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London Borough of Bromley
COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

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1. AIM

- 1.1 This document sets out the Council's Policy in relation to all forms of communication with the public, press, partner organisations, contractors, consultants and staff.
- 1.2 The policy is designed to clarify and explain the basic rules for making the best use of LBB's communication and information systems without putting staff, customers or data at risk.
- 1.3 It explains the Council's expectations and sets out general standards regarding communications.

2. CORE PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 The Council treats all people with equal respect, concern and consideration and recognises the valuable contribution made to the community by all individuals. We strive to ensure that this belief is embodied in the way we communicate with residents, service users and customers; in our employment practices; and in how we work with our partners and agencies in the community.
- 2.2 Being 'excellent' is a key part of Building a Better Bromley, and it requires staff to promote and protect the good name of the Council and abide by its corporate operating principles and REAL leadership values (Respect, Empower, Ambition, Learn).
- 2.3 The Council understands that employees have a right to a private life and has an expectation that employees should maintain reasonable standards in their own behaviour to uphold public trust and confidence in them. Employees should avoid conduct which is likely to bring the Council into disrepute and conduct themselves in a way that they would not lead any reasonable person to question their motives or intentions and should seek to protect and enhance the reputation of the Council at all times. When representing the Council in person, on the telephone or in written form, staff should always be aware of the way in which they are perceived. In particular, being aware that they should not make personal or political comment regarding Council policy which may bring into question their impartiality and professional integrity. The employment relationship between individual employees and the Council is based on trust and confidence which is a central part of every contract of employment.
- 2.4 Staff should be aware that their actions either inside or outside the workplace can potentially lead to their conduct being called into question and could result in disciplinary action being taken against them which could ultimately lead to their dismissal.
- 2.5 All employees are under a general duty towards the Council regarding confidentiality and must not, either during their employment or afterwards, use, disclose or distribute any information or data acquired in the course of their employment other than is necessary for the proper performance of their duties and responsibilities or as required by law.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 This Policy applies to all staff within the Council and sets the standards the Council expects in relation to all forms of communication.
- 3.2 Where partner organisations carry out work or activities on behalf of Bromley Council they may already have their own policies regarding communication standards, however, the Council's standards should be regarded as the minimum.
- 3.3 All staff with access to the Council network have access to an email account and to the internet. Many contractors and partners also have access to these systems. This policy applies to everyone who uses the Council's IT network and/or systems, including Councillors, all permanent or temporary Council staff, contractors and consultants.

4. MEDIA PROTOCOLS

- 4.1 All the Council's media contact will be professionally managed to meet the communications needs of the Council and of the media.
- 4.2 When the media approaches the Council, officers should immediately direct journalists to their Communications Lead. They should not engage with the journalist themselves. Only officers approved as media contacts by their Chief Officer, in agreement with the Communications Team, should be able to talk to the media. Officers designated as a 'spokesperson' on a specific or technical subject should again ensure that Communications Leads are consulted before any quotes are given to the media. All quotes must be confined to factual matters aimed at clarifying Council policy; it is not appropriate for officers to make subjective comments. Queries requiring a policy or political comment will be passed on to the relevant Executive Councillor to respond to. The principle of 'No surprise' applies here: your Chief Officer and the relevant Executive Councillor should be fully briefed before you talk to the media.
- 4.3 If you are contacted by the media, always contact your Communications Lead in the first instance. Staff should not engage with the media themselves.
- 4.4 For further advice on what to do if contacted by the media please contact Communications immediately on 020 8461 7911 or 020 8313 4390.

5. TELEPHONE CONTACT

- 5.1 The Council is actively promoting contact via the web as electronic communication becomes more and more the norm for many people who want to access information from their desktop and increasingly while on the move through mobile phones and tablets. Nevertheless, we need to continue to deal with a volume of phone calls.
- 5.2 Telephone calls should be dealt with promptly and courteously and staff should take responsibility for answering or directing the call appropriately. When employees are away from their desk, they should ensure that adequate arrangements are made for callers to be responded to in their absence.

6. WRITTEN ENQUIRIES

- 6.1 To be efficient and effective we need to make sure that we reply promptly to any written communications and that everything we write is clear and well expressed in plain language and provides sufficient information for our customers. All written communications should be factually accurate and reflect the Council's position, and properly filed for future reference.

7. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

- 7.1 Information technology, especially the Internet and email systems, offer powerful and cost-effective ways of doing business and increasingly, customers expect to communicate with us electronically. The Council has made a significant investment in information technology so we can process, store and share data more effectively.
- 7.2 However, developments in technology mean it is now extremely easy to share information instantaneously and easily using email or websites, giving rise to unique risks and real dangers that could potentially impact on the Council or an individual officer's reputation. It is essential, therefore, that employees exercise care and attention to ensure that any personal comments made are subject to the core principles in this policy.
- 7.3 The Council does not object to employees using internet browsing facilities for personal use out of core work hours or for quick reference during the normal day. However, staff must exercise discretion to ensure that this is limited and does not impact on business activities, nor should it be used for private gain or private commercial purposes. Inappropriate use of Council's electronic communications could result in disciplinary action.

Social Media

- 7.4 Social media and social networking sites are websites by which personal information or opinions can be presented for public consumption and websites which allow people to interact with each other. Examples of social media and social networking sites could be all internet presences including blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Web 2 , Bebo, YouTube and MySpace. This list is not exhaustive as new technology is emerging on a daily basis.
- 7.5 Staff are personally responsible for their communications on social media. This includes any media attachments such as photographs or videos. What staff publish on a social media site will be available for any member of the public to read for a long time. Staff should always think carefully about this when posting personal content and be mindful that privacy settings on personal social media accounts do not prevent individuals from forwarding or circulating information to others.
- 7.6 Staff should not place any information regarding their employer, their colleagues and pupils or people they come into contact with as part of their employment on a social networking or media site. Any derogatory remarks or comments about the Council or your colleagues or partner organisations could result in disciplinary actions.
- 7.7 Staff working in schools or with young people should take particular care that communication with those young people should only take place on a professional basis using the school's or the Council's communications systems. Staff working in schools should not place themselves in a position which will call into question their professional integrity and safeguarding responsibility.

8. SECURITY

- 8.1 If there is a need to share sensitive information a secure method of communication must be used. Failure to adequately protect sensitive data can have serious consequences, be subject to legal action, or in the worst case result in financial penalties for the Council.
- 8.2 Sensitive information includes:
- Personal data and sensitive personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 1998
 - Strategic business or financial data
 - Commercially confidential and contract information
 - Technical electronic data including account user names and passwords of line of business systems or the LBB network infrastructure.
- 8.3 Under normal circumstances, Royal Mail Special Delivery, or a commercial courier service will provide adequate protection for printed material, film or static images.

8.4 Electronic communications or 'data in transit' can be secured by one of a number of different methods depending on the sensitivity of the information, Details are available on One Bromley. If unsure please seek professional advice from the Information Systems Division.

8.5 To ensure clarity all electronic or paper documents containing sensitive information must be clearly and appropriately labelled to indicate the likely impact if lost, corrupted, or wrongly disclosed.

- PROTECT – minor or moderate short term impact.
- RESTRICTED – Significant or prolonged impact.

More details are available on One Bromley or from the Information Systems Division.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

9.1 This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to reflect the Council's priorities.

9.2 For further information regarding communications please contact Corporate Communications. For Human Resource related matters please contact HR Consultancy.

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