

# SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL FOR MEMBERS



## **Social Media Protocol for Members**

### **1. What is Social Media?**

- a) Social media describes the online tools, websites and services that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media. These tools include, but are not limited to, social networks, blogs, message boards, podcasts, social bookmarking and wikis.
- b) Social media is an effective communication method for Members to interact with the public and support Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in the promotion of its work.

### **2. Protocol Purpose**

The purpose of the protocol is to support Councillors in the effective use of social media whilst avoiding potential accusations that they may be breaching the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct. It is designed to ensure that the reputations of the Fire Authority and Fire Authority Members are not adversely affected and the Fire Authority is not subject to legal challenge as a result of the information posted on social media sites

### **3. Policy Application**

- a) This protocol applies to you as a Member of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.
- b) When you are acting or purporting to act in that role you have responsibility to comply with the provisions of this policy.
- c) This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Code of Conduct for Members.
- d) This guide is intended to assist Members in complying with the Code and ensuring that the use of online media is well received.

### **4. Use of Social Media**

- a) All Members of the Fire Authority are required to act in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct whilst acting in an official capacity.
- b) When using social media, you will need to think about whether you are seen to be, or give the impression that you are, acting in your official capacity as a Member of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.
- c) When using social media in a personal capacity, if you refer to the business of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, you may be viewed as acting in your official capacity.

- d) To ensure you comply with the Code of Conduct, you are requested to observe the following guidelines:
- a. Do not refer in social media to any issues identified by the Fire Authority as being confidential or exempt;
  - b. Do not disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone or information acquired by you which you believe or are aware is confidential in nature;
  - c. Do not publish personal data of individuals unless you have their express permission to do so;
  - d. Do not publish personal data of individuals unless you have their express permission to do so;
  - e. Respect intellectual property rights and copyright ensuring you have appropriate permissions to use images;
  - f. Give the impression that you are expressing the views of the Fire Authority where it is not appropriate to do so;
  - g. Be aware that any posts made whilst using the facilities of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service will be viewed as you acting in your official capacity;
  - h. Consider that English Law allows action for libel to be brought in the High Court for any published statements alleged to defame a named or identifiable individual or individuals. Use of social media and other forms of digital content are covered by libel laws.

## **5. Use of Social Media during and after Fire Authority meetings**

- a) Members are permitted to use social media for the reporting of proceedings of public meetings.
- b) If Members wish to use social media during meetings they should inform the Chairman who will make it clear to any members of the public attending that this activity is permissible.
- c) Members will need to consider whether using social media may distract them from participating and understanding information being shared at the meeting.
- d) When using social media, the use of mobile devices must not disrupt the meeting and should be switched to silent mode.
- e) If, at a meeting, a Member's use of an electronic communication device is causing proceedings to be disrupted, any Member may move that the Member should desist from using the device. If the motion is seconded it should be put to the vote without discussion.

