private should not be used to publicly criticise colleagues, or to vent grievances, which should be directed in the first instance to your line manager. The ICB will not tolerate these behaviours in their workforce and activities that might be classed as discriminatory will also be investigated.

In addition, if at any stage, when working with social media, you suspect that a child, young person or adult is subject to social media abuse you should raise it in accordance with this policy and with the relevant Local Authority Safeguarding, please see details below:

### Children

- Stoke-on-Trent: Advice and Referral Team **01782 235100**  
[www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk](http://www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk)
- Staffordshire: First Response **0800 1313 126** [www.staffsscb.org.uk](http://www.staffsscb.org.uk)

## Adults

- Stoke-on-Trent: Stoke-on-Trent City Council Contact Centre **0800 561 0015**
- Staffordshire: Staffordshire County Council **0345 604 2719** [www.ssaspb.org.uk](http://www.ssaspb.org.uk)

## Confidentiality

Staff must not publish sensitive or confidential information via any form of social media. If you are unsure of whether to publish please refer to your line manager or the Information Governance (IG) Handbook/Policies.

## Public Confidence and Bringing the Organisation into Disrepute

Your actions in your private life must not harm public confidence in the NHS or the ICB. Staff need to be aware that even 'off-duty', they will still be representatives of the ICB, the NHS and their profession. You should make every effort to ensure your posts are not damaging to the ICB. If you discover online content that disparages or reflects poorly on the ICB please report it to your line manager, in the first instance, this will enable the ICB to investigate and respond appropriately.

*Did you know?* Staff misusing social media has hit the headlines a number of times. Here is one example from The Times: [“NHS disciplines 1,200 staff for misusing social media”](#)

## Professionalism

Many roles that require registration, such as Nursing, will have professional codes of conduct to be maintained. In extreme cases, unprofessional conduct can lead to suspension/removal from the professional register with the associated risk that would entail.

Staff should retain their professional boundaries and therefore must not contact patients/clients through personal social media. Similarly, work or personal social media must not be used to, for example, report in sick, request annual leave or to raise/address work related issues etc.

If you are required to manage or access a ICB social media account as part of your role you must follow the relevant departmental procedure, which must be approved by the Communications and Engagement Team

## Working in a Digital Age

The ICB is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way we do business. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we communicate, reach out and interact with the different communities we serve.

If you feel that the spirit of this guidance paper has been breached, please approach your line manager in the first instance. Please also refer to the IG Handbook/Policies for further guidance.