Social Media Policy and Guidance

Background
Social media is key to Age UK Surrey's (AUKS) communications, making a positive contribution to delivering our strategic aims with significant future potential.

It plays an important role in engaging with our clients and their families, businesses, partners and other charities and can significantly help us facilitate two-way communication with a broad group of key stakeholders.

All of these accounts together help AUKS to have a strong, open, accountable and approachable presence on social media, and allows our charity, and our team as individuals, to have an active voice in our community.

This policy seeks to minimise the risks to AUKS associated with the use of social media.

Our Guiding Principles in the Use of Social Media:

- **Respect and dignity**: Treat all individuals with kindness and respect online.
- **Safeguarding first**: Do not share personal information or images of clients, volunteers, or staff without written consent.
- **Be truthful and accurate**: Share verified and factual content only.
- **Stay neutral**: Do not express political, religious or controversial opinions in the name of AUKS.
- **Professionalism**: Maintain a courteous, inclusive and non-discriminatory tone.
- **Confidentiality** – Do not share confidential or sensitive information.

Benefits and Risks
Social media gives us an excellent opportunity to reach and engage with a large audience. It is an important way that AUKS communicates news, events, projects and income generation.

However, there are also risks for AUKS associated with social media use, including:

- Damage to the AUKS' reputation resulting from negative comments or criticism on social media.

- Disclosure of confidential information or breaches of safeguarding responsibilities.

- Civil or criminal liability resulting from contraventions of statutory provisions or other unlawful conduct.

- Trolling (when someone posts deliberately inflammatory messages to invoke a response) or offensive language, unsuitable or inappropriate posts and comments targeting AUKS.

- Malicious software attacks (virus, malware or phishing.

Purpose and Application
This policy applies to all team members (including contractors and temporary staff), volunteers who have access to AUKS' social media accounts and to also those team members and

volunteers who identify themselves as employees or volunteers of AUKS in their social media profiles (ie. AUKS is listed as an employer/or charity for which the volunteer gives their time).

It covers the use of social media networks, online blogs, discussion forums and other digital activity to ensure consistent and appropriate use across the organisation. This includes (but is not limited to) Facebook pages and Facebook groups, Instagram, X, Threads, BlueSky, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Snapchat and TikTok.

It aims to support successful two-way engagement with our stakeholders and ensure appropriate, effective and consistent use of social media, while reducing associated risks.

Your Responsibilities

Staff and volunteer conduct on social media
This policy sets out the responsibilities of team members (including contractors and temporary staff) and volunteers when using social media on AUKS' behalf (this is confined to the Income Generation, Marketing and Partnerships Team (IGM&P) or when identifying themselves as employees or volunteers within their social media profiles.

Team members must:

- Ensure the use of social media is aligned to *this* policy.

- Ensure they are aware of their responsibility to comply with good practice and the law so that AUKS is not brought into disrepute.

- Ensure the reputation of the AUKS and its team is not damaged and that vulnerable adults are safeguarded by reducing the risk of positions of trust being abused or misused.

- Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations being made against those who work with vulnerable groups.

- Ensure they can clearly identify where information provided is legitimately representative of AUKS' strategy and policies.

- Keep their personal and professional lives separate and always maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

- Be responsible for their own actions and conduct and avoid behaviour which could be misinterpreted by others or which could put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between their work for AUKS and their personal interests.

- Use social media in a professional, responsible and respectful way and must comply with the law in their online communications.

- Be aware that everything they post online is public, even with the strictest privacy settings, online content can be copied and redistributed and it is easy to lose control of. They should therefore assume that everything they post online will be permanent and will be shared.

- Be aware that when using social media for business purposes, they are acting as ambassadors for AUKS. What they say and post online will directly impact the reputation and image of AUKS.

- Ask and secure permission from the information owner before publishing any documents, photos, emails and/or reporting on social media any conversations that are intended to be private, confidential or internal.

If team members have any questions about the use of social media they should consult the IGM&P team for further advice and guidance.

Do:

- Comply with equality and diversity laws and don't publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic or anti-faith etc.

Don't:

- Make statements or post comments that could lead to potential liability or that you would not be prepared to make on paper or face to face.

- Use social media in any way to attack, insult, abuse, defame or otherwise make negative, offensive or discriminatory comments about service users, their family or friends, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations, or any other person.

- Browse, download, upload or distribute any material that could be considered inappropriate, offensive, defamatory, illegal or discriminatory.

Safeguarding
Adult safeguarding concerns should be reported to the AUKS Safeguarding Officer (the Head of I&A) ***immediately*** for advice and action.

Social Media and the Law
Everyone is responsible for using social media appropriately and must be mindful of the legal implications of inappropriate use.

All team members need to be aware that they will be held personally responsible if they break the law when using social media on AUKS' behalf (for example by posting something defamatory). AUKS may also be held liable for the acts of its employees and members.

Liability can arise under the laws regulating:

- abusive or inappropriate behaviour or language.

- obscene, profane, divisive, discriminatory, hateful, or racist content, links or images.

- indecent, explicit or blasphemous material.

- bullying, spam, trolling or deliberate disruptions to conversations.

- posts that are false, misleading, threatening or defamatory to a person or organisations.

- solicitations or advertisements for commercial gain.

- infringements on an individual's privacy rights.

How to manage these issues appropriately:
If you manage an official AUKS account or represent the charity in a professional capacity, it is advised that you do not respond to content of this nature.

Where possible, abusive and obscene comments/posts should be hidden or deleted (please note this is not currently possible on Twitter). These posts or accounts should also be reported to social media networks for official review (through the automated reporting tools on each social media platform).

Abusive users can be 'blocked' but this should be used very rarely and after careful consideration as it could lead to the generation of further negative content and is unlikely to reduce the volume of offensive content being posted.

In extreme cases, social media content may be reported to the police for investigation.

Responding to Negative Comments
The IGM&P Team, and those authorised to use AUKS' social media platforms for posting (the 'editors' and 'owners'), have responsibility for providing responses to comments and direct messages on AUKS' social media platforms, including responding to negative comments. (It is the role of the IGM&P Team to obtain guidance from relevant services if needed to make a response).

Reporting of Defamatory Remarks
Defamatory remarks are to be notified immediately to either the Head of Income Generation, Marketing and Partnerships or the CEO.

If in doubt, or you would like to seek further advice or support, please contact the Head of Income, Marketing and Partnerships.

Guidelines

Appropriate content
The following general guidelines should be followed when it comes to managing content and discussions on social media accounts:

- Questions relating specifically to AUKS' services should be referred to the Head of Service, or for I&A, to the Head of I&A.

- Do not engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. Show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory – such as politics or religion.

As a general rule, do not post any content or information that you would not be prepared to say to your line manager or in other AUKS communications.

If in doubt about any issue mentioned here, please refer to your line manager or a member of the IGM&P Team before responding.

Tone of Voice
Please remember that you are representing AUKS and your social media posts should always be polite, professional and written using correct spelling and grammar. Please avoid using acronyms, abbreviations or 'text speak'.

Personal Use
Team members (including contractors and temporary staff) and volunteers are, of course, permitted to use social and other digital media in their own time but always need to be mindful of AUKS' codes of conduct.

It is important therefore that employees and members are aware that their actions could have an adverse impact on their professional role and/or on AUKS' image and reputation, and to avoid a potential conflict between their personal use of social media and their role.

Team members may wish to occasionally share work moments of which they are proud or post about key work issues on their personal accounts. This is a personal choice but care should be taken.
Team members may add a disclaimer to their account, such as 'these are my own views and opinions and not those of my employer'.

For team members, personal use of social media sites is permitted at work but must be within the individual's own time i.e during lunch breaks and on their own personal devices.

Team members should be aware of the dangers of sharing personal information online, be aware of the privacy levels of their personal accounts, be cautious about inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' in personal social networking (with the exception of LinkedIn) and take personal responsibility for anything they say online or anything posted from their account.

Posting online will stay online forever, even with the 'right to be forgotten' legislation.

Team members and volunteers should never:

- **Seek to establish social contact through any personal social media with AUKS' clients or former clients, their families or other third parties connected to them.**

- **Accept 'friend' requests from AUKS' clients or former clients, their families or other third parties connected to them.**

If identifying as connected to Age UK Surrey, staff and volunteers must:

- Include a disclaimer (e.g. "views & opinions are my own and not those of my employer");
- Not disclose confidential information;
- Not speak on behalf of the charity;
- Avoid posting anything that could damage the charity's reputation.

It is important that team members send news, items and material for posting on the main social media platforms to the Income Generation, Marketing and Partnerships Team (IGM&P) who are the authorised editors and owners of AUKS' social media platforms. The IGM&P Team will respond to comments and direct messaging and will also respond to negative comments. The IGM&P Team will obtain guidance from Service if needed to make a response.

News, items and material for posting on AUKS' social media platforms should be sent to the IGM&P Team as authorised Age UK Surrey Editors, to ensure compliance is maintained across brand guidelines and consents (for sharing of quotes/images).

Sharing of posts from the Age UK Surrey social media platforms is encouraged, rather than posting content on personal accounts.

How to raise concerns
Team members (including contractors and temporary staff) and volunteers are reminded that it is our collective job to protect and enhance the reputation of AUKS. Therefore, concerns about AUKS matters or the charity's social media accounts should be raised through your line manager.

Do not raise concerns or complaints about AUKS publicly through your social media accounts.

Legal Compliance
All users must comply with:

- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act
- Equality and discrimination laws
- Age UK Surrey's policies, including the Code of Conduct

Breaches of this Policy
If you suspect an individual covered by this policy has used social media in an inappropriate manner, please:

- Take screenshots to capture any inappropriate posts you see before they are deleted.

- Escalate to the Head of Income, Marketing and Partnerships.

Any breach of this policy will be investigated and may result in disciplinary action, removal of volunteer status, or legal action where appropriate.

In the event of a breach of the policy so serious that the law has been broken, AUKS will be obliged to report the matter to the police or other external agency as appropriate.

Defamatory remarks about AUKS should be notified to either the Head of Income Generation, Marketing and Partnerships or the CEO.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years.

Issue	Date agreed by Board of Age UK Surrey	Reviewed
1	Aug 2025	