



VICTIMS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

&

PEACE IV

Guidance Note on Social Media

G12/VSS

Version 1.0

Issued: December 2017

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### **Annex 1 - General Rules**

### **Annex 2 - Managing social media in the workplace guidance**

## 1 Introduction & Background

- 1.1 The purpose of this Guidance Note is to assist VSS funded organisations to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn.

This Guidance Note outlines the standards VSS require of VSS funded organisations when using social media and the actions that will be taken in respect of non-adherence to social media protocol.

- 1.2 There are many benefits of using social media:
- It can help organisations engage with the public and be more transparent and accountable.
  - Social media/networking can give organisations the ability to communicate with wider audiences.
  - It can be used positively to raise awareness of the services provided by an organisation.
  - It can promote partnership working and enable greater collaboration between organisations.
  - It can support the promotion of the activities of the organisation.
- 1.3 **Annex 1 – General Rules** of this Guidance Note provides a list of general rules which should be adhered to when using social media.
- 1.4 This Guidance Note applies to the use of social media regardless of the method used to access it - it covers static and mobile IT/computer equipment, as well as smartphones etc.

## 2 General Principles

- 2.1 The overall vision of VSS is “**to improve the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors.**” All organisations in receipt of VSS funding have demonstrated that they contribute to this aim and that they share the values of VSS outlined below:

**TRUST** - Working confidentially, impartially and respectfully with victims and survivors and others to develop and sustain an open and honest relationship

**UNDERSTANDING** - Listening to and learning from victims and survivors and others

**RESPONSIVE** - Continually developing our people and services through growth and innovation

**ACCOUNTABLE** - Applying good corporate and clinical governance to all that we do

- 2.2 As a general principle all organisations must behave in a manner which is professional and in line with the vision and values under which VSS funding was provided.
- 2.3 All organisations should consider the following before posting any content on social media:
- **Is it legal?** – posting any inaccurate or defamatory content about any individual or organisations could result in legal action.
  - **Terms and Conditions of Grant** - is the post contrary to the terms and conditions of grant funding?
  - **Health and Wellbeing of victims and survivors** - is the post likely to cause distress and anxiety to individually named victims and survivors?
  - **Reputational Damage** – is the post likely to cause reputational damage to the VSS and/or the funded organisation? Does it detract from the professional support and services being provided to victims and survivors? Is it contrary to the vision, values and principles of the Victims and Survivors Service and the overall aim of the PEACE IV Programme which seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors?
  - **Leadership** – is it acceptable for an organisation in receipt of VSS funding to 'improve the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors' to post content that may cause upset and distress? Organisations in receipt of funding from VSS should at all times show leadership in the promotion of VSS values.
- 2.4 Particular attention should be paid to not posting or promoting content which may be considered discriminatory, harassing, derogatory, or defamatory about any other victims and survivors as defined under the NI Victims Order 2006, the Victims & Survivors Service and our partners within the community and voluntary sector and the statutory sector.
- 2.5 Social media is not an appropriate platform to raise issues or grievances.

If you have any concerns or issues about any other victims or survivors as defined under the NI Order 2006 or any organisation funded by VSS, please bring them to our attention. There are a number of ways you can do this:

1. Informally through your Programme Officer or any member of VSS staff.
2. Through the VSS Whistleblowing Policy.  
[Information and Useful Downloads for Funded Organisations | Victims & Survivors Service | Victims & Survivors Service Northern Ireland | VSSNI](#)
3. Through the VSS Complaints Policy.  
<http://www.victimsservice.org/contact-us/complaints-and-feedback/>

### 3. Specific Responsibilities

- 3.1 VSS recommends that the organisation nominate one employee or volunteer to have responsibility for posting material to the organisations social media platform, in the organisation's name and on its behalf.
- 3.2 Senior management and/or the Committee should agree an approved list of social media platforms that are permitted to be used.
- 3.3 The nominated employee or volunteer should read and understand the VSS Social Media Guidance Note and the implications to the organisation of non-adherence to it.
- 3.4 If you are a Board Member/Committee Member, an employee or a volunteer of a VSS funded organisation, the same rules as outlined above are expected to be followed on your own personal social media where the content you are sharing /commenting upon or interacting with is related to the work of your organisation.
- 3.5 Within 3 months of the issue of this Guidance Note, each VSS funded organisation should develop its own Social Media Policy and send to VSS for approval. [Annex 2 – Managing Social media in the workplace](#)

### 4 Breaches

- 4.1 VSS will take very seriously any misconduct on social media. We will monitor key events and victims' issues on social media. However, it is not possible to proactively monitor every instance. Therefore, when breaches of this Guidance note or any other VSS Operating Rules are brought to our attention, the VSS will investigate and if appropriate may take action as detailed in [Section 5](#).
- 4.2 VSS require all funded organisations to comply with the broad range of legislation which should be considered in relation to all social media communications.

This legislation includes, but is not limited to:

- The Computer Misuse Act 1990
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Malicious Communications (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (interception of Communications) Regulations 2000

- Electronic Communications Act 2000
- Communications Act 2003
- Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (unfair Dismissal)

## **5 Investigation**

### **5.1 Stage 1 – Informal**

Breaches of this Guidance Note or any other VSS Operating Rules will be primarily investigated by the funded organisation's Programmes Officer.

The Programmes Officer will prepare a report, taking into consideration the factors outlined in [Section 2](#) and [Section 4](#) with one of two possible outcomes determined:

- No case to answer – no further action required, or,
- Breach of the social media protocol has been identified therefore a first warning will be issued by the Programmes Manager.

Depending on the nature of the breach, a temporary suspension of funding may be implemented pending investigation.

### **5.2 Stage 2 – Formal**

If a second breach of this Guidance Note or any other VSS Operating Rules occurs the circumstances will be investigated by the Programmes Manager.

The Programmes Manager will prepare a report, taking into consideration the factors outlined in [Section 2](#) and [Section 4](#) with one of two possible outcomes determined:

- No case to answer – no further action required, or,
- Breach of the social media protocol has been identified therefore a second warning will be issued by the Head of Corporate Services.

### **5.3 Stage 3 - Final Warning & Cessation of Funding**

If, after investigation VSS finds that a third breach has occurred of this Guidance Note or any VSS Programme Operating Rules, a final warning will be issued.

Depending on the nature of the breach, a temporary suspension of funding may be implemented pending investigation.

Investigation will be completed by the Programmes Manager.

The Programmes Manager will prepare a report, taking into consideration the factors outlined in **Section 2** and **Section 4** with one of two possible outcomes determined:

- No case to answer – no further action required, or,
- Breach of the social media protocol has been identified. A decision to suspend funding may be taken by the Head of Corporate Services and/or the Chief Executive Officer.

5.4 Decisions to permanently suspend funding will be taken by the Chief Executive Officer.

## **6 Appeal**

6.1 Organisations can appeal the outcome of any investigation into breaches of this Guidance Note.

## **7 Conclusion**

7.1 VSS recognises that there are many benefits to using social media.

7.2 However at all times, we need to be aware of the responsibilities that come with it and to ensure we maintain standards of behaviour that reflect integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality, and above all, a commitment to supporting the health and well-being of all victims and survivors.

## Annex 1

### General Rules for Social Media Use

- **Think before posting. Check grammar and spelling. Ensure there won't be any negative effects of posting. This includes creating or encouraging confrontation and divulging sensitive information online.**
- Do not post, promote or share any abusive, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- **Never** disclose any information in relation to VSS or VSS service users, which is private or confidential. You are personally responsible for content you publish. Be aware that it will be public for many years.
- Avoid social media communications that may be construed in a way that could damage your organisation and/or VSS reputation, even indirectly. Social media may seem like an informal communication platform, however comments can be taken out of context.
- Refrain from posting anything that you would not like to be repeated. Think before you post and if in doubt, hold off and double check.
- Have a Social Media policy in place. This plan should detail who can access the social media account and the type of material and content they should be posting. This policy will ensure that any individuals using social media on behalf of the organisation understands their social media expectations and responsibilities.
- Funded organisations should always be mindful not to disclose official information, and not to take part in any public activity which compromises or might be seen to compromise the service delivered.
- You must have approval from a senior manager or committee member to post on the organisations social media account.
- Remember that posting content on social media should be an expression of your organisation and its values and ethos, not those of the individual posting.



## Annex 2

### Managing social media in the workplace

There are ways that you can effectively manage your employees' use of social media so that you can acquire the benefits without causing damage to your business.

#### Develop a social media policy

By creating a social media policy, your employees' and volunteers' will be aware of the organisations boundaries and expectations.

It also helps employees draw a line between their private and professional lives and helps you to effectively manage performance.

A social media policy also helps to protect your organisation against liability for the actions of your employees and ensures you comply with the law on discrimination and data protection.

A social media policy should include:

- **Definition and purpose of policy** – outline what the policy is about and who it applies to – including those using work-related social media and those who access it in a personal capacity.
- **Why use social media** – describe the benefits to the organisation e.g. more effective engagement with customers, promoting products.
- **Roles and responsibilities** – who will oversee social media activity and take overall responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the different activities.
- **Using work-related social media** – what the limitations are as to what can be discussed, commented on or promoted via social media to avoid potential problems or reputational damage.
- **Personal use of social media** - description of what is seen as acceptable personal use of social media during work.
- **Personal use of social media outside work** – highlighting that your employees need to be mindful of their contributions and what they disclose about your organisation even when they're at home, using their own equipment, in their own time.
- **General rules for using social media** – including examples of inappropriate content and terms of use.
- **Monitoring use of social media** – you must ensure that any monitoring is carried out in compliance with relevant legislation.
- **References to other relevant policies** – e.g. disciplinary procedure or anti-bullying policy.
- **Sanctions** - where it is believed that an employee has failed to comply with the policy, they will face the organisations disciplinary procedure.
- **Ongoing review and update** – provide details of who will be responsible for reviewing the policy and when this will be done.