

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Resources
2.	Date:	12th October 2009
3.	Title:	Electronic Communications Policy
4.	Directorate:	Chief Executive's

5. Summary

To provide an update on the revision of the Electronic Communications Policy incorporating modern technology changes and the inclusion of access to social networking sites for business purposes.

6. Recommendations

- That the Cabinet Member for Resources note the progress made on the revision of the Electronic Communications policy including its circulation to employees and Elected Members.

7. Proposals and Details

The policy has been updated to provide guidance to employees and managers on the use of social networking sites and personal blogs following the ability to now access these sites for business use.

In addition the policy has been generally refreshed and updated in line with the progression of technology.

The following changes have been adopted following consultation with the Corporate Management Team, members of the E-Gov Board, Trade Unions, the Corporate Information Governance Group, Communication Officers and HR Business Partners :

1.5 Home Working

The requirement to activate the 'Out of Office' email function to provide alternative telephone numbers has been removed due to the need for employees to be contactable whilst working from home.

2.5 Social Networking Websites, Personal Blogs etc

This section is an addition to the policy.

With these sites becoming increasingly popular it is appropriate that guidance is provided to employees as to what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relation to information that is posted on the sites, this includes personal use on personal equipment.

Points 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 provide cautionary advice and guidelines to employees who are provided with access to these sites for work purposes as well as guidance for use in an employees' personal time using personal equipment. It highlights that all employees are ambassadors for the Council and any views posted on such sites could be deemed to represent the views of the Council and in turn bring the Council into disrepute which may result in disciplinary action.

Points 2.5.3 and 2.5.4 set out the process for requesting access to social networking sites for work purposes and conditions of access.

Other changes

Minor amendments have also been made to the Checklist of Do's and Don'ts as detailed in the policy.

A template for 'Out of Office' messages has been produced and is detailed in the policy as Appendix 5.

All sections that have been amended are underlined and marked in red. The revised policy is attached.

Communication of the Changes and Policy

A team briefing was issued on 10th September drawing attention to the changes to the policy and the fact that employees would receive a direct email on the subject and that

read receipts for this email would be monitored. To date 3027 have read the email out of around 4000 active email addresses. Those people for whom a read receipt has not been received are being contacted again by email to remind them to open the email and read the revised policy. An email specifically for Elected Members drawing attention to the policy was sent on 1st October.

8. Finance

There are no financial resources required to revise the policy however the financial implications of not providing up to date advice and guidance to support the use of new technology may lead to additional employee resources being required to monitor and investigate misuse.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Human Resources have recently dealt with a number of disciplinary matters arising from the use by employees of social networking both within the Council and on personal equipment which has had serious implications for their employment and impacted upon the reputation of the Council.

The risk of not promoting the ability to gain approved access to social networking sites, personal blogs etc limits the Council's ability to communicate with a wider audience and keep up to date with the use of modern technology as other Councils now communicate with their communities using such methods.

The amendments and inclusion of a section specifically relating to social networking sites and personal blogs provides the necessary guidance to protect both the Council and the employee from potential disrepute and/or litigation.

The Council has a duty to ensure that staff are correctly trained and advised in the use of technology.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda implications

The amendments to the policy support all the priority themes.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Consultation on the revised policy has taken place with Communications Officers, Information Governance Group, Trade Unions, Transformation Team, ICT, e-Gov Board and HR Business Partners.

Appendix 1: Electronic Communications Policy (amendments highlighted in red and underlined)

Contact Name:

Theresa Caswell, HR Officer, (82) 3710, theresa.caswell@rotherham.gov.uk

All enquiries to Kathryn Pease, HR Officer, (82) 3572, kathryn.pease@rotherham.gov.uk