



Social Media Policy

A comprehensive guide for social media use for Sheffield Methodist District's channels and how team members should behave on their personal social media.

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis but at least once a year. Sheffield Methodist District will amend this policy, following consultations with District Chair, District Leading Team and District Communications Officer where appropriate. All staff and volunteers will be notified of updates.

This policy is intended for all staff and volunteers of Sheffield Methodist District. Before engaging in social media activity, you must read this policy, which contains guidance that will help you adhere to our standards. This policy is non-contractual and is there for guidance.

Date of last review: June 2026

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Introduction

What is social media?

Social media is the collective term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create, share and interact with content (words, images, graphics and video content), as well as network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Twitch and TikTok.

Why do we use social media and what can we use it for?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating Sheffield Methodist District's work. It is important for designated staff and volunteers to participate in social media to engage with our audiences and stakeholders, contribute to relevant conversations, and raise the profile of Sheffield Methodist District's work, using the charity's corporate accounts. Some staff and volunteers may also support the work of the Methodist Church using their personal accounts, and many will have social media accounts for personal use.

Social media helps us to:

- ☐ Share our news and updates with our audiences
- ☐ Engage in conversations
- ☐ Raise awareness of important issues and challenges
- ☐ Advertise job and volunteering opportunities
- ☐ Build an online supportive community
- ☐ React to quickly changing situations and topics

Why do we need a social media policy?

Social media is a fast-moving online world, where nuance and context can be easily lost. While social media brings the Methodist Church to a wide audience, it can also present risks. We want to ensure that all staff and volunteers using social media represent and reflect Sheffield Methodist District in the best way possible. It is also important to mitigate risks (such as reputational or legal issues) associated with the use of social media to protect our people, work and reputation.

While we encourage the use of social media to support our communications/mission strategy, we have important standards, outlined in this guidance, which we require everyone to observe. The difference between a personal and professional opinion can also be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to Sheffield Methodist District's work. Publication and commentary on social media carry similar obligations and is subject to the same laws as other kinds of publication or commentary in the public domain.

Failure to comply with this guidance could expose Sheffield Methodist District to reputational damage as well as putting our people at risk.

Responsibilities and breach of policy

Participation in social media on behalf of Sheffield Methodist District is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect.

Breaches of policy or inappropriate behaviour may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Please contact the District HR Officer for further information on our processes. Staff and volunteers who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach policies should seek advice from the District Communications Officer.

Application

This guidance applies to all social media platforms used by staff and volunteers in a professional and personal capacity.

This guidance also applies to online blogs, podcasts, forums, and messaging based apps, such as WhatsApp. Social media can be accessed in various ways, including from a desktop or laptop computer, tablet or smartphone.

Point of contact for social media to post on Sheffield Methodist District's social media accounts

Our District Communications Officer is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have questions about any aspect of these channels, please speak to the District Communications Officer. Only permitted members of the district team can post to Sheffield Methodist District's official social channels.

Which social media channels do we use?

Sheffield Methodist District uses the following social media channels:

Facebook: [@sheffieldmethodist](#)

Instagram: [@sheffieldmethodist](#)

WhatsApp: <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Vb749dVG8I5KDbwNPT2P>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@SheffieldMethodistDistrict>

Policy ownership

The District Communications Officer is responsible for authoring and updating this document. The policy must be approved by the District Chair and District Leading Team and reviewed every year, unless a significant change requires the organisation to check the policy before the next review date. All staff and volunteers will be notified of updates.

Code of conduct

- I will not insult, harass, bully or intimidate individuals or organisations
- I will respond to others' opinions respectfully and professionally
- I will not do anything that breaches my terms of employment/voluntary role
- I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly using provided guidance
- I will disclose conflicts of interest where I am able
- I will not knowingly post inaccurate information
- I will link to online references and original source materials directly
- I will be considerate, kind and fair
- I will always ensure my activity does no harm to the organisation or to others
- I will champion Sheffield Methodist District

Using Sheffield Methodist District's social media channels — appropriate conduct

1. Know our social media guardians

The District Communications Officer is responsible for setting up and managing Sheffield Methodist District's social media channels. District Chair has overall ownership of these accounts and only those authorised to do so by the District Communications Officer will have access to these accounts.

The District Communications Officer will uphold best practices for channel security with secure passwords that regularly change. Never give out the passwords for our channels without express permission from the District Communications Officer.

2. Be an ambassador for our brand

Staff and volunteers must ensure they reflect Sheffield Methodist District's values in what they post and use our tone of voice. The Methodist Church brand guidelines set out our style that all staff and volunteers should refer to when posting content on Sheffield Methodist District's social media channels.

3. Always pause and think before posting

When posting from Sheffield Methodist District's social media accounts, you must respond to comments in the voice of the Methodist Church and not allow your own personal opinions to influence responses. Staff and volunteers must not reveal their personal opinions via our accounts by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'reposting' as Sheffield Methodist District, unless it is clear that you are doing so as an individual staff member or volunteer as part of an approach agreed with the District Communications Officer (e.g. as part of a 'takeover' of the account). If you are in doubt about Sheffield Methodist District's position on a particular issue, please speak to the District Chair.

4. Ensure brand consistency

Staff or volunteers must not create or manage any other social media channels, groups or pages on behalf of Sheffield Methodist District without express permission from the District Chair and the District Communications Officer and training. This is to ensure brand consistency and the appropriate safeguarding and monitoring processes are in place.

5. Remember the bigger picture and focus on the benefit

Staff and volunteers must make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for Sheffield Methodist District and The Methodist Church. All content must accurately reflect Sheffield Methodist District's and The Methodist Church's agreed position.

6. Bring value to our audience(s)

Those responsible for the management of our social media accounts should answer questions as swiftly as possible to help and engage with our service users and supporters.

7. Seek permission to share

If staff or volunteers wish to contribute content for social media, whether non-paid for or paid for advertising, they should obtain guidance and permission from the District Communications Officer.

8. Obtain consent

Staff and volunteers must not post content about individuals without their, or their guardian's, express permission. If staff or and volunteers are sharing information about individuals or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from Sheffield Methodist District. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff and volunteers must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.

9. Put safety first

It can be challenging working on social media and there may be times where staff or volunteers could be subject to unpleasant or abusive comments directed at the charity, our work or people. We encourage

everyone who is on social media on behalf of the district to be aware of our safeguarding and wellbeing practices to deal with online abuse and consult with the District Chair, District Communications Officer or Regional Officer for Safeguarding where necessary.

It is also vital that Sheffield Methodist District does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials in pursuit of social media engagement. For example, a video of a stunt or visiting an unsafe location.

10. Stick to the law

Staff and volunteers must not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.

11. Political social media content

As a charity, we can 'campaign to achieve our purposes, but we can't have a political purpose or undertake any political activity that is not relevant to our charitable purpose.' (Government Guidance: Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities (CC9)) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9> .

We will look to official Methodist Church and JPIT statements for guidance on sharing political content.

12. Check facts and be honest

Staff and volunteers should not automatically assume that material that's shared or included in any post is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification – for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it. But think first about how to manage any risk to the district and its brand in doing so by consulting with the District Communications Officer to craft the response.

13. Seek advice for complaints

If a complaint is made on Sheffield Methodist District's social media channels, staff and volunteers should seek advice from the District Chair and District Communications Officer before responding. If they are not available, then staff and volunteers should speak to the Connexion Media Team.

14. Know what to do in a crisis

Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the reputation of the Methodist Church.

The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the district or our people. The District Communications Officer regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of the district so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis, the District Communications Officer will refer to the Crisis Communications Policy, consult with the District Chair and speak with the Connexion Media Team.

If any of our people becomes aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on Sheffield Methodist District's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the District Chair and District Communications Officer immediately. It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to report complaints or comments that could escalate into a crisis or have serious implications for the charity. Only the District Chair or District Communications Officer is permitted to amend or delete content in a crisis.

15. Timings, schedules and rotas

The District Communications Officer works Monday to Thursday (24 hours per week) and social media is populated and comments are responded to within that time frame. For out of hours or weekends the District Communications Officer does monitor activity and will respond where appropriate.

16. Use AI appropriately

AI can be a valuable tool that can support our communications activities. However, the Methodist Church advises approaching AI with caution, focusing on safety, transparency, and data protection (GDPR/PECR). <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/digital-church/digital-training-blog/embracing-ai-with-care-and-caution-interim-guidance-for-methodist-churches/> If you are unsure about AI consult the District Communications Officer.

17. Handover ownership if your role changes

You must hand over ownership of the group/page/account you manage to another appropriate staff member if you change roles or if you leave the district.

Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct

Personal social media use by our people can sometimes be attributed to the charity or bring other risks for the district or individual staff or volunteers. This guidance does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which risks or conflicts might arise. Sheffield Methodist District's staff and volunteers are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are considerate of district's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Separate your personal views

Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive Sheffield Methodist District. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of The Methodist Church. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about Sheffield Methodist District's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "Views are my own" or "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Sheffield Methodist District's positions, policies or opinions."

2. Discuss risks and conflicts of interest

Staff and trustees who have a personal blog, social media profile or website which indicates in any way that they work for The Methodist Church should discuss any potential risk or conflicts of interest with their line manager. Similarly, staff or trustees who want to start blogging and wish to say that they work for The Methodist Church should discuss any potential risk or conflicts of interest with their line manager.

3. Protect your personal reputation

Think about your personal reputation as well as the district's. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be the first to correct your own mistakes.

Remember that if you have a public profile with the district, your personal social media accounts could be looked at by critics of the charity, and bear this in mind when posting.

4. Refer press enquiries

If a staff member or volunteer is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to Sheffield Methodist District, they should talk to the District Communications Officer before any reply is given.

5. Keep your political activity separate from the charity

When representing Sheffield Methodist District, staff and volunteers are expected to uphold the district's values. Staff and volunteers who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from The Methodist Church and understand and avoid potential risks and conflicts of interest. Staff should also inform their line manager and the District Communications Officer about any such political activity, and trustees should inform the Chair.

6. Protect your privacy

Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. Remember that a simple 'like' can draw attention to your personal accounts. What you publish is widely accessible and could be around for a long time, so do consider the content, and your privacy, carefully.

All staff and volunteers who wish to engage with any of Sheffield Methodist District's social media platforms are strongly advised to ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their own privacy. All staff and volunteers should keep their passwords confidential and change them often.

In their own interests, staff and volunteers should be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers.

7. Help us to raise our profile (where appropriate)

We encourage staff and volunteers to share posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support the district and the work we do. Where appropriate and using this guidance, we encourage staff and volunteers to do this as it helps to raise our profile and share stories.

8. Avoid logos or trademarks

Never use district's logos unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos must be requested from the District Communications Officer and any content created must adhere to The Methodist Church's brand guidelines. If permission is granted, content must be approved by the District Communications before publishing.

9. Staying safe online

It can be challenging working on social media and there may be times where staff and volunteers could be subject to unpleasant or abusive comments directed at the Methodist Church, our work or people. We encourage everyone who is on social media to be aware of our safeguarding and wellbeing practices to deal with online abuse and consult with the District Chair, District Communications Officer and the Regional Lead for Safeguarding where necessary.

Staff and volunteers should be vigilant regarding suspicious content or links and must not reveal personal, confidential or sensitive information about themselves, or our people. Staff and volunteers should be wary of fake accounts that may claim to be Sheffield Methodist District and should immediately notify the District Chair and District Communications Officer.

Care must also be taken to ensure that any links to external sites from our social media accounts are appropriate and safe.

Please consult our relevant policies and procedures for the safeguarding <https://www.sheffieldmethodist.org/what-we-do/safeguarding.html>

Further guidelines: using social media in a professional and personal capacity

Defamation

Defamation is when a false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published in print (such as in media publications) or online (such as Instagram Story, Facebook Live, Snapchat post). Whether staff or volunteers are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring The Methodist Church into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

Copyright law

It is critical that all staff or volunteers abide by [the laws governing copyright](#), under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, when representing the charity. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

Confidentiality

Any communications that staff and volunteers make must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that the district is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date, or information from people who the district has worked with which is private.

Discrimination and harassment

Staff and volunteers should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Sheffield Methodist Church's social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief.
- Using social media to bully another individual.
- Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

Accessibility

In line with Sheffield Methodist District's equity, diversity and inclusion policy we endeavour to ensure our social media is as accessible as possible. This includes:

- Using plain English, accessible fonts and avoiding small text sizes
- Using contrasting colours
- Using subtitles where appropriate
- Using alt text for videos and images
- Explaining text contained in an image in the copy that accompanies it
- Following the Methodist Church's brand guidelines which have been designed to be accessible.

The Lobbying Act

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose but can never be party political. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law (often known as the 'Lobbying Act'¹).

Under the Lobbying Act, organisations (including charities which spend more than £10,000 across the UK on 'regulated activity' during the regulated period need to register with [the Electoral Commission](#) within the outlined windows for elections.

Regulated activity is any activity which could reasonably be seen as intended to influence people's voting choice, either for parties or candidates (which a charity could never do) or for categories of candidates (e.g. female candidates, or candidates who support Net Zero). During these periods, all campaigning activity will be reviewed by the District Chair and District Communications Officer.

¹ Set out initially in the [Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000](#), as amended by [the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014](#) and [the Elections Act 2022](#).

Use of social media in the recruitment process

Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with the Safer Recruitment Policy (<https://www.sheffieldmethodist.org/what-we-do/safeguarding/safer-recruitment/safer-recruitment-principles.html>) and associated guidelines. Any advertising of vacancies should be done through HR and promoted through approved channels.

Protection and intervention

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if a staff member or volunteer considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the District Chair, District Communications Officer, Regional Lead for Safeguard immediately. If someone is in immediate danger contact 999.

Under 18s and vulnerable people

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming or radicalisation. Where known, when communicating with vulnerable or young people under 18-years-old via social media, staff and volunteers should ensure the online relationship with [charity name] follows the same rules as offline.

Staff and volunteers should be aware that children under the age of 13 should not be encouraged to create their own personal social media accounts or engage with others and are not legally allowed to use social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram or X.

Staff and volunteers should ensure that vulnerable and young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online and given guidance on security and privacy settings as necessary. Staff and volunteers should also ensure that the site itself is suitable for the vulnerable or young person, and district's content and other content is appropriate for them. Please refer the district's safeguarding policy

All staff members and volunteers have a responsibility to do everything possible to ensure that vulnerable and young people are kept safe from harm. If you come across anything online that could mean someone is at risk, you should follow The Methodist Church's safeguarding policies <https://www.sheffieldmethodist.org/what-we-do/safeguarding.html>

Engaging on emotive topics

The Methodist Church may be involved in issues that provoke strong emotions. The emotive content we share via our social media channels can engage our audiences and help us achieve our communications goals. However, it is important to plan appropriately and consider potential reputational risks to the Methodist Church.

1. What social media channels are you currently using for communications?

Named Responsibilities

Team Member	Role	Responsibility	Contact
Sam Roberts	District Communications Officer	All social media/website/ media enquiries/YouTube/ whatsapp/canva	comms@sheffieldmethodist.org
Katrin Hackett	District Administrator	Website/Newsletter/ mailchimp/zoom/GDPR lead/ whatsapp has access to facebook/insta/ canva	admin@sheffieldmethodist.org
Alison Hill	Regional Lead for Safeguarding	Safeguarding	hilla@methodistchurch.org.uk
Dave Burton	IT	IT	d.burton@dronfield-methodist.org.uk
Neil Harland	Mission Enabler	MDSW facebook/ Can update district facebook/canva	mission@sheffieldmethodist.org
Vicky Atkins	Chair of District	Facebook/canva	chair@sheffieldmethodist.org
Andrew Crawford	HR	Linked In Facebook	HR@sheffieldmethodist.org