

AVON AND SOMERSET POLICE

# Social Media Communications Protocol

Resubmitted

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## 1. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POLICE

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Social media has evolved into a powerful global communications channel. The way we communicate is rapidly changing as a result, and social media and the Internet are having an impact on many aspects of our lives, both positive and negative.

For the police, the web and social media provide an opportunity to engage directly with the public and to reach a much wider audience through the sharing facilities that social media cites as one of the cornerstones of its success.

### **Balanced and proportional**

In Avon and Somerset our use of the web and social media is balanced and appropriate to ensure our messages are consistent and accountable. These clear reliable channels of communication are used as extensions of our central web service to increase our reach, rather than isolated platforms. As a result, they have been used to great effect.

There is much debate in the wider police community about the use of social media. Whilst it has an important part to play, it is all too easy to overlook the impact and consequences of this approach. Some forces have operated a model that allows free reign for local teams and officers to set up multiple accounts but have found the growing number of accounts difficult to manage.

There are some good examples of accounts being used centrally and local officer/team accounts and some good community engagement has taken place, and the essence of a single voice sustained.

### **Common sense, honest and integrity at all times**

It is important to note that all of our dealings with the media must be approached with a high degree of integrity and social media is no exception. Current ACPO Guidance for dealing with the media states:

*"There is an expectation that you, as police officers and staff, have integrity, but if you make mistakes you will be supported as long as you have been transparent and honest. However, a robust approach will be taken to those who inappropriately leak or who have inappropriate relationships with the media and are not transparent in the purpose or content of their meetings with the media."*

It is equally important to consider the content of posts on personal Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media sites. Apparently innocent and innocuous comments, such as a grumbling post about an early morning operational start for example, could prove to be compromising to operational security.

The simple rule is 'if in doubt, leave it out.' Build a mental firewall and avoid commenting on anything remotely connected to work.

## 2. WHY USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

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In using these channels, our aim is to integrate with the force's wider communications approach and reach a wider – and potentially more targeted - audience to help us in a wide range of areas, from community engagement and reassurance to intelligence gathering, information and witness appeals to aid investigations.

### **Proactive use of social media**

- Provide clear lines of communication for community engagement and reassurance
- Extend the reach of police messages on personal safety and crime prevention advice
- Encourage sharing of our communications to harder to reach audiences

### **Supporting our response during times of heightened public interest**

- Provide a clear voice direct to the public, partners and stakeholders and communities
- Respond to community concerns in a timely manner
- Provide reassurance and encourage spreading of that reassurance to recipient's contacts
- Encourage people to come forward with intelligence and information through the appropriate channels.

## 3. HOW WE USE SOCIAL MEDIA – OUR BASIC OPERATING PRINCIPLES

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### **SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EXTENSION OF OUR CORE WEBSITE SERVICE**

- **Quality rather than quantity** - To ensure a strong presence we minimise the number of public accounts on each social media channel; they are an extension of our core website service and part of our tried and tested multichannel online presence.
- **Management of social media** - Public facing social media channels are managed centrally from the Corporate Communications Department; the benefits of this approach are:
  - Clear lines of communication to the public when they are searching social media sites for us
  - Consistent and appropriate corporate approach
  - Manageability, especially during crisis or operational situations
  - Responding and engaging quickly and where appropriate
  - Reduced threat of spoof sites and misinformation
  - Protection of on-line reputation and integrity.

### **FACILITATION OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT TO SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES**

- **Supporting police operations / incidents** - In specific operational situations an additional online presence can be set up as a temporary solution to address a local issue where it is felt to be appropriate. This will be agreed by Head of eServices or escalated to the Head of Corporate Communications if required.

*NB: This is a temporary solution until the new website (V4 goes live) where community issues will be focussed on the new website and the public will be encouraged to engage there. Social*

*media will be used to share and cross publish the Community Issue to ensure wider reach, but it is an extension of the core website service.*

Criteria for these special cases is as follows:

- There is proven evidence that the target community will not engage with the police via their main social media account and only a locally branded account will work
- eServices remain the guardians of the account with engagement being done in collaboration with the team and the local officers who have been granted access
- Guidance be given to the officers on appropriate use
- Breach of guidance will result in immediate closure of the service
- Clear guidance is given to the organisation when questioned that this is a temporary solution and has an operational purpose

## INTELLIGENCE AND OPERATIONAL USE

Districts and units have been provided with open source accounts on Facebook and Twitter created by eServices to facilitate open source intelligence gathering and witness contact as well as for operational commander use during public order incidents.

Clear guidance has been given and is displayed on the account profiles that these do not represent the constabulary as channels for public contact, instead directing people to the main corporate accounts.

Guidance given for these accounts can be found in **appendix 1**

## MONITORING AND ENGAGEMENT

### **Normal protocol**

We monitor the constabulary's social media channels on a daily basis (working week) during normal situations.

This monitoring is done using a combination of automated tools and manual observations by a member of the eServices team in Corporate Communications.

Direct responses are made when required and appropriate and anything that needs escalation is either raised within Corporate Communications or to a specific unit or department as appropriate.

Material including video content is published through a variety of channels by Corporate Communications using a mixture of automated and manual publication.

### **Scaling up the service during critical incidents**

During Silver or Gold incidents, monitoring and engagement moves over to the Press team in Corporate Communications as primary users and is supported by the eServices team. See the **Critical Incident Plan** for more information.

#### 4. DETAILED PROTOCOLS FOR INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

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##### YouTube

▪ **Why**

We use YouTube to host and share all our website videos for the purpose of appeals, proactive messages and general advice and information.

▪ **Who**

The account is maintained by eServices in Corporate Communications. This includes management of videos but also comment moderation and responses when required.

▪ **What**

All videos use a standard template for the introductory part of the video, which includes the crest, the title of the video and the website address, and a "watermark" of the website address overlaid in one of the corners. The video description includes reference to the content of the video and a link back to the parent page of the website.

By default, comments are always set to pre-moderated.

Videos are removed from YouTube when they have served their purpose and if they contain personal information as part of an appeal, for example.

##### FACEBOOK

▪ **Why**

Facebook is used for public engagement and information sharing as an extension of our main website service and multi-channel on-line strategy. There are a number of accounts and services we use for different purposes. These include a single point of contact account for public engagement, individual campaign pages or "applications", and Facebook adverts. Facebook's application programme interfaces (APIs) are also used for sharing content on our main website and other micro sites. There are several open source intelligence accounts used for encouraging potential witnesses to come forward, and other people the police would like to speak to.

▪ **Who**

The main account is maintained by eServices in Corporate Communications. The e-services team will post content, respond to users, create dedicated campaign applications and adverts, and look after all aspects of maintaining the account. All communications officers within Corporate Communications have access to the account and can post news and appeals where appropriate.

The overt intelligence accounts are maintained by various intelligence units and are overseen by eServices.

▪ **What**

A set style profile image has been created for the corporate account and these are used at all times to achieve consistency and a strong profile.

We make it clear that Facebook accounts are not the route for reporting urgent crimes to the police as they are not monitored round the clock.

**Appendix 1** contains guidance on the protocols for the Open Source intelligence accounts.

Engagement and discussion is encouraged amongst followers and new followers are encouraged to help spread our communications reach.

We do not tolerate speculation and misinformation on our accounts, and in particular during a live investigation. This is made clear to the people who post on the page, and it is moderated and comments removed as and when required. Repeat offenders are banned from the page.

#### **Facebook accounts currently in operation**

Main Constabulary account: <http://www.facebook.com/avonandsomersetpolice>

Cranium Caviar: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/wwwcraniumcaviarcom/26356387223>

In the Zone Campaign site for Bristol Student Burglary  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Are-you-in-the-Zone-Essential-info-for-Bristol-Students/40949149876>

#### **TWITTER**

##### **▪ Why**

Twitter is used for public engagement and information sharing as an extension of our main website service and multi-channel on-line strategy. There are a number of accounts we use for different purposes. These include a single point of contact account for public engagement and information dissemination, dedicated accounts for specific policing operations or initiatives such as Glastonbury Festival and Cranium Caviar and one for incident commanders to use during public disorder incidents.

Twitter's APIs are also used for sharing content on our main website and other micro sites.

##### **▪ Who**

The accounts are maintained by eServices in Corporate Communications, who post content, respond to users, and look after all aspects of maintaining the accounts. All the communications officers in Corporate Communications have access to the main accounts for the constabulary, Glastonbury and Cranium Caviar, and can post news and appeals where appropriate.

The Incident commanders account is managed by designated staff within Operations.

##### **▪ What**

A set style profile image has been created for the corporate account and should be used at all times.

We make it clear that Facebook accounts are not the route for reporting urgent crimes to the police as they are not monitored round the clock.

Engagement and discussion is encouraged amongst followers and new followers are encouraged to help spread our communications reach.

News from the main website newsroom is automatically published into the main constabulary Twitter feed and individual updates are also provided as and when required.

From time to time we use Twitter as a method to provide live coverage of events from a policing perspective, such as the Glastonbury Festival or operation Relentless, however this is as an extension of our core service to reach a wider audience.

**Twitter accounts currently in operation**

Main police account: [www.twitter.com/aspolice](http://www.twitter.com/aspolice)

Glastonbury account: [www.twitter.com/policeatglasto](http://www.twitter.com/policeatglasto)

Cranium Caviar: [www.twitter.com/CraniumCaviar](http://www.twitter.com/CraniumCaviar)

Police Witness and Victim Advocates: [www.twitter.com/Aswitnessvictim](http://www.twitter.com/Aswitnessvictim)

Incident Commanders: [www.twitter.com/ASPIncidentComm](http://www.twitter.com/ASPIncidentComm)

**FLICKR**

**Why**

Flickr is used as a photograph sharing site by the force with a single account. The photographs are mainly from police events and the account is used for PR purposes and the sharing facilities it provides.

We don't use it heavily, but it is useful for storing and presenting a large number of images.

**Who**

The account is maintained by eServices in Corporate Communications, this includes posting content and responding to comments.

**What**

A set style profile image has been created for the corporate account and is used at all times.

Images must be uploaded with a copyright license applied and watermarked with the website address.

The description of images should include the information surrounding the event in question, with a link back to the dedicated website or event page.

**Flickr accounts currently in operation**

Main Constabulary account: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/aspolice/>

**USTREAM**

**Why**

Ustream is used by the Constabulary to broadcast live video events. The events are usually PR related and include the Community Policing Awards and the Live and Unsigned competition.

During the event, engagement with viewers takes place as well. We are exploring the potential of this service for more operational events such as briefings and meetings.

**Who**

The account is maintained by eServices in Corporate Communications, who run the video stream and community engagement prior to and during events.

**What**

A set style profile image has been created for the corporate account and should be used at all times.

The video is set to be recorded during broadcast so it can be available on the Constabulary's Ustream channel for people that missed the live event.

The live video is embedded into a website or microsite, and visitors are driven to that instead of the Ustream channel itself.

**Ustream accounts currently in operation**

Main Constabulary account: [www.ustream.tv/user/asPolice](http://www.ustream.tv/user/asPolice)

**WEB CHATS**

**Why**

Web chats are used as part of the Constabulary's website service to allow live virtual discussions between members of the constabulary, the public and partners.

**Who**

The platform was developed and is supported in house by eServices in Corporate Communications.

The web chat schedule is co-ordinated by a member of the eServices team who organise timings and promotion of the chat in partnership with one of the communications officers from Corporate Communications.

The chats are moderated by a member of the eServices team.

**What**

Web chats are open to all units and teams within the constabulary who want to engage with the public.

There is a set fortnightly schedule that rotates through different areas of the force and is focussed on local neighbourhood teams as an alternative to physical PACT meetings.

However, web chats can be set up at anytime for public engagement. In the past, chats have included engagement with the Chief Constable and other senior officers, as well as themed chats that were used in relation to specific incidents and operations.



Chats are promoted via Facebook, Twitter and the constabulary website. The public can sign up for reminders to be sent via e-mail or text message on the day of the chat.

The transcript is published at the end of the chat, usually within one working day once any information that needs editing has taken place.

Restricted

## Appendix 1

### Guidance for open source intelligence and operational accounts on social media channels

E-services will support each district and department in setting up an overt Facebook site (e-services maintains control over usernames and passwords and account allocation).

Responsibility for authorising the creation of a Facebook account rests with the District Intelligence co-ordinator or Department Manager

The District Intelligence co-ordinator or Department Manager will confirm the names of those persons allowed access to the account and be responsible for the day to day use of the account. It is anticipated this will be used for tracing witnesses, victims or Missing persons. To achieve the full benefit and maximise the potential for raising public awareness, it is important that the lead officer for the case from Corporate Communications is involved.

Intel 24 will have an account set up for 24/7 access. The FIM will take the responsibility of the District Intelligence co-ordinator or District Manager out of hours. This will facilitate research in relation to high risk mispers out of hours.

The account will be aligned to the existing department or unit outlook E-mail account.

Each account will have a password which should be limited to a number of individuals and it should be monitored on a regular basis.

The E-mail address of the accounts is hidden to prevent SPAM and the account will be monitored and flagged to eServices during any incidents of SPAM.

No "friends" or followers should be added nor photos added to the profile

Access to the two Operational Incident Twitter accounts is limited to selected individuals and is the responsibility of the account requesters.

The Twitter accounts should be used in cooperation with Corporate Communications during public incidents where a corporate response is required and good lines of communications must be in place at all times.