Code of Practice for Employees in the use of Social Networking Sites and Electronic Media (including policy on mobile phones)

1. Protecting yourself and others in the use of Social Networking Sites and electronic media

This code of practice provides employees with guidance to ensure that they are taking the necessary steps to protect themselves and others against Cyber bullying.

It also provides employees with practical guidance on how they can ensure that their conduct in relation to social networking sites and electronic media is accordance with the code of conduct for all Local Government employees as interpreted by Staffordshire County Council in relation to social networking sites and electronic media.

2. Cyber Bullying

Definition:"Cyber bullying is the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and internet, deliberately to upset someone else" [Cyber bullying: Guidance issued by the DCSF 2007]

Staffordshire County Council supports the view that cyber bullying represents a cruel, dangerous and inescapable form of bullying that causes humiliation, stress and trauma to its victims, and so believes that cyber bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

3. Legislation

Although bullying is not a specific criminal offence, criminal law exists to prevent certain behaviours. These behaviours may constitute harassment, or cause a fear of violence. Sending indecent, grossly offensive or threatening letters, electronic communications or other articles to another person is illegal

Other legislation protects against the publication of obscene articles or data (e.g. over a school intranet), hacking into someone else's computer, invading their privacy, damaging their reputation or engaging in anti-social acts.

4. Protecting yourself against Cyber Bullying

There are simple measures that you can take to safeguard against cyber bullying:
- being careful about personal information and images posted on the internet
- not leaving your mobile phone or personal computer around for others to gain access or leaving details on view when left unattended
- choosing hard-to-guess passwords and not letting anyone else know them
- being aware of the risks of giving your mobile number or personal e-mail address to others
- making use of blocking facilities made available by website and service providers
- Not replying or retaliating to a bullying message
- saving evidence of offending messages
- making sure you inform others of any mobile phone or online bullying or harassment in accordance with relevant policies.

5. What action you can take

You can report any incidents in relation to cyber bullying in the work environment in accordance with county council's Harassment and Bullying policy. If you make a complaint you have a right to have it investigated, and to seek assistance from managers, colleagues or trade unions in so doing. .

Cyber bullying complaints will be investigated to obtain any evidence available and you can support this process by:

- logging any incidents
- noting the dates, times and content of messages and, where possible, the sender's identity or web address.

Taking an accurate copy of the whole web page address, for example, helps service providers to locate offending material. Such evidence may be required also to show to those who need to know, including police. Saving evidence of texts and images on the device itself is useful. It is important they are not deleted.

In the non work environment it may be appropriate to report incidents of cyber bullying direct to an internet service provider or mobile phone company. Content may be blocked and / or removed if it is illegal or breaks the provider's own terms and conditions. Some providers issue conduct warnings to users and are able to delete the accounts of those who have broken the rules.

Some cases may raise allegations against staff and in such cases; immediate referral should be made via the First Response Team to one of the Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO) who will provide initial advice and guidance.

6. Code of Conduct

As a Condition of Service, all employees are expected to maintain conduct of the highest standard such that public confidence in their integrity is maintained

This employment obligation is also reinforced, in relation to certain posts, by a duty to comply with other external standards – as applies, for example, to Social Workers under the GSCC Codes of Conduct, or the requirements of professional bodies such as the Law Society.

You are reminded that care should be taken with the personal use of Social Networking Sites to ensure that the integrity of the county council is maintained and to this end you should ensure that you take account of the expectations of all employees with regard to all aspects of the employees code of conduct when posting information, messages, pictures or video footage these may include:

1. Bringing the County Council into disrepute

2. Confidentiality

3. Political restrictions

Care should also be taken of the legislative measures that already exist e.g. Invasion of privacy, harassment,

Learning Platform

When given their username and passwords the children will be taught the rules to ensure the platform is used appropriately. The children will need to accept the Acceptable Usage Policy before they can start using the learning platform. The children will not be allowed to post any comments that are that are inappropriate or offensive to other pupils or members of staff. The teacher setting up the tasks will monitor the comments that are posted and remove any that are inappropriate.

7. Safeguarding

In order to safeguard yourself and potentially vulnerable adults and young people who you may work with you should ensure that your behaviour with regard to social networking sites is consistent with the standards of behaviour expected in normal day to day interactions with vulnerable adults and young people.

Communication that is undertaken via social networking sites is comparable to 'one to one' interaction in other contexts, and individuals should avoid any activity which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions. You are reminded that it is expected that you:

a)   Always act in such a way as to promote and safeguard the well being and interests of service users and colleagues.

b)   Take all reasonable steps to ensure that relationships with service users and colleagues are such that there can be no suggestion of impropriety whether by word or action.

c)   Develop a friendly relationship between employee and service users, with clear boundaries. It is deemed an abuse of that professional relationship for an employee:

• To enter into an improper relationship with a service user
• To show favour towards a particular service user
• To act in a threatening or aggressive manner or to use foul, abusive or profane language
• To endeavour to exert an undue influence with regard to personal

Attitudes, opinions or behaviour which is in no way connected to the   work of the Service.

d) Take all reasonable steps to ensure that no action or omission on your part or within your sphere of influence is detrimental to the condition or safety of service users

In order to preserve these standards of behaviour it is recommended that you decline any request from an existing or previous service user to be a "friend" on your Social Network Site.
It is inappropriate to request contact with an existing or previous user of the service via this medium or any other form of electronic medium.

It is acknowledged that you may accept a service user as a "friend" unintentionally and where this occurs you are advised to ensure that you remove this access as soon as you become aware of their status. You should do this in a way that does not jeopardise your professional relationship and should inform your Line Manager, if any significant conversation or activity occurs.

All employees are advised to ensure that when setting up social networking sites they should make full use of the range of tools which enable the access to personal information to be restricted.

8. Other Policies

Harassment & Bullying at Work Policy
ICT Acceptable use Policy
Whistle Blowing Policy
Local code of Conduct for County Council Employees

N.B. Whilst this code is for the guidance of employees, wilful disregard of any part of it could lead to action under the approved disciplinary procedures; but disregarding the code is not of itself a disciplinary offence.

Mobile phones may be used in settings, as long as their use is appropriate. The use of a mobile phone must not detract from the quality of supervision and care of children.

Mobile phones have a place in settings, especially those without a landline, and on outings. They are often the only means of contact available in settings and can be helpful in ensuring children are kept safe.

The statutory guidance listed in the Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage states that providers should take contact telephone numbers and a mobile phone on outings.[1] The provider, as part of the risk assessment, will decide how to keep safe personal numbers that may be stored on the phone.

The safety of children in childcare provision is paramount. Casual or inappropriate use of mobile phones by staff may pose a risk, if staff are distracted from caring for children.

When developing safeguarding policies and procedures, registered providers should set out clearly how mobile phones and other potential distractions should be handled in their settings.

If inspectors observe, or become aware of, staff using a mobile phone for non-essential purposes they will consider drawing this to the attention of the manager, supervisor or registered provider. They will also consider if the staff member was meeting the needs of the children, when using the telephone, and consider the impact on inspection judgements, including setting an action.

The Department for Education published guidance on the use of mobile phones at: www.childrens-centres.org/SupportDocuments/MobilePhonesInEYSettingsNov09.doc.

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[1] Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, DfE, 2008; http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/151379.

We do not use our own mobile phones for taking images of pupils or our own cameras. (E Safety)

Teachers do have their own mobile phones in school. They are not used during lessons (only in staff's own time). Taken on school trips for emergencies and for keeping parents informed.