



Walton Athletic Club Social Media Policy (if you wouldn't do it offline, don't do it online)

To whom does this guidance apply?

This guidance applies to all members of Walton Athletics Club and those associated with the club in any way; i.e. parents/guardians of athletes, coaches and volunteers.

Why do we need a policy and guidance?

To provide clarity on what is and what is not appropriate when using social media. This policy and guidance highlight the key things to remember; clarify the boundaries and potential issues; and empower people to use social media responsibly. It is intended for those who may be unfamiliar with social media, as well as experienced users.

When accessing and contributing to social media, you are faced with immediate decisions about acting in a responsible and safe manner. You need to think carefully before you post any comments or opinions and ensure that your usage does not conflict with the values of the club. By keeping these values in mind when using social media, you will be protecting both the Club's reputation and your own.

Social media is not a private forum and often you may think you are posting to a private pre-selected audience, but anyone accessing your posts and contributions can easily copy and forward them on to others, potentially accessing a far bigger audience than you had intended. Once you share something online you lose control of its security, it cannot be taken back and it is no longer private. It is important to remember that what you do online may impact on your membership/association with the club, the reputation of the Club and all those associated with the Club. To put it simply:

Think before you post!

What is social media?

Social media consists of online IT platforms where you can generate, contribute, and share content including text, pictures and videos. Here are some examples (this list is not exhaustive):

- Social networking sites where people can interact with others and share information, usually in real time. For example, Facebook or LinkedIn.
- Video and photo sharing websites which allow interaction but specifically by sharing photos or videos (although they may provide a space for comments). For example, YouTube or Flickr.
- Blogs which allow you to write long accounts of your daily life and/or a specific topic (this could be done through your own website or through a site such as Blogger).
- Micro-blogging, which is similar to blogs but limits the number of characters you can type. For example Twitter.
- Wikis and online collaborations which allow users to easily add, modify, or delete content in an online database and are used for knowledge sharing, note taking and working collaboratively. For example, Wikipedia.
- Online forums and discussion boards where users can hold conversations by posting messages onto the site (some of these are just general topics, and others centre around specific areas of interest). For example, Netmums or online multiplayer games.

- Online instant messaging applications. For example, BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) or WhatsApp.

The nature of social media websites means that there is cross-over between these definitions. For example, Twitter can be classed as both a micro-blogging site and a social networking site.

Social media is a great way to engage and communicate with family and friends as well as share information and experiences with a variety of online communities.

Responsibility

The very nature of social media means that once posted online, information is in the public domain, could reach a very wide audience and could stay there forever.

Apply the same rules of interacting with people in the online community as you would when commenting through any other medium, whether that is putting something on a noticeboard at work or talking to your friends/colleagues in a public place.

You are responsible for anything you post online. This includes content which has been added by others but which you may choose to share through your own social media.

Make sure you read and follow the Terms of Use/Rules of Engagement for the social media sites that you use.

If you think somebody has posted something which is inappropriate you should report this to the site owners. If an inappropriate post has been made by someone associated with the Club, you should report this to one of the Club's parent reps or the Club's Welfare Officer. Take care not to inflame or implicate yourself in the situation by getting drawn into an online argument.

Respect

Show the same respect for others that you would if you were interacting face-to-face. Consider that sometimes actions are amplified online because they are accessible by so many people.

Things to think about before you post:

- Could your post be perceived differently by other people including those associated with the Club? These may not be your intended audience but anyone could potentially view your posts.
- Could it risk the safety or security of you or others? Again you cannot be certain who is viewing your posts so think about how the information could be used by somebody with a different agenda to yours.
- Could it affect the personal privacy of others? For example, this could be done by naming somebody in your post.
- Is social media the appropriate communication channel for what you are trying to say? Whilst using social media can be very effective, sometimes a quick chat, phone call or email might be more appropriate.
- Could your judgement be temporarily affected? For example, in the heat of the moment.
- Show respect for the fact that people have different levels of online expertise and not everyone will use social media for the same reasons. For example, some people may not wish to interact socially online, this is a personal choice.

Official Representation

If you are authorised by the Club to represent it online, you should follow the principles highlighted in this guidance. Ensure that you disclose and comment only on information for which you have authorised permission and ensure that the information which you are sharing is accurate and complies with the Club's policies. Information and passwords linked with the Club's social media accounts belong to the Club and remain the property of the Club even after a person is no longer associated with it.

Misuse

As with any communication channel, problems can arise if social media is used inappropriately and this may lead to action being taken by the Club. Examples of inappropriate use could include:

- Bullying/harassment: Online bullying and harassment is equally as serious as if it had been offline. Examples could include using threatening or abusive language and posting crude jokes or derogatory comments.
- Posting offensive comments which are inconsistent with the Club's standards and values.
- Posting inappropriate material which brings the Club into disrepute.
- Posting derogatory/defamatory comments about the Club or those associated with the Club. A defamatory statement gives false information which damages the reputation of a person or the Club. This could include re-posting information that had originally been shared by others. In re-posting you can personally be held liable for the post as if you had posted it yourself.
- Using social media to spread rumours or repost inappropriate comments about the Club, its members, and those associated with the Club.

Don't use social media as a channel to air your Club-related grievances or issues, always use the appropriate channels. Once something has been said online, it stays online and this could result in reputational damage for yourself and/or the Club.

Action by the Club

Should the committee become aware of a potential misuse of social media they should follow these steps:

1. If informed by a third party, request to see evidence of the breach e.g. inappropriate post, viewing inappropriate material.
2. Speak to the individual responsible for the breach (if a young athlete, speak to his/her parent or guardian), giving consideration to the following factors:
 - What action would be appropriate if the breach was committed off-line? It is important to not unduly 'inflate' the severity of a situation because it took place through social media. Consider the situation before reacting.
 - Was the individual aware of the policy? Have they done it before?
 - When alerted to the issue did the individual apologise and remove the offending comment?
 - Did the individual continue a conversation string after the initial post?
3. If, after discussing the breach with the individual/their parent or guardian, the decision is to take the matter further, it should be referred to the WAC committee to decide what action is appropriate. This could be any of the following:
 - If a member of Walton Athletic Club committed the breach, a verbal or written warning, temporary suspension from club activities, or (in extreme circumstances) revoking his or her membership with immediate effect (membership fees will be refunded on a pro-rata basis).
 - If a parent/guardian or a member of Walton Athletic Club committed the breach, the associated athlete may receive a verbal or written warning, temporary suspension from club activities, or (in extreme circumstances) revoking membership with immediate effect (membership fees will be refunded on a pro-rata basis).
 - If a volunteer/coach/anyone else associated with the Club committed the breach, may receive a verbal or written warning, temporary suspension from club activities, or (in extreme circumstances) severing their association with the Club with immediate effect.

Safety

Staying safe online is a really important consideration when using social media. The hints and tips below will help you stay safe when using social media.

- **Learn the rules** of each social media site before using it. Be mindful that social media sites often update their guidelines, and it is your responsibility to keep up-to-date.
- **Be aware of hyperlinks** within emails or websites. Know their intention and who they are from.
- **Use strong passwords** to protect your personal social media accounts from being hacked into and consider changing them regularly.
- **Check your privacy settings.** Using the strongest privacy settings will help you keep your information safer. You should check these settings regularly.
- **Keep your personal information private.** For example, do not disclose your date of birth, location or contact details - these could make you vulnerable to others including criminals.
- **Be wary of posts that are offering something too good to be true,** trust your instincts if something seems suspicious. Be alert to scam messages that are designed to trick you into disclosing information that will lead to defrauding you or stealing your identity.
- **Be wary of links posted on social media sites or sent to you,** malicious code (malware) spreads rapidly around online social networks. Many URLs are 'obfuscated' meaning the full address of the website cannot be seen until the link is clicked on. They may appear as a link to a reputable site but actually take you to a site containing malware.
- **Ensure your personal equipment has up-to-date, reputable security software** when connecting to the internet to help you stay safe online.

Summary

Social Media is an important means of communication with millions of people choosing to interact online. When using social media be responsible in your actions, respectful of others and clear about who you are representing.

Think before you post. Don't forget: if you wouldn't do it offline, don't do it online.

1st January 2019