

Social Networking - Code of Conduct

Rationale and context:

Over the past years the use of social networking sites such as Bebo, Twitter, MySpace and Facebook has become increasingly popular. Such sites are used to share information, photographs and news with friends across the world.

Whilst the use of such sites (known as social networking) has very many benefits there are potential problems concerning privacy and appropriate usage. These may include breaches of confidentiality, unsuitable language or images, and in some cases breaches of the law.

Examples of such problematic usage by employees (the definition of employees in this code of conduct extends to workers, contractors and volunteers) of publicly accessible social networking could be:

- referring to clients by name
- referring to business matters
- the use of derogatory or offensive language about clients or colleagues
- posting images of themselves in inappropriate dress or situations
- participating in illegal activities such as the sharing of indecent images of children
- partners or friends posting inappropriate comments concerning colleagues
- partners and friends posting images that show colleagues in situations which may not be in keeping with their professional status

This code of conduct is designed to protect employees and service users who may use such sites in their private lives. Whilst it is not intended to govern colleagues' private use of social networking, it does set out expectations around online behaviour that could affect professional standing, integrity and dignity.

What this code does not cover:

- Social contact between adult colleagues. However, employees need to be mindful of what they are posting and who can see it. This is important in respect of confidentiality, workplace relationships, and the fact that their online contacts may not appreciate the difference between private and professional comments.
- Online contact with young people made as part of professional duties.
- Membership of professional networks or forums, as these are usually covered by the professional body's own code of conduct.

- Membership of other chat rooms or forums, although in extreme cases legal restrictions may apply. Employees should, however, remember that what they say may reflect upon their professional lives and should moderate their comments accordingly.

Code of Conduct:

Employees:

- should not allow themselves to enter into online contact with adult clients or the families of such clients. “Friend” requests from adults in this context should be politely declined by explaining that it is against Council guidance, which is designed to protect employees and the public from abuse and misunderstandings.
- should not create web pages, groups or contact lists concerning professional activities carried out on behalf of Medway Council unless they have express written permission from their Assistant Director/Deputy Director to do so.
- should have absolutely no private online contact between and any young person (people) with whom they have a work-related relationship.
- should always log an securely record any online contact made as part of professional duties. This requirement extends to the use of instant messaging services and private chat rooms, where content can be stored by switching the system’s “history” setting on.
- are strongly advised to be careful about what they say online in contact with other young people such as relatives or family friends. This caution should apply to images or video material.

Staff privacy and dignity

Employees are strongly recommended to check that their online privacy settings only allow “friends” to see their profiles. It is also advised that as a general measure to protect their personal safety and identity, employees do not accept friend requests from people who are not personally known to them.

Employees may wish to ask friends to check before photographs are posted which may cause them embarrassment. Employees posting their own images should bear in mind the fact that any image can easily be downloaded and manipulated and they should choose which images they share accordingly.

It is recommended that employees do not post images that could be used to identify their homes or families.

All employees are advised to make themselves familiar with the parent/carer pages on the CEOP “Think You Know” site at www.thinkyouknow.co.uk