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<b>Title</b>	<b>: Child Protection and Information : Communications Technology – Guidance : for Carers</b>
<b>Ref. Number</b>	<b>:</b>
<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>: 28 August 2007</b>

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## **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

This Policy is to provide guidance to Foster Carers and Residential Homes' carers to assist them in providing safeguards to young people in their use of the Internet and other forms of Information Communications Technology such as electronic messaging and the use of digital camera technology on web cams and mobile telephones.

The Policy is proposed to promote awareness and to provide Carers with guidance to young people on the safe use of this Information Technology. It introduces an acceptable use Policy to which young people and their carers should subscribe before being provided access to such equipment in Care placements.

## **2. POLICY INFORMATION**

This Policy is intended to provide clarity about the use of electronic communications equipment in a manner that is safe and deters users from accessing inappropriate information.

The Policy applies to all Foster Parents, Residential Care staff and others who care for children on behalf of Telford & Wrekin Council. This policy will be brought to the attention of Private providers caring for young people on behalf of the Authority.

The Policy will also be brought to the attention of all young people who are looked after by Telford & Wrekin Council. They will be encouraged to accept the guidelines promoted in the Acceptable Use Guidance (attached).

### **2.1 Service-Specific Policy Information**

This Policy will be applied to Carers and young people served by the Children & Young People Portfolio. Those children and young people concerned will be Looked After by the Local Authority and resident away from their parental home.

### **3. BACKGROUND DETAILS**

Children are growing up with the Internet and other forms of Information technology as a part of their every day life. The internet is a vital tool that can bring communication, information, entertainment and commerce (buying and selling) to the user.

The growth of different electronic media in everyday life has however also led to global concern about child abuse images on the Internet. Abuse of children occurs using a range of media, such as digital cameras, computer web-cams, telephone and photographic images of children. These child abuse images on the Internet are naturally a major concern to parents, carers and all those working with children.

It is important to be mindful that any such images are instances of actual child abuse. They are not a passive act and the children portrayed are victims of crime and abuse.

However it is to be recognised that developments in information technology has transformed communications and is welcomed by young people who have adapted their thinking towards its perceived benefits. The internet is an incredible source of information to assist in research and educational tasks. Computers use search engines (such as Google or Ask Jeeves) to find a wealth of information on any subject. This can mean inadvertently being exposed to images that were not sought.

The system also enables virtual communication with a wide group of people through sites (such as Habbo Hotel or My Space). It is important to recognise that not all users are as they portray themselves. It is a common practice for users seeking to access young people to pose as fellow young people when they are, in fact, considerably older. These P2P (person to person) sites are open to abuse.

Information technology permits game playing and this can often be on an interactive basis and lead into developed friendships with other internet users. There are also links to many thousands of companies, organisations and individuals with something to sell. This can lead to difficulties when a commitment is made to buy something and you wish to change your mind.

Sites such as Habbo Hotel combine all of these things through being fun, an opportunity to meet peers (and others) and the incentive to make purchases to buy presents, furnish a room etc.

In addition, mobile telephones are also seen as an essential prerequisite and they will give access to a wealth of services to enable communication by voice, word (text) and image through the camera facilities. Many modern 'phones will also enable full access to the internet (WAP enabled).

It is extremely difficult to monitor all use of Information technology and therefore good and corporate parenting means it is essential that young people are advised of the risks that systems contain as well as maximising their potential for beneficial communication.

Carers and staff members need to be alert to the operations of systems and of their potential in order that they can provide appropriate safeguards to young people.

#### 4. PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

- Carers and staff need to be aware of the operation procedures and potential applications of equipment to which young people have access. Training is to be arranged for Carers to assist in this process.
- Each Foster carer or Residential Care Team should, with the young person's Social Worker, conduct a risk Assessment in respect of each young person's use of ICT equipment.
- The Risk assessment is to be based on knowledge and experience of the young person's history, behaviour and attitude towards the use of such systems.
- The Risk assessment is to be conducted prior to access to ICT equipment whether it be PCs, laptop Computers or Mobile telephones.
- The Risk Assessment should consider any limitations with regard to the siting of the equipment, time and duration of use and any other relevant factors.
- The Risk Assessment should consider the need for Parental Blocks on site access and appropriate software obtained to ensure that this facility is available.
- Guidance is to be given to young people in respect of confidentiality and data protection. Young people should be advised not to disclose any personal details that would enable them to be identified and targeted. This would include address' leisure venues and school details.
- Young people are to be instructed to tell their carer of anything that has scared them, made them feel uneasy or having accessed anything they may consider indecent or inappropriate. It is possible that some such information may be accessed unintentionally but this should be reported and possibly notification made to agencies such as CEOP (Child exploitation Online Protection). The child's Social Worker is to be informed of any such incident.
- Consideration is to be given as to the need to invoke Child Protection Procedures in the case of any misuse of ICT equipment. This may lead to a formal investigation by the Police and disciplinary action or action by the Fostering Panel in the event of misuse by a carer. Equipment may be removed from the young person if there is evidence of misuse.
- Carers should accompany the young person if they are ever to meet somebody met through the Internet.
- Carers and staff to adhere to Policy Guidelines (see attached)
- Children and young people to be 'instructed/advised' re safe use of equipment and software
- Children & young People to be asked to agree to follow the Use guidelines

- Young people are to be advised in respect of responsibilities re copyright etc

## **5. CROSS-REFERENCE INFORMATION**

The above Policy and Procedures are consistent with the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board's Child Protection Procedures. These are to be used in the event of any investigations or complaints about the inappropriate use of ICT equipment by young people and/or their carers

### **5.1 Linked Policies & Procedures**

This Policy and Procedure is consistent with the ICT Use Policy to be followed by all employees of Telford & Wrekin Council.

### **5.2. Recognised Standards & Legislative References**

Sexual Offences Act 2003

### **5.3 Useful References**

Keep your child safe on the Internet	Leaflet from Home Office
Child Exploitation Online Protection	<a href="http://www.ceop.gov.uk">www.ceop.gov.uk</a>
DCSF advice service	<a href="http://www.parentsonline.gov.uk/safety">www.parentsonline.gov.uk/safety</a>
Childline	Tel. No. 0800 1111
Children's advice	<a href="http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk">www.thinkuknow.co.uk</a>
Adult Advice	<a href="http://www.internetsafetyzone.com">www.internetsafetyzone.com</a>
General guidance	<a href="http://www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk">www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk</a>
Report illegal content	<a href="http://www.iwfi.org.uk">www.iwfi.org.uk</a>

## **5. DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT**

- Date First Issued *August 2007*
- Dates Amended
- Date Approved By DMT
- Date Approved By Cabinet [if applicable] : *Not Applicable*
- Date Due For Review *August 2008*
- Review To Be Managed By *Principal Officer – Child Protection*

## **Acceptable Use Policy**

The computer system and access to the Internet is provided for your benefit. This Acceptable Use Policy helps to protect you and your Carer by clearly stating what use of the ICT resources is acceptable and what is not.

- The computer and the Internet are for both leisure and educational purposes. If you are not sure what is acceptable use ask your Carer.
- When leaving your computer it should be closed to prevent any misuse against your password.
- Messages (including emails and through chat rooms) should be written responsibly and politely and only sent to people who are known to you. Abusive and 'bad' language of any kind is forbidden.
- You are responsible for messages that you send and for any contacts made. You understand that you must never give out your 'home' address or 'phone number, or arrange to meet someone. You must tell your carer if someone writes that they want to meet you.
- From time to time unpleasant or inappropriate content may appear on the system. This should be reported to a carer as soon as possible.
- You should not give out any personal details over the Internet without seeking the permission of a responsible adult.
- Anonymous messages and 'chain' letters should not be acted upon.
- Not all resources on the Internet are free. You must be aware of copyright issues as many documents and pictures on the Internet do belong to someone.
- Use for personal financial gain or gambling is not allowed.
- ICT security systems must be respected; they are there for your benefit. Any attempt to bypass security systems is a serious offence. A "parental block" should be available and used.
- You should understand that your carer, or someone from the Council, may check your computer files and the Internet sites you have visited.
- If you deliberately break these rules, you may not be allowed to use the Internet and/or this computer in future.