

An Garda Síochána Social Media Policy

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Contents

1. POLICY RATIONALE	3
2. POLICY AIMS & OBJECTIVES.....	3
3. STATEMENT OF POLICY	4
4. POLICY DEVELOPMENT	7
5. HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY REQUIREMENTS	7
6. LEGAL BASIS.....	7
7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS	8
8. ANCILLARY SUPPORT MECHANISMS	9
9. SECONDED POLICE OFFICERS	10
10. PUBLICATION.....	10
11. APPROVING AUTHORITY	10
12. DELEGATED AUTHORITY	10
13. MONITORING AND REVIEW	10
14. CONSULTATION.....	11
15. DISCLAIMER	11

1. POLICY RATIONALE

Social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are increasingly important public communication tools for An Garda Síochána. Social media gives An Garda Síochána the ability to deliver messages directly to the public, complementing traditional media. It also allows for a direct two-way conversation with the community.

However, such tools need to be managed and overseen to ensure that they are effective, in line with corporate strategy and meet legal obligations. This policy will ensure a consistent delivery of the corporate image of An Garda Síochána across all official social media channels, and for clear lines of management of oversight to be established for same.

2. POLICY AIMS & OBJECTIVES

This policy will:

- Ensure the use of official social media channels by Garda staff is effective, safe and appropriate
- Enhance the reputation and integrity of An Garda Síochána in line with our values and corporate strategy

All staff will:

- Consider any impact on An Garda Síochána, its reputation and values when engaging in this activity
- Ensure that they comply with legal obligations

All social media sites will:

- Have a corporate look and feel that is consistent with existing official An Garda Síochána social media sites
- Display the crest of An Garda Síochána
- Display the Acceptable Use Standards on the site
- Be in line with corporate strategy

Clear lines of management of oversight will be established by Garda management to ensure that this is achieved.

3. STATEMENT OF POLICY

Definitions

- Social Media – Sites that facilitate direct electronic contact with the public. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr, fora, blogs, podcasts, chat rooms. The Press Office may determine, at a future point, that other similar channels are to be utilised.
- Activity – The content posted (e.g. photos or information), or interaction on official An Garda Síochána social media channels.
- Authorised Users – Those in charge of populating content on official Garda social media channels under the An Garda Síochána name.
- Moderators – Those in charge of:
 - (a) ensuring that material posted by authorised users adheres to the principles set out in this policy
 - (b) ensuring material posted by the public on official Garda fora remains within the Acceptable Use guidelines (see supporting Procedures document)

Introduction

An Garda Síochána uses social media to communicate with the public to:

- maximise public assistance to help solve crime
- correct or clarify information in the public domain
- warn people of dangers or threats
- deter criminal activity
- increase Garda visibility and highlight good police work
- reassure the community and reduce the fear of crime
- provide crime prevention advice

The Garda Press & Public Relations Office is responsible for all official Garda social media sites.

The Director of Communications, Garda Press & Public Relations Office, is responsible for ensuring processes are in place for establishing, managing, publishing, updating, moderating and decommissioning official Garda social media sites (see Section 8 and Procedures guidelines for details of such sites).

The Garda Press & Public Relations Office is also responsible for archiving relevant material from the sites, consistent with the Archives Act 1986.

All Garda staff are required to comply with this policy. Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action.

Creation of official Garda social media channels

All proposals for the creation of official Garda social media activities such as creating a new Regional / Divisional / District social media site, creating a dedicated Facebook site or Twitter account for a Local Area or specialist Section must be approved by the:

- Chief Superintendent / Section Head
- Relevant Assistant Commissioner / Executive Director or equivalent, and the
- Director and / or Superintendent at the Garda Press & Public Relations Office.

The final decision on whether such social media activity can be undertaken rests with the Director of Communications..

Initial authorisation to commence social media activity will be on a probationary basis, and activity will be monitored and/or moderated by the Garda Press & Public Relations Office to ensure compliance. The Director can withdraw operating authorisation from any social media activity. The Garda Press & Public Relations Office will be supplied with administrator rights to all social media sites that are set up.

All official social media sites will set out clearly that they are not monitored on a 24 hour basis, and will not be used for the purpose of reporting crime.

Activity on official Garda social media sites

The Director of Communications/Chief Superintendent /Superintendent, or authorised officers, must only publish on their social media site information which is operationally relevant to the functions, expertise or geographic location of their Region / Division / District, consistent with the content restrictions set out in this policy and the Media Policy (Garda Code, Vol 1,Chapter 17).

Moderator's role

All official An Garda Síochána social media sites that seek public comments online must have moderators appointed to review comments either before or soon after they are posted. The moderator's role is to ensure that online postings placed on official An Garda Síochána social media sites are relevant, non-threatening, respectful of the views of other contributors, are not insulting, obscene, prejudicial, offensive, discriminatory or defamatory, or a breach of discipline.

Moderator(s) will regularly review their social media site or activity to remove any postings that do not comply with the requirements, set out in the Acceptable Use Standards (see Section 4, Procedures & Guidelines document). A number of moderators may be appointed to ensure that postings are regularly reviewed so that inappropriate posts are quickly removed.

The aim of the Acceptable Use Standards is to set rules that must be followed by members of the public when they contribute to official An Garda Síochána social media sites. The Acceptable Use Standards help to create an environment where community members can contribute their views to assist An Garda Síochána, without fear of abuse or harassment or exposure to offensive or otherwise inappropriate content. The Standards also protect An Garda Síochána from legal liability.

Key related material:

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Policy on the Use of Official Garda Social Media Channels: Procedures and Guidelines Document
- HQ Directive 27/2014, “An Garda Síochána Policy on the use of Social Media”
- HQ Directive 35/2012, “Internet & Electronic Mail Policy – Version 3”
- HQ Directive 082/2003 “Declaration of Professional Values and Ethical Standards”
- The Garda Síochána Act 2005.
- Data Protection Code of Practice for An Garda Síochána
- Official Secrets Act 1963

4. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This policy has been developed using a staged uniform approach in conjunction with the seven stages of policy making.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY REQUIREMENTS

The fundamental principle underpinning Garda Policy on the Use of Social Media is that any action taken must comply with the fundamental principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and accountability and is applied in a non-discriminatory manner in accordance with the principles of the ECHR.

6. LEGAL BASIS

Background

Legal rules governing this policy include, but may not be limited to:

- Data Protection Act 1988

- Official Secrets Act 1963
- Trade Marks Act 1996
- Freedom of Information Act 1997
- HQ Directive 082/2003 “Declaration of Professional Values and Ethical Standards”

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Organisational implications

A major challenge for any social media site is keeping the information accurate, up to date, and moderated. The Director of Communications / Chief Superintendent / Superintendent or authorised nominee is responsible for ensuring that the content of their site is regularly reviewed. Out of date and/or inappropriate content presents a considerable risk to An Garda Síochána and it is therefore vital that content is regularly reviewed, updated and moderated.

Each Chief Superintendent/Superintendent will be responsible for ensuring that their Division/District has appropriate access privileges necessary to carry out social media activity. This will be provided by IT Security.

Delegation of roles

The hosting Director of Communications/ Chief Superintendent / Superintendent is responsible for granting approval for An Garda Síochána staff to post information to the Garda site.

The Director of Communications / Chief Superintendent / Superintendent that hosts a social media site is responsible for ensuring processes are in place for establishing, managing, publishing, updating, moderating and decommissioning the site. For example, the Superintendent of a local District is ultimately responsible for the operation and content of that District’s Facebook site. Chief Superintendent / Director / Superintendent may delegate this responsibility as deemed appropriate to other Garda staff. Roles that may be delegated include responsibility for:

- implementation and management of the activity, including meeting the objectives set out in the approval document
- administration and moderation of the activity or site
- approval of staff to provide content to the activity or site
- records management of the site in accordance with the Archives Act 1986 and related policies

Moderator's role

Moderation of these sites will be undertaken by Garda staff that have received internal or external training in social media and content management and are competent users of the social medium in which the activity will operate. Competence to use social media in an official capacity is a decision for the Director of Communications, Garda Press & Public Relations Office and will be kept under regular review.

A number of moderators may be appointed to ensure that postings are regularly reviewed throughout the day and night so that inappropriate posts are quickly removed.

8. ANCILLARY SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Garda Press & Public Relations Office personnel will support Garda staff charged with administrating and moderating official social media sites by:

- assisting in setting up the site
- providing ongoing telephone/e-mail support
- providing social media training

Garda Press & Public Relations Office personnel will regularly monitor the content of official Garda social media sites and may:

- proactively contact the site administrator to offer assistance
- help ensure the messages being conveyed are consistent with corporate priorities, policies and decisions
- help ensure adherence to the Official Use of Social Media Policy

Garda Press & Public Relations Office personnel will advise and assist, or if required, modify or remove social media content that contravenes An Garda Síochána policies in conjunction with HQ Directive 35/2012, “Internet & Electronic Mail Policy – Version 3”, HQ Directive 27/14 “An Garda Síochána Policy on the Use of Social Media” (both available on the Garda Portal), the Data Protection Code of Practise for An Garda Síochána, Official Secrets Act 1963 and An Garda Síochána Act 2005.

Technical support will be provided in the course of first instance by the Garda Press & Public Relations Office. If the problem requires further expertise, the issue will be escalated to the IT Helpdesk – 01 666 2400.

9. SECONDED POLICE OFFICERS

This policy applies to any police officer seconded to An Garda Síochána from the Police Service of Northern Ireland in accordance with Section 53 of the 2005 Garda Síochána Act.

10. PUBLICATION

This policy is for internal Garda use and will be published on the Garda Portal.

11. APPROVING AUTHORITY

This policy has been approved by the Garda Commissioner.

12. DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Once published and approved by the Commissioner, revisions to the sections relating to (a) the delegation of responsibilities, and (b) the expansion of sites covered by the term ‘social media’ can be made by the Director of Communications without recourse to the Commissioner.

13. MONITORING AND REVIEW

An evaluation of official An Garda Síochána social media sites will be conducted every 12 months by the Director of Communications, Garda Press & Public Relations

Office to ensure the sites continue to be relevant to the mission of the An Garda Síochána, and are achieving the set objectives.

14. CONSULTATION

Consultation has been carried out with the Human Resource Management Section and Legal Section of An Garda Síochána in the composition of this Policy.

15. DISCLAIMER

[This document is not intended to, and does not represent, legal advice to be relied on by members of the public on the subject matter considered herein. This publication should not be used by members of the public as a substitute for professional legal advice]

An Garda Síochána



Policy on the Use of Official Garda Social Media Channels

Procedures & Guidelines

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Policy Justification
3. Approval of Official Garda Sites
4. "Acceptable Use" statement
5. Rules for representing An Garda Síochána online
6. Content
7. Moderation
8. Evaluation and decommissioning of sites

Appendices

Appendix One – Suggested Content

Appendix Two – National Sites management

Appendix Three – Responding to Comments chart

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guideline document is to instruct all Garda members and civilian personnel in An Garda Síochána (hereinafter referred to as Garda staff) regarding the management of all official An Garda Síochána sites. It should be read in conjunction with HQ Directive 47/2014

(Supporting documents include HQ Directive 27/14 "Use of Social Media", and HQ Directive 35/12 "Internet & Electronic Mail Policy - Version 3".)

Social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are increasingly important public communication tools for An Garda Síochána. Social media gives An Garda Síochána the ability to deliver messages directly to the public, complementing traditional media. It also allows for a direct two-way conversation with the community.

However, such tools need to be managed and overseen to ensure that they are effective, in line with corporate strategy and meet legal obligations. These procedures are provided to assist you with this.

2. POLICY JUSTIFICATION

This policy will:

- ensure the use of social media by Garda staff is effective, safe and appropriate
- enhance the reputation and integrity of An Garda Síochána in line with our values

Clear lines of management of oversight will be established by Garda management to ensure that this is achieved.

As per HQ Directive 47/2014, the Director of Communications has overall responsibility for granting approval for An Garda Síochána staff to post information to an official Garda social media site.

Staff given approval to post to the social media activity or site must:

- be competent in the area of expertise they will be approved to post on
- understand the requirements on the public release of information set in conjunction with HQ Directive 27/14 on Social Media Policy, HQ Directive 35/12, "Internet & Electronic Mail Policy – Version 3", the Data Protection Code of Practise for An Garda Síochána, Official Secrets Act 1963 and An Garda Síochána Act 2005
- understand the requirements on representing An Garda Síochána set out in this policy, especially at section 3.

A number of authorised Posters/Moderators should be appointed to ensure that postings are regularly made or updated throughout the day, and that postings by members of the public are regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with the Acceptable User Standards.

3. APPROVAL OF OFFICIAL GARDA SITES

Proposals for Creating Social Media Sites

Creating Social Media Sites

All proposals for social media activities must include the following details:

- the specific objectives of the activity (how it will benefit An Garda Síochána)
- the target audience
- the type of social media tool chosen (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc), and its suitability to achieve the objectives
- what type of content is proposed and in what kinds of media (text, video, images, audio) to attract the target audience. Provide examples of the types of information to be posted to the site/activity
- a schedule/calendar of when and what kind of material will be posted to the social media site
- how end users (e.g. members of the public) will be able to contribute to the site, if relevant
- plans for the regular updating of content and ongoing moderation of comments and feedback. Sufficient resources must be available to ensure continual updating and moderating
- which positions and persons will be responsible for providing high quality and relevant content consistent with national policy
- the cost to An Garda Síochána (including funding and time) in setting up and ongoing management of the site or activity. What is the funding source and has the funding been approved?
- risks that have been identified in running this site, and the plans to mitigate the risks
- which positions and persons will be responsible for the:
 - implementation and management of the activity including performance of the site or activity against its objectives
 - administering and moderating the activity
 - providing content
 - recording management in accordance with the Archive Act 1986 and related policies
 - evaluation and reporting - How will the activity be measured against its objectives? What methods, qualitative and/or quantitative, will be used to assess performance? When will the evaluation occur?

4. "ACCEPTABLE USE" STATEMENT

The aim of the Acceptable Use Standards is to set rules that must be followed by members of the public when they contribute to official An Garda Síochána social media sites. The Acceptable Use Standards help to create an environment where community members can contribute their views to assist An Garda Síochána, without fear of abuse or harassment or exposure to offensive or otherwise inappropriate content. The standards also protect An Garda Síochána from legal liability.

All official An Garda Síochána social media sites that seek public comments online must have the following Acceptable Use Standards displayed on the site:

When contributing your views to this forum, please ensure that you:

- protect your personal privacy and that of others by not including personal information of either yourself or of others in your posts to the forum, (such as names, email addresses, private addresses or phone numbers)
- report information about crime or persons of interest directly to An Garda Síochána, not to this site
- post material to the forum that is relevant to the issues currently being discussed
- represent your own views and do not impersonate or falsely represent any other person or organisation
- do not post material or use language that is obscene, offensive, indecent, pornographic, insulting, provocative, or harass, intimidate or threaten others
- do not use language that incites hatred based on race, gender, religion, nationality, sexuality or other personal characteristics
- do not post material that encourages behaviour that may constitute a criminal offence or create a civil liability, or otherwise violate a law
- do not post or upload any content that is unlawful, is in contempt of court or breaches a court injunction, or may defame, libel or discriminate against others
- do not post material that is prejudicial or pre-judges a person who has been arrested and charged, but who has not yet had the opportunity of defending themselves in court
- do not post material to the forum that infringes copyright, trademark or other intellectual property rights
- do not post multiple versions of the same view to the forum (spam)
- do not promote commercial interests in your posts to the forum; and
- do not include internet addresses or links to non-government department websites, or any email addresses, in your contribution

Postings which breach the Acceptable Use Standards may be deleted or the author banned from this site. In extreme case breaches may result in criminal or civil sanctions or a breach of discipline.

5. REPRESENTING AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA ON-LINE

Rules for Representing

Rules for Representing On-line

If authorised to add or amend content on any official An Garda Síochána social media site, or if authorised to comment on-line on non-police social media sites on behalf of An Garda Síochána, members/civilian staff are required to:

- ensure that any content they publish is factually accurate and complies with relevant An Garda Síochána policies, particularly those relating to confidentiality and disclosure
- ensure they are not the first to make a Garda announcement unless they have the authority in accordance with the Media Policy (Garda Code, Vol 1, Chapter 17) for releasing information to the public. Authorisation requirements for releasing information to social media are the same as those for traditional media, as set out in the Media Policy
- not commit An Garda Síochána to any action or initiative, unless they have the authority to do so
- not disclose official information (whether confidential or not), unless authorised to do so
- not disclose other people's personal information in social media sites unless it can be justified on the grounds that the information is being published for legitimate operational reasons
- avoid any statement or comment that might bring An Garda Síochána into disrepute, or otherwise embarrass the organisation
- avoid any statement or comment that could be perceived as criticising the decisions, policies or practices of the Dáil, Government, Courts, An Garda Síochána or other departments
- be objective and impartial. Avoid any comment that could be interpreted as a personal political view, such as advocating or criticising the policies of political parties
- not publish material that could lead to criminal penalty or civil liability
- be polite and respectful of all individuals and communities on-line
- not use antagonistic, insensitive, inflammatory, condescending or other socially offensive language
- use non-discriminatory language, taking care not to cause contention or offence to any section of the community
- avoid using abbreviations, jargon, colloquialisms, clichés, ambiguous, technical or abstract terms
- respect the laws covering copyright, privacy, libel, defamation and the protection of intellectual property
- have the permission of colleagues before writing about or posting images of them
- not post images or otherwise identify undercover or surveillance operatives, or other persons with suppressed identities
- if they are officially representing An Garda Síochána to other (non-Police Force) social media sites, let people know who they are. They should disclose their position as a representative of the agency, unless there are exceptional circumstances such as a potential threat to personal security

Check with the Garda Press & Public Relations Office in the first instance if uncertain about what can be reproduced or disclosed on social media sites.

Writing Style

The tone and style used in social media is less formal than for other media such as the corporate website or brochures. However, Garda social media sites or postings still represent An Garda Síochána. All postings must be factual, presented in a neutral or positive tone, and represent the official organisation policy or position.

Spelling and grammar must be accurate and the writing style simple, easy to understand, and free of Garda jargon.

Postings – Assessing the Risk

Inappropriate or inaccurate comments or photographs on official police social media sites are a risk to both individual member(s)/civilians(s) and An Garda Síochána.

Staff authorised to post onto police or other sites must assess the risk, including any security risk, involved in publishing information on a social media site before posting, given that once posted on-line, it cannot be withdrawn, even if deleted.

The key rule of assessing content before posting is that an official police site or activity should not contain anything that the authorised officer would be uncomfortable with if published in a newspaper, or if said in public by a Garda in full uniform. If in doubt about the content of a post, do not post it, or seek advice or supervisor approval before posting.

Improper Use

Garda staff authorised to publicly represent the organisation on social media sites must not use these sites for posting, searching, sending, downloading or storing material that would contravene the Acceptable Use Standard (see Section 5.3).

If in any doubt on whether their official use of social media sites is appropriate, Garda staff should consider their obligations, as relevant under HQ Directive 27/14 “An Garda Síochána Policy on the Use of Social Media”, HQ Directive 35/2012, “Internet & Electronic Mail Policy – Version 3”, the Data Protection Code of Practice for An Garda Síochána, Official Secrets Act 1963 and An Garda Síochána Act 2005.

6. CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Content Management

Corporate Look

All official Garda social media sites should have a corporate look and feel that is consistent with existing official Garda social media sites.

Sites should show the crest of An Garda Síochána, display the Acceptable Use Standards, make it clear that they are not monitored on 24/7 basis, and that the site is not a vehicle for the public to report crime.

Postings

The requirements on releasing information to social media are the same as those for traditional media, and are set out in the Media Policy in the Garda Code (Vol 1, Chapter 17).

Keep postings timely, focusing on issues of relevance today or on events coming up soon. Try to post regularly, mixing up posts to provide varied and interesting content i.e. an appeal for information followed by a crime prevention tip. Make clear how your posts are relevant or important to readers. If postings are not sufficiently regular, users will become frustrated with the lack of service, plus social media providers can reclaim accounts inactive for over six months.

Where possible, provide links or details on where readers can find more information on the topic.

Try to make posts easy to share, to enable users to spread police information into the community, for example by providing options to post links to Twitter or Facebook.

Ensure posts are consistent with the view of An Garda Síochána i.e. that of the relevant spokesperson. If in doubt, check with the spokesperson.

Endorsements

Only links with specific relevance to An Garda Síochána objectives, initiatives and operations may be listed, or those of other Government departments and agencies such as the Road Safety Authority and Crimestoppers.

Official An Garda Síochána social media sites should only re-tweet tweets from Government departments and agencies or those with a legitimate link to An Garda Síochána on a professional level.

Official An Garda Síochána Twitter sites should clearly state that re-tweets should not be taken as an endorsement.

Similarly, official An Garda Síochána social media sites should only “follow”/become “fans”/“like” Government departments and agencies or those with a legitimate link to An Garda Síochána on a professional level.

Garda staff charged with posting on and moderating official An Garda Síochána social media sites must be careful when considering whether to provide a link to an external site. Other sites often carry different, even conflicting advice which has the potential to cause embarrassment to An Garda Síochána. This is particularly the case with private sector organisations whose operations, standards and attitudes may not reflect those of An Garda Síochána. Links to non-government websites also need to avoid any implication of police endorsement or sponsorship.

In addition, An Garda Síochána may be legally liable for the re-publication of any defamatory material via linking it to a Garda social media site, just as if An Garda Síochána were the original publisher.

Photographs and Images

The release of photographic images or video recording for operational reasons must be coordinated through the Garda Press Office, Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner where appropriate.

If posting a photograph of a Wanted Person, Person of Interest or Missing Person, monitor the post carefully to ensure that comments do not contain information that may be defamatory or prejudicial to any future court matters. It is also vital that the image and text be urgently removed (e.g. from the Facebook wall, notes archive and photo gallery) if the Person of Interest is arrested or charged, the warrant is withdrawn or suspended, or the Missing Person is found.

If publishing images of persons for non-law enforcement purposes, written permission (such as via email) from the photographer and the person photographed must be obtained before posting the image.

If intending to publish images with children in them, signed permission from parent(s)/guardian(s) is required.

Appealing for Information

When appealing for information, encourage the public to report their information directly to a Garda Station or the Garda Confidential Line (e.g. telephone 1800 666 111) not to the social media site. Advise members of the public not to post information about a potential person of interest or details of a crime to a social media site such as a Facebook Wall. Posting information about crime onto a Garda social media site could be prejudicial, defamatory or incorrect.

There is also the risk that the information posted may not be attended to immediately, or be overlooked, which could have serious consequences. Garda/civilians overseeing the site (i.e. acting as moderators – please see Section 5) need to be alert to postings about crime.

All official social media sites should clearly state that they are not manned 24/7 and should not be used for reporting crimes or potential crimes.

Public Reporting a Crime Independently

Members of the public may also post information about crime independently on social media sites from time to time. When this occurs it is important to capture the information, remove it from the site, promptly forward it to the appropriate Division / District / Section or personnel and encourage the author to contact the Gardaí directly with any further information. The author should also be informed that for legal reasons, further discussions on this matter will not be entered into and any further posts on this matter by the author or any other posters will be deleted.

Failure to process and respond to this information in a timely manner could have serious consequences and may also be a breach of discipline.

Responding to Questions

Many questions can be answered with information already approved and available on government websites. Where practical, respond to questions by providing a link to relevant information on An Garda Síochána or other government agency websites.

Members of the public may also post complaints, misinformation, or details of crime to official An Garda Síochána social media sites. As mentioned above, these ideally should be responded to by providing a link to information from official source. However, this may not always be possible and a guide on how to deal with such posting from members of the public, as well as more general and positive posting, can be found in Appendix 2 ("Responding to comment on social media An Garda Síochána").

Contact Details

Personal email addresses, telephone and facsimile numbers must not be published.

Advertising and Sponsorship

While An Garda Síochána cannot control advertising that is placed around our social media sites, advertising or sponsorship is not permitted on An Garda Síochána social media sites. An Garda Síochána does not sponsor or endorse products or services from an external person or organisation. If possible, this position should be stated on the social media site e.g. in the 'About' section on a Facebook page.

Files and Formats

Multimedia files such as .jpg, .wmv and .mpg files may be posted for downloading. However, where possible, links should be provided to ensure compatibility and ease of both viewing and sharing.

7. MODERATION OF GARDA SITES

The Moderator

The Role of the Moderator

In reviewing online postings:

- the moderation process must assess all content on official An Garda Síochána social media sites, whether posted by An Garda Síochána representatives or by members of the public
- the moderation process must be sensitive to the diversity of Irish public opinion and avoid any perception of discrimination or censorship
- the moderation process must be objective and impartial. Content that is positive or negative and in context is acceptable. Content that is insulting, obscene, offensive, discriminatory, denigrating, prejudicial or defamatory etc., must be removed
- for more serious or repeated breaches of the Acceptable Use Standards, the moderator can ban members of the public from the Garda social media site
- when appropriate, the moderator can inform posters of why a post has been rejected and give them an opportunity to repost, as long as they adhere to our posting guidelines. As per above, if they ignore such advice and engage in further breaches of our guidelines. then they should be blocked/banned from the site.

Defamatory, Discriminatory or Offensive Public Comments

Social media sites inevitably attract comments that are offensive, inappropriate or irrelevant.

An Garda Síochána may be legally liable for defamatory postings on its social media sites where:

- a person has requested the removal of a defamatory comment, or An Garda Síochána 'turns a blind eye' to a defamatory comment on its site
- An Garda Síochána has the technical ability to remove the comment; and
- the defamatory matter is not removed after a reasonable time.

Failure to remove racially offensive or other discriminating comments may contravene Irish anti-discrimination and racial discrimination legislation.

Where a person alleges that a comment is defamatory, discriminatory or offensive and requests its removal, An Garda Síochána must, as soon as reasonably possible, review and if necessary, remove the comment.

In circumstances where the offence is particularly grave, or is from poster with a history of failing to adhere to An Garda Síochána Acceptable Use standards (see Section 7), then consideration should be given to blocking that poster from the site.

Where An Garda Síochána makes a comment on a social media platform that is considered to be discriminatory and/or offensive to a member of the public and the member of the public concerned asks that the comment be removed, then it is incumbent

on the original poster and/or moderator to ensure that comment is removed and done so as quickly as possible.

Copyright

There may be licensing or copyright issues that either prevent the posting of external copyrighted material onto the social media site, or require payment to do so. Any reproduction of material without the consent of the copyright holder (the person/organisation who created the material) may be a violation of copyright.

Garda staff must understand and comply with the copyright requirements placed on the material they put onto their social media site. Site owners are responsible for any breaches of copyright on their social media site. Although a copyright notice (i.e. the symbol ©) does not need to be placed on a work before it is protected by copyright, it does demonstrate if the work is copyrighted.

Avoid placing external copyrighted material on An Garda Síochána social media sites.

All An Garda Síochána social media sites must carry the official Copyright and Disclaimer on their homepage.

Administrative Settings

Some social media sites contain administrative functions, which can assist moderation, for example:

- settings that limit the ability of contributors to submit offensive materials, by prohibiting the posting of images, video or hyperlinks
- filters and settings that hide from public view, limit or highlight defamatory, discriminatory, or offensive comments
- filters that create key word lists to auto-hide, flag or highlight words or phrases.

In setting automatic restrictions, take care to ensure that the restrictions do not unnecessarily limit the ability of the social media site to fulfil its objectives.

Negative Comments & Complaints

Possible Negative Comments/Postings – Quick Resolution

Some issues can be resolved immediately by providing non-confidential information that explains why an event occurred as it did. For example, a criticism of Gardaí driving while using a mobile phone can be resolved by explaining that Gardaí are exempt from the prohibition but should drive with care at all times. A Local Regional / Divisional / District moderator may be able to resolve a complaint that local Gardaí took three hours to attend to a call, by explaining that Gardaí were instead responding to a major fatal accident.

Posts made to An Garda Síochána social media sites by members of the public will from time to time contain negative comments and/or complaints. When reviewing negative postings, administrators and moderators of Garda social media sites must identify when a criticism may constitute a complaint.

In responding, do not be defensive or take negative comments personally. Thank the person for their feedback and remain friendly and courteous. Consider the issue before responding. Do not speak on behalf of An Garda Síochána or on topics outside your expertise without first seeking advice and authorisation. Avoid making any statement that could be seen as criticising An Garda Síochána or Government policies.

Possible Complaints – Other

If the negative comment appears to be a complaint, administrators and moderators should contact the author and advise them of the options to make a complaint.

Conflict of Interest

If the potential complaint creates a conflict of interest with the administrator or moderator who receives the posting, then the posting must be forwarded to the moderator's supervisor for processing.

8. EVALUATION & DECOMMISSIONING OF OFFICIAL SITES

Assessing Effectiveness

On-going Evaluation

The evaluation of social media sites should include analysis of benchmarks which may include the following:

- success or failure measured against the agreed objectives of the site
- time spent administering the site – cost in terms of the workload on staff members compared with the benefits
- the effectiveness of the administrators and moderators in managing the site
- extent of two-way engagement achieved
- quality of content posted by An Garda Síochána
- the quality and tone of comments posted by the public
- number of visits to the site
- feedback from users – positive comments and complaints, problems or other negative experiences generated by the site, especially feedback that demonstrates whether the site or activity was successful or not in meeting the objectives
- opportunities for further development or enhancements.

An official An Garda Síochána social media site will typically seek to achieve one or more of the following:

- awareness - increase the awareness by the public of An Garda Síochána and events or incidents in the community
- engagement - foster community engagement with the organisation
- influence - influence community opinion and behaviour
- action - mobilise the public to take action (e.g. reporting crime and assisting Gardaí).

The Director of Communications/Chief Superintendent/Superintendent or authorised nominee must:

- institute ongoing review processes by moderators to ensure the currency, accuracy and appropriateness of content and contact details. The frequency of reviews will primarily depend on the risk that any out of date or defamatory material, or reports of crime, poses for police operations and responsibilities
- include the review process in the Local Management Accountability to ensure that moderation takes place, including the management of identified corrective actions.
- provide Garda Press & Public Relations Office with administration/access rights to the social media site

Closing Down a Site or Activity

When decommissioning any official An Garda Síochána social media site or activity, consideration should be given to:

- reviewing which threads or comments should or should not and can or cannot be deleted
- managing the content and links to any other websites
- addressing any licences or contracts associated with the site
- migrating any necessary content to other sites
- ensuring that users are advised of the closure of the site or activity
- complying with records management policies and processes
- undertaking account closure process

Appendix One

Suggested Content

Where possible, provide information that is immediately relevant to the local community or a specific target audience. For example, ask the public to report information about a crime via the Garda Confidential Line or Garda Station, or provide crime prevention advice that is applicable to the average person.

To assist members / civilian staff in identifying appropriate content for posting to their social media sites, the following topics are recommended.

Crimes

Suggested crime related topics include:

- keep a look out for....
- can you help us?
- successes - good arrests
- warnings of possible criminal or suspicious behaviour (e.g. stalkers or bag snatchers).

Only use crime statistics provided by Central Statistics Office (C.S.O).

Appeals

Direct requests for information from the general public or a specific group, including:

- missing persons and property
- cold case appeals relevant to the local area
- persons of interest
- witnesses

Emergencies

Provide information on emergencies that could impact on members of the local community. For example, provide information on floods, power blackouts, road closures or delays.

Corporate Information

Media releases issued by the Garda Press Office, and information on An Garda Síochána internet sites that relate to the local community or specialist units, are options for selecting content for social media sites. These two sources offer the advantage of containing information that is already corporately endorsed for public distribution.

Safety and Security

Proactive safety and security messages, consistent with the position of the Garda Spokesperson, if relevant:

- community safety — promoting responsible behaviour in connection with alcohol, road safety, school safety, outdoor venues and licensed premises (parks, beaches, pubs and clubs)
- crime prevention — personal security, home security, vehicle security, business security and fraud prevention.

Garda or Corporate Campaigns

Promote relevant campaigns that are being run by individual Units / Section or the organisation such as traffic operations, major sporting events, St. Patrick's Day, major outdoor events or campaigns on mobile phones and driving.

Events and Community Programmes

Provide information on significant events that could impact on the local community such as music festivals and sporting events. Provide advice on potential traffic issues, crowd management, crime prevention and safety. Major events include:

- seasonal issues such as major sporting and outdoor events.
- promotion of community programs such as Neighbourhood Watch
- Community Policing / Local Neighbourhood meetings - upcoming meetings and the outcomes from previous meetings.

General Interest

- Good work by members of An Garda Síochána in raising money for charity.
- Sporting success by a member or team of An Garda Síochána.
- Awards given to Gardaí (eg local recipients of bravery awards).

APPENDIX TWO

National Sites Management

Content on National Social Media Sites

Official postings to An Garda Síochána's national social media sites are primarily the responsibility of the Garda Press Office; in particular the Garda Press & Public Relations Office staff may also liaise with other appropriate stakeholders to obtain information for posting, or to answer questions or clarify information posted by members of the public.

Content on the national social media sites is subject to the requirements of this policy in conjunction with HQ Directive 35/2012, "Internet & Electronic Mail Policy – Version 3" and the accompanying document entitled "Guidelines to staff on the personal use of Social Media" (TBC) available on the Garda Portal, the Data Protection Code of Practice for An Garda Síochána, Official Secrets Act 1963 and An Garda Síochána Act 2005.

National Site Moderating and Review

Moderators must ensure that postings are regularly reviewed so that out-of-date posts are removed, potentially offensive or defamatory posts are quickly removed, and any crime reported is appropriately processed.

APPENDIX THREE

Responding to Comments on social media

