**Social Media Policy**

**Introduction**

New Milton RFC (NMRFC) understands that social media has become increasingly popular in recent years. It can be hugely beneficial in disseminating information about the rugby club and/or specific age groups.

NMRFC club policies in this area seek to address and clarify the areas of content permission (from parents/individuals), control (distribution/promotion of content) and respect (individual rights not to publish content/removal when requested and respectful behaviour in social media channels by individuals).

**Explanations of ‘Image & video’, ‘Children’, ‘Parents’ and ‘Safeguarding’ and ‘Controlled Social Media Channels’.**

Social media is defined as the websites and applications (apps) that enable users to create and share content or, to participate in social networking. Social media platforms are digital and mobile technologies that turn communication into active dialogue either in controlled (official NMRFC channels) or open (public) forums.

Children are young people under the age of 18.

Parent(s) is a term that may include the child’s biological or adoptive parents, or be representative of their caregivers, guardians, or person with responsibility for the child at that time e.g, a teacher.

Safeguarding relates to the protection of children from harm or damage by using appropriate measures.

Control and ‘controlled social media channels’ mean social media channels that are administrated and controlled by NMRFC. For example, the official club Facebook channel or, age group WhatsApp groups that are managed and run by DBS cleared managers or coaches. Public channels are those not administered or controlled by NMRFC volunteers, members and officials.

**Approval**

The club’s committee approved this policy in February 2022. It was updated to reflect new technology trends in February 2024.

**Applicability**

This policy is applicable club wide i.e, to everyone associated with NMRFC and to all age grade and adult playing groups. It should be read in conjunction with NMRFC’s policy on Image and Video Recording which is available on the NMRFC website. There is overlap in some policy areas and, for ease of explanation, some policy threads are repeated in this document.

**Aims and objectives**

The aim of this policy is to address NMRFC club social media interactions in a positive way. It sets out how we wish to engage with the technology. It seeks to help people understand the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of using social media channels. In particular, it attends to safeguarding aspects that relate to children and social media.

**Social media channels & platforms**

Social media is media in which people can post (publish), comment on, share (distribute) and react to (like) content that is either self-generated by the user, e.g., by using a mobile phone to capture an image/video or, generated by NMRFC or, shared by other users, either in a group or individually.

There are a wide range of digital media channels that social media platforms utilise. These include websites, apps, forums, blogs, mobile applications, and podcasts. Common platforms include FaceBook (meta), WhatsApp (meta), Instagram (meta), X (formerly Twitter), YouTube (Google), TikTok, Snapchat (meta) and Spond. Content posted can include text (emails, messages etc) images, memes, videos, and live streaming video.

**Key guiding principles (summary)**

* All stakeholders (players, parents, volunteers, members etc) at NMRFC have a responsibility to ensure that they protect the reputation of the club and treat both internal and external stakeholders with dignity and respect. This applies in online (digital) channels (social media) as well as offline (in person).
* NMRFC require all stakeholders to use social media positively and responsibly. Share your achievements, celebrate success, be gracious in defeat, be honest, and enjoy communicating and interacting. Negative, offensive or otherwise controversial comments and content may have unintended consequences. It is important to protect NMRFC from allegations and misinterpretations which can arise from the misuse of social networking platforms. If in doubt, we request that you don’t post about, share/repost, or respond to inappropriate content (see Policy Guidance section). Instead, report concerns to the Club Safeguarding Officer or, a NMRFC Committee member.
* Safeguarding children is imperative and a key responsibility of all members and volunteers. It is essential that everyone at NMRFC considers this aspect and acts responsibly when using social media platforms as part of their involvement with the club (see Safeguarding and Social Media, below).
* A child’s status relating to image/video recording is recorded by their parents in the RFU’s Game Management System (GMS). Consent must first be sought (and approval granted) before posting any image or video content in social media. In a situation where one parent does not give consent for publication, this is considered a withdrawal of consent.
* Where images or video recordings of children are taken and distributed in social media, control of distribution and circulation must be by a DBS checked volunteer i.e., manager or coach for that age group. This person must have the ability to remove content if requested.
* Please think before you post or share. If in doubt, don’t post. Seek advice from the NMRFC Committee prior to posting. Content shared in private groups may become public at any time. Engage with content only in a way that you would be comfortable with if this were shared in the public domain. Content can be taken and used out of context and may reflect poorly on the club, damaging its reputation. Be aware that offensive or controversial content can be shared very quickly and, in serious cases, can prove ruinous to the reputations of individuals and organisations.
* Serious instances of policy abuse by any member of NMRFC on social media platforms will be referred to The Club Committee on a case-by-case basis. This may result in disciplinary action being taken against the individual member(s) associated with reported posts, comments and interactions or, those who have disseminated offensive and inappropriate content whilst acting as a member of NMRFC.
* Where there is abuse of social media policies (and/or Image & Video recording policies), the club reserves the right to block individuals from NMRFC controlled digital media platforms and channels. Because social media issues can escalate very quickly, the club’s officers may decide (and reserve the right) to block individuals as a temporary precaution or, as soon as they become aware of problems and whilst they seek to establish facts, before deciding on the course of action to take.

**What constitutes inappropriate content?**

NMRFC prohibit the posting of any content that deals with, alludes to or, seeks to address protected characteristics such as race, religion or belief, age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, sex or sexual orientation. Whilst representing NMRFC, or whilst using social media channels and platforms associated with NMRFC, do not engage in social media discussions pertaining to these areas. Any instance of abuse associated with these areas will result in action being taken by The Club Committee. Think carefully before posting, commenting on, liking, or sharing content that may lead to unintended consequences.

When representing NMRFC, we ask that you avoid gossip, slanderous comments (video/audio), disruptive comments, threatening comments, and anything that could otherwise be construed as abusive, harassing, bullying, obscene, libellous or, an invasion of another’s privacy (this includes posting, sharing or commenting on text, audio, photographs and video).

**Policy guidance in detail**

This policy is designed to provide helpful, practical advice to members in respect of using social media effectively and positively. As a club we encourage the responsible and positive use of social media.

NMRFC recognises that we all live in a society that promotes free speech and freedom of expression. However, we would caution you that anything you post has the potential to enter the public domain, be taken out of context and reflect poorly on you and/or the club. Consequently, we require that all social media commentary relating to NMRFC is of a positive nature. We request that you refrain from any negative comments about, players, parents, coaches, managers, referees, clubs, associated organisations and stakeholders etc.

Partaking in public disputes via social media is discouraged. Any grievance towards either NMRFC or opposition club individuals including players, managers, coaches, referees or other club members should be raised in person or directly via email and not via social media. Please be respectful at all times. The Club Committee are here to hear grievances, support members

and to find solutions to problems. Please ask or email a committee member before airing negative or otherwise unproductive comments/views via social media.

Content that deals with any commercial or press promotion must be discussed with the Club’s Committee. This includes any content distribution requests from external stakeholders. Any commercial promotion must first be discussed and approved by The Committee.

Whilst the club realises that a certain amount of good natured ‘banter’ may take place on some platforms, we would request that any language used is moderated. Please remember that these platforms can be viewed by a range of age groups and by all genders.

**Reporting misuse. If in doubt, report it!**

If negative comments (or comments likely to offend) are made, we would ask you not to comment, respond, share or repost these in any way. We would

also ask that you do not ignore this content. Content that could offend, or otherwise be viewed as controversial or potentially damaging to NMRFC, should be reported to the Club Safeguarding Officer in the first instance. If in doubt, report it. Serious instances of social media platform abuse associated with NMRFC will be referred to The Club Committee for action on a case-by-case basis. The Committee will take appropriate action to protect the club’s reputation and that of its members, volunteers, children and anyone else who is directly linked to the club.

**Safeguarding & social media**

Adult volunteers and adult members involved with the club should refrain from communicating privately with children in social media. Members should immediately notify the Club Safeguarding Officer of any concerns in this area or, where there are concerns around the sharing of content by adults relating to children. The club reserves the right to notify and work with the appropriate authorities where there are safeguarding issues and incidents. Open, public communication between adults and children via official club social media channels is permissible. Please be respectful and positive in your communication.

**Children, digital content & Control**

(See also NMRFC ‘Image & Video Recording Policy’ document).

We understand the need for parents to take photos of their children and their child’s team. However, these images must only be taken once agreement is reached between the child/parent and other parents in the age group. Managers can check the status and image permissions of all children in their age group (regarding the taking and recording of their image) in the RFU’s Game Management System (GMS). Care must be taken to exclude images of children where parental consent has not been granted. We recommend that the status of all age group players is established at the beginning of the season by managers and coaches, in particular.

Before taking images of groups of players, coaches/managers/volunteers should first ask the group and make reference to NMRFC’s Social Media Policy, namely that any image/video taken may be shared via club controlled social media channels and/or in age group related social media groups. For example, after a festival, we may share images of the age group team in the NMRFC Official Facebook Group or, post images in the age group’s WhatsApp channel or, via Spond. Any issues relating to this area, particularly the removal of content at the request of a parent, need to be acted upon immediately by age group managers/coaches and should involve the Club Safeguarding Officer if/when required or, when problems arise.

Only DBS cleared individuals are allowed to administrate, distribute/circulate images or recordings of children in NMRFC branded/controlled social media channels. This includes age group related WhatsApp (parent/coach/manager) or Spond channels. Handover (or ownership changes) of groups must be to DBS cleared individuals. Those in control of groups must have the ability to remove content from those channels and remove/block individuals from the groups. Group membership needs to be reviewed periodically (we recommend twice a season) and any participants no longer associated with NMRFC e.g., parents of children who no longer play, removed from groups.

Guidance for social media usage relating to children at NMRFC:

* Do not record or share images or video content of NMRFC players under the age of 18 without first being clear on their image permission status from the coaches/managers of that child’s age group. If in doubt, do not take images or recordings.
* Do not post images and video content that cannot be retrieved and removed quickly if/when required.
* Do not post images/video or other content representative of children involved with NMRFC in public social media channels. Content should focus on playing, training and associated activities. Avoid identifying children (other than your own) by name in images or video content. Posting and sharing images/video in club-controlled group channels such as NMRFC age group WhatsApp / Spond volunteer led groups is permissible if consent is granted by all parents in the group. Please be mindful of causing offence when posting non-rugby related content in these groups. If in doubt, don’t post content that may offend. Report concerns about any individual’s behaviour in these groups to the Club Safeguarding Officer.
* Do not record or post images or video footage of opposition players without first establishing from opposition club officials (managers/coaches etc.) that this is permitted. Permission must be sought and agreed prior to recording. This permission must be sought in line with their club’s policy in this area.
* Cease taking images and recording video content if asked to do so by NMRFC officials or opposition officials whilst it is established why this is impermissible. If asked to delete related images or video content by NMRFC club officials or opposition officials, please do so immediately. This is normally in response to known safeguarding issues and risk management.
* It is, of course, acceptable to post and share content outside of club social media channels that focuses on, or relates solely to, your own child when they are representing NMRFC. However, please be aware of all the points above and all relevant policies (including our Image & Video recording policy) when sharing content outside of official club controlled channels.