



The Charity Commission's Draft guidance: charities and social media

INTRODUCTION:

The recent [draft guidance on social media issued by the Charity Commission](#) was created following demand from the voluntary sector across the UK. We are pleased to see this guidance being considered by the commission as we know this is a challenging subject for many of our members and the need for a guide on how to approach social media policy is evident.

The guidance is not intended to restrict charities using social media platforms and the content will not change the law for trustees to consider. The guide is intended to provide direction for organisations using social media and to give trustees a better understanding of their responsibilities and potential risks.

The draft guidance in its current format addresses the following:

1. How to set a social media policy
2. Managing potential risks in posting social media content
3. Engaging on controversial topics
4. Campaigning or political activity on social media
5. Fundraising on social media
6. Staying safe online

CONSULTATION RESPONSE FROM WCVA:

WCVA issued a response to the consultation using the dedicated questionnaire provided by the Commission. Our full response is available below.

Q1. Having read the guidance how clear are you about the level of oversight trustees need to have about their charity's use of social media?

WCVA response: More clarity on what constitutes a governance risk when it comes to social media. Examples may help with this so that it is clear what types of issues are operational vs requiring trustee decision.

Q2. Do you think the expectations set out in the guidance of the level of oversight that trustees should have of the charity's social media use are reasonable?

WCVA response: There isn't enough detail on what issues trustees need to make decisions on. This could end up being a very onerous task that would put people off from being trustees. It may be more appropriate to advise that trustees have decisions to make on the social media policy for staff and that trustees are then only asked to review issues when complaints are made and there is clear evidence of policy not being followed.

Q3. Do you think the guidance covers all the relevant issues that charities need to think about to help them use social media?

WCVA response: There could be more encouragement for charities to use their voice on social media to speak up about controversial topics that are directly linked to their charitable purposes. There seems to be a lack of detail on what charities should be encouraged to use the platforms for which could present an issue. The guidance should also refer to the challenges around trolls and fake accounts on social media. A definition of what constitutes 'social media' would also be helpful, eg, does this include WhatsApp which is being used more and more by organisations to share messages with their service users.

Q4. Is what the guidance says about an individual's personal use of social media – whether a trustee, employee, or volunteer – helpful?

There should be more detail on how charities can protect their staff as well as ensuring their staff are sharing views in line with the organisation. More clarity is needed on roles of individuals based on whether their social media platforms are being used for personal or professional purposes and whether their accounts are private or public. There is a risk that staff and trustees could be put off sharing any messages in support of their charity, which would be detrimental to organisations where their target audiences are regularly using social media. There should be some guidance on how charities should go about overseeing personal social media channels and there should be an indication of trust for staff using social media to help raise awareness of their charity aims. There is a danger that policies could infringe on free speech and privacy. It might be more appropriate to suggest that all staff using social media where they are sharing messages that could impact the charity have a statement in their biography that states their opinions are their own and furthermore ensure on a regular basis that all staff understand the organisation's social media policy, what they deem to be acceptable then having trust that staff adhere to this. Organisations should then have a process defined within the policy on how they deal with any complaints about controversial statements made by staff members on social media if they are reported to the charity.

Q5. As a result of reading the guidance how confident would you be that you know what to include in a social media policy?

WCVA response: The guidance needs more detail and clarity on the points above to enable charities to develop policies with clear processes.

Q6. Please provide us with any other comments you have on the draft guidance:

WCVA response: It is important that all voluntary organisations using social media have a policy, however it is likely that this guidance will disproportionately impact on smaller organisations who have less capacity. It is also likely to increase workload for infrastructure bodies being asked to advise organisations on this. This might take some time

for infrastructure bodies to adapt to and any further support and guidance to help infrastructure bodies deal with these enquiries would be really helpful. The guidance as it stands could potentially be off-putting for staff, trustees, and prospective trustees in using their social media channels to help raise awareness of their organisation's work. The guidance might also deter charities from speaking up on broader issues that may not necessarily relate to their day-to-day work, for example commenting on developments in the news such as the earthquake in Turkey and Syria or the War in Ukraine. It would be helpful to have more detail on how to delegate decision making with some examples based on different sized organisations, to help direct charities in developing their social media policy. A template or example policy for various size organisations as part of the guidance would be really useful.

SUMMARY AND FURTHER DISCUSSION:

The introduction of guidance for social media from the Charity Commission is very welcome and we feel the section headings reflect the challenges faced by the sector. We feel the draft is a good starting point, but we would like to see more detail and examples to help guide users. We are in regular contact with the Charity Commission and are happy to work with them on developing this guidance. Social media is a great tool to help charities share information about their work and therefore we would like to see the guidance encourage organisations, their staff and trustees to use social media whilst being aware of the responsibilities and risks.

We encourage our members and the wider sector in Wales to get in touch if you have any questions or thoughts you would like to share in relation to social media guidance. Please get in touch with Elen Notley at enotley@wcva.cymru.

Elen Notley
Marketing and Membership Manager
March 2023
enotley@wcva.cymru