

## Guidance for social workers on checking young people's social media accounts

### 1 Introduction and purpose

- Surveillance of a service user's social media accounts is one method of gathering relevant information for the purpose of safeguarding children and carrying out other CFHS duties. However, it is important that this surveillance is carried out lawfully and in an open manner. Social workers must refer to the *Use of social media sites by social care and safeguarding staff* policy available on Tri x. [Use of Social Media Sites by Social Care and Safeguarding...](#)
- CSFH will only carry out surveillance openly and with the consent of the service user so that authorisation under RIPA is not required. These procedures set out what social workers need to do in order to gather information from social media sites in an open and lawful manner.

### 2 When can social workers access social media accounts?

- Chapter 3 (8.1) of the London Safeguarding Procedures allows social workers to access open-source information on social media accounts for the purposes of safeguarding children, either for assessment or for carrying out a child protection enquiry.
- Social media accounts of young people who are thought to be at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation or who are missing can be accessed by the Missing and Exploitation team in order to safeguard their welfare, gather information on locations and potential perpetrators to inform the council-wide child exploitation strategy or to locate a missing child.
- CLA social workers carrying out age assessments of UASC where there is reason to believe they are over 18 years may access social media accounts in order to establish the young person's age or where there are concerns that the young person is a victim of trafficking and modern slavery.

### **3 Main principles**

- Accessing a service user’s social media account must be authorised. For cases involving safeguarding risks or possible exploitation, trafficking or grooming, this will be at a strategy discussion or child exploitation response meeting. For cases involving age assessments, access must be agreed by the CLA service manager based on a reasonable belief that the young person is over the age of 18.
- Where possible, social workers should obtain the written consent of the service user before accessing accounts and their consent recorded using the format shown in Appendix 1.
- Access should be a “one-off” as continuous access could be considered “covert surveillance”.
- Access of accounts should only be by the designated officer and only using Camden devices and profiles/accounts that have been set up for this purpose (see section 4).
- Only open-source information that is publicly available may be gathered; no attempt should be made to *friend or follow* the service user.
- Only relevant information can be gathered and any information must be used only for the specific purpose (see section 5).
- There must be a record on the MOSAIC case file of any surveillance including dates, media accounts accessed and the information gathered.
- Social workers should be aware that the veracity of information gathered from social media accounts may be questionable and may need to be verified by other sources.

### **4 Designated officers and accounts**

Access of social media accounts may only be carried out by following designated officers using the named Camden accounts so that it is clear to the service user that it is Camden that is viewing their information.

### **5 Information to be gathered**

Information must be gathered only if it is relevant to one of the following purposes:

- information relating to safeguarding risks and exploitation to be used in assessment or s47 enquiries in order to ensure the safety and welfare of individual children
- information on the potential whereabouts of a missing child in order to locate them
- information needed to establish whether a young person seeking asylum is under 18
- information and intelligence to the MASE group and police on the activities of perpetrators, locations of exploitative activities and recruitment for sexual exploitation.



### Consent to social media surveillance

Camden may need to access social media accounts of parents and children/young people to gather information for the following reasons:

- We have concerns about the safety and welfare of a child and need to carry out an assessment or child protection enquiry.
- We are concerned about a young person who is at risk exploitation or is missing.
- We need to carry out an age assessment on a young person who is believed to be over the age of 18.

We will monitor the following accounts (please list the name of the person and social media account):

We will monitor the accounts for the following information (please state):

This information will be used for the following purposes and shared with the following people

Consent of parent/young person

Name:

Signature:

Date: