Rickmansworth Hockey Club

Social Media and Digital Communications Policy

Date Adopted: November 2026
Review Date: November 2027
Policy Owner: Penny Lawrence, Club Welfare Officer (CWO)

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1. Purpose and Scope

Rickmansworth Hockey Club is committed to providing a safe, welcoming, and positive environment for all members, particularly children and young people under the age of 18 (U18s).

This policy sets out clear standards for all digital communication—including social media platforms, messaging apps (such as WhatsApp), team management apps, emails, and SMS—in accordance with **England Hockey (EH) SafeGuard** policies and **NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU)** guidance.

This policy applies to all club officials, committee members, coaches, umpires, team captains, managers, volunteers, adult players, parents/guardians, and junior members.

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2. Core Safeguarding Principles

- **Transparency:** All digital communication involving U18s must be open, transparent, and accountable.
- **No One-to-One Contact:** Adults in a position of trust (coaches, captains, team managers, umpires, committee members, and volunteers) must never engage in private, one-to-one digital communication with an U18 player.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents and guardians are the primary point of contact for U18 members. Any digital communication with an U18 must include a parent/guardian or be conducted via an approved parent-linked club platform.
- **Respect and Conduct:** Online behaviour must reflect our club's Code of Conduct. Cyberbullying, harassment, discrimination, and inappropriate language will not be tolerated.

3. Approved Communication Channels

- **Junior Teams (U8 to U16):** All club communications must be directed exclusively to parents/guardians via the club's official team management platform (**[Pitchero / Teamo / Spond]**) or official club email accounts. Under-16s must not be added to team WhatsApp groups or contacted directly by club officials.

- **Youth Players in Senior Teams (Ages 16–17):** Where 16- and 17-year-olds train or play with adult squads, communications should primarily use the club's official team management app. WhatsApp groups may only be used if the strict rules in Section 4 are met.

- **Direct Emails and Texts:** If a club official needs to email an U18 directly (for example, regarding county/talent academy nominations or umpiring appointments), a parent/guardian or the Club Welfare Officer must be copied into the message.

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4. Rules for Team WhatsApp Groups (Ages 16–17 Only)

Because WhatsApp displays personal mobile numbers to all group members, strict controls apply whenever an U18 is included in a senior team chat:

1. **Written Parental Consent:** Before a 16- or 17-year-old is added to any team WhatsApp group, the club must hold signed written consent from their parent or guardian.

2. **Mandatory Parental Presence:** At least one parent or guardian must be added to the exact same WhatsApp group alongside the U18 player to oversee communications.

3. **Approved Group Admins:** Groups must only be created and administered by at least two DBS-checked, EH-safeguarding-trained club officials (e.g., Team Captain, Coach, or Welfare Officer). Group settings must restrict adding new members to **Admins Only**.

4. **Hockey Logistics Only:** Team groups must be used strictly for match logistics, availability, training updates, and transport. Social/alcohol-related discussions, inappropriate jokes, offensive language, and selection debates are prohibited.

5. **Pinned Safeguarding Notice:** Every group containing U18s must display the club's standard Safeguarding Rules in the group description and as a pinned message.

6. **Handling Direct Messages:** Adult players, captains, and coaches must never privately message an U18 on WhatsApp. If an U18 messages an adult directly, the adult must not reply one-to-one; instead, they must respond inside the main team group (where the parent is present) or start a group chat including the player's parent/guardian.

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5. Official Club Social Media Accounts

- **Account Management:** Official club accounts (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube) must be set up using a club email address and managed by at least two designated, committee-approved administrators.

- **Personal Accounts:** Coaches, captains, umpires, and volunteers must not follow, friend, tag, or exchange direct messages (DMs) with U18 players from their personal social media accounts.

- **Interactive Features:** Direct messaging features on official club social media accounts should be disabled where possible, or monitored regularly by two administrators. Any message received from an U18 must be answered with a parent/guardian copied in or redirected to an official club email address.

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6. Photography, Video, and Identifying Information

- **Consent:** Photographs, livestreams, and match footage featuring U18s may only be captured and published if valid written parental consent is recorded on the club's membership system.

- **Protecting Personal Details:** Posts featuring U18s must never pair a young person's full name with personal identifying information such as their school, home address, email, or phone number.

- **Appropriate Imagery:** All images and videos must show players in appropriate hockey kit and focus on the sport rather than individuals.

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7. Guidance for Players and Parents/Guardians

- **U18 Players:** Junior members are expected to use social media responsibly, treat teammates, opponents, and officials with respect online, and report any uncomfortable or inappropriate messages to a parent/guardian or the Club Welfare Officer immediately.

- **Parents and Guardians:** Parents/guardians are encouraged to monitor their child's online activity, ensure their contact details and consent preferences are kept up to date on the club system, and actively participate in any senior team WhatsApp group their 16- or 17-year-old joins.

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8. Reporting Breaches and Safeguarding Concerns

Any breach of this policy, suspected cyberbullying, or inappropriate digital contact involving an U18 must be reported immediately to the Club Welfare Officer.

- **Club Welfare Officer:** Penny Lawrence
- **Email:** penny.lawrence66@btinternet.com
- **Phone:** 07717037543

If the Club Welfare Officer is unavailable or the concern involves them, reports can be made directly to the **England Hockey Ethics and Welfare Team** via the England Hockey SafeGuard Reporting Form or by emailing **safeguarding@englandhockey.co.uk**.

Failure to comply with this policy will be addressed under the club's disciplinary procedures and may result in suspension or removal from club roles or membership.

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9. Policy Sign-Off

Approved by [Club Name] Committee:

- **Club Chair:** ____Jess Martin _____ **Date:** ___20/11/26_____

- **Club Welfare Officer:** ___Penny Lawrence___ **Date:** ___20/11/26_____