

**Standards Committee - 10<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

**Report of the Head of marketing and communications**

**Social Networking Policy**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To inform the Standards Committee of the council's social networking policy, implemented in the New Year.

**Background**

2. Through the corporate communications team and with support from ICT services, Dudley Council has trialled social networking applications since January 2010. These include but are not limited to:
  - Blogs
  - Online discussion forums , including professional forums
  - Collaborative spaces , such as Wikipedia
  - Media sharing services , e.g. You Tube, and Flickr
  - Micro-blogging applications , e.g. Twitter
  - Facebook
3. The widespread availability and use of such sites provide great opportunities to communicate with a whole range of audiences in new ways. However, it is important to ensure that we balance this with our duties, legal responsibilities, and in line with the Council Plan.
4. A policy has been drafted in consultation with directorates that aims to ensure:
  - That the council is not exposed to legal and governance risks
  - That the reputation of the council is not adversely affected
  - That employees are provided with clear guidance on what is acceptable use and the consequences of breaching this policy
  - The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults is not compromised as a result of employees actions
  - That our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the council and reinforces the brand of Dudley.gov.uk

5. This policy covers the use of social networking applications by council employees, elected members and by partners or other third parties (including contractors) on behalf of the council. These groups are referred to collectively as 'council representatives' for brevity.
6. If any user is found to have breached this policy, they may be subject to disciplinary action in line with Dudley Council's employee improvement and disciplinary procedure and may invoke safeguarding procedures. If a criminal offence is considered to have been committed further action may be taken to assist in the prosecution of the offender(s).
7. References and related documentation

Document description	Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet Acceptable Usage Policy</li> </ul>	Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Dudley Safeguarding Children Board – Use of Social Networking Sites</u></li> </ul>	Guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Equality and Diversity Policy Statement Policy</u></li> </ul>	Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of conduct for employees</li> </ul>	Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee improvement and disciplinary procedure</li> </ul>	Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dudley Safeguarding Children Board – Safer Working Practice Guidance</li> </ul>	Guidance

## 8. Implications for the council

Social networking provides new opportunities to engage and communicate with local people, businesses and visitors and indeed to a global audience if appropriate.

Like all communication tools it has its advantages:

- Electronic communication
- A global network – open to all
- Can be instantaneous
- Creates powerful networking opportunities
- Available 24/7
- Can be fashionable and fad driven
- Can bring savings and efficiencies

and it's disadvantages:

- Damage to brand reputation
- Difficult to monitor
- Conversations can be dominated by a few

- Additional management overhead
- Being instantaneous
- FOI channel
- Don't get it right could lead to litigation
- Safeguarding
- Individual's right to privacy
- It's not the answer to everything

## **9. How is the council looking to promote social networking?**

All social networks are signposted from the Dudley Council website and conversely the website is referenced on all social networking sites.

The corporate communications team is holding social media workshops that council officers can attend to spread awareness and encourage a controlled roll out. An awareness raising session is also planned ahead of full council on 28 February which will be open to all members.

### **Finance**

10. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **Law**

11. There are no specific legal issues arising from this report, however all council communications should uphold the Dept of Communities and Local Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

### **Equality Impact**

12. This report takes in to account the council's policy on equality and diversity.

### **Recommendation**

13. It is recommended that the Committee note this report for information and the policy attached (at time of writing still out on consultation)



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Background papers:  
Social networking policy