



## **COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

### **Introduction**

To operate effectively, organisations need to communicate effectively. It is important to ensure that we treat everyone, internally and externally, professionally and courteously.

This policy is to be regarded as a code of conduct on e-mail and internet usage, on contact with the media and all aspects of communication. It applies to all employees, volunteers, Trustees and any other person connect with and/or using Mind in Croydon's facilities. Failure to observe this policy may be regarded as misconduct or gross misconduct, and will be dealt with according to Mind in Croydon's normal disciplinary procedure.

### **Written communication**

All written communication should use plain English, be professional, polite and spell checked.

### **E-mail and internet use**

Mind in Croydon has invested in the necessary resources to provide employees with the facility to use e-mail and to access the Internet which is beneficial in enabling them to undertake their duties more effectively. These facilities may only be used for business purposes except in certain circumstances outlined below.

Any person who experiences problems concerning abuse of the electronic communication facility, should in the first instance approach their immediate or (in the case e.g. of volunteers/trustees the appropriate) line manager.

### **USE OF E-MAIL**

- E-mail should normally only be used to communicate internally with colleagues and externally to clients and suppliers, on business related issues. Messages to family or friends, and others are permitted, but must be of a serious nature and be as brief as possible. The mailing of jokes containing sexually explicit or otherwise offensive material, either internally or externally may be regarded as gross misconduct.
- All staff should ensure that the automatic 'out of office' assistant/response and/or message forwarding facilities are used to cover absences and should cover when the staff member will be away and when they will return to the office and who to contact if there is an urgent matter
- No e-mail may contain any references to other individuals which might be construed as libellous.
- No e-mail communication, which might be regarded as harassing or insulting, may be sent using Mind in Croydon's system. Complaints about the performance or service of other departments or individuals must be made on a face-to-face basis or in a formal letter, as is normal and courteous practice.

- Mind in Croydon recognises that it is not always possible to control incoming mail. Any material received which would be considered as non-businesslike, sexually explicit or offensive should be reported to a person's line manager.
- E-mail may be used for the despatch of formal documents such as contracts or proposals, but it should be borne in mind that documents issued this way are just as legally binding as those sent conventionally. All such items must be followed up with a formal hard copy in the usual manner. **However, please remember that e-mail can be intercepted on the Internet and if confidentiality is an issue, avoid it.**
- If employees receive virus warnings via e-mail, they should take no action whatsoever other than informing the Office Manager immediately
- E-mails sent internally may be sent in an informal style, but staff are asked to observe the normal courtesy that they would extend in written memos.
- E-mails which are sent to recipients outside Mind in Croydon should be composed in a businesslike manner.
- Unsolicited e-mails must not be sent at any time. Any 'junk' mail received should be deleted.
- It is a disciplinary offence to access another individuals' e-mail facility by using their password without their express permission.
- Any message sent should have the appropriate authority. No one is permitted to send e-mails in another person's name.
- Employees should inform their line manager if training is required to ensure adherence to this policy.
- Computers, networks, e-mail systems etc are the property of Mind in Croydon. E-mails are not the property of staff and as such there can be no expectation of privacy. Hard copies of e-mail will be used as evidence in disciplinary proceedings and as evidence supporting any claims.

#### **USE OF INTERNET (WORLD WIDE WEB)**

- Employees should not access, view, receive, download, send or store material from sites such as those relating to pornography, racism, terrorism, cults, hate speech, illegal drugs or other inappropriate sites. To do so may be considered an act of gross misconduct. The only possible exceptions to this are for employees who need to access such sites in relation to work. For example, someone in the counselling service may need to go to a site about gambling addiction or a member of staff may have good reason to go to a site about the effects of illegal drugs. Visits to such sites however should be limited strictly to work-related issues.
- The Company accepts that employees may find it convenient to browse the Web for their own personal reasons during their own time (e.g. lunch break). If you decide to buy anything over the Internet you are advised that, if you give credit card details or other sensitive information, ensure that you have a secure connection. Goods may be received on company premises but this should be kept to a minimum and if in any way it interferes with the smooth running of the office employees may be asked to cease the practice.
- Employees should not generally join any mailing lists or solicit any information on the Internet unless there is a business need to do so. Should they wish to take part in such activities in a private capacity, they should consult their Line Manager first who may give permission on a case by case basis
- It is forbidden to access an external computer or external network (excluding the www) without authorisation or to compromise the performance or privacy of any computer system.

- It is forbidden to place any Mind in Croydon Limited material on any publicly accessible website unless authorised by the Chief Executive
- You should be aware that those viewing Web pages can be identified by the site owners.
- Mind in Croydon reserves the right to view and monitor all e-mail and internet access. Should this be found to be inappropriate it may be viewed as gross misconduct.

None of these examples is exhaustive. Depending on the circumstances of each case any use of Information Technology deemed to be unauthorised, to bring the Charity into disrepute or deemed to be in any way unwelcomed by the Charity will result in disciplinary action, and in some cases summary dismissal. Misuse amounting to criminal conduct will be reported to the police.

## **CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA (PRESS, RADIO, TV**

The press, TV and radio can be powerful friends for organisations like Mind and the people we exist to help. But they also have their own agenda which may conflict with our own. For this reason, and because they frequently get things wrong, we need to handle our contact with the media with great care.

Enquiries and requests for information or comment from the media fall into three main categories:-

### **1. Enquiries about specific incidents or individual people**

Examples: - a suicide; an assault on a member of the public by a patient released from compulsory detention in hospital; a fire at a Mind project.

**No trustee or member of staff apart from the Chief Executive is permitted to comment on specific incidents or individual people and this should be made clear to media representatives.** All enquiries must be referred to the Chief Executive or the Chairman. S/he may delegate the responsibility for responding to media enquiries to another staff member or trustee in specific circumstances such as absence on holiday.

Staff must brief the Chairman or Vice-Chairman about the incident in question before s/he makes a response.

### **2. Requests for comment on general mental health issues**

These are likely to fall into two categories:-

a) Issues where Mind's policy is established and well-known.

**Example:** - support for increased user involvement in running services.

b) Current issues where Mind's Board of Directors may not have discussed and agreed on the view the organisation should hold and promote.

**Examples:** - what is the impact of the new system of care management on clients locally; are homeless people in Croydon receiving adequate medical care?

The Chief Executive is the only member of staff authorised to comment on these matters.

### **3. Requests for factual and statistical information**

**Examples:** - a) How many flats did Mind furnish last year?  
b) When is the Fairfield Club open?  
c) How many homeless people in Croydon have mental health problems?

Project leaders (Fairfield, Enterprise, Furniture, Welfare Benefits, Counselling) may answer such questions with direct factual information (provided they are certain they know the answer!) but they may not give an opinion or comment. They should not answer questions about project funding which should be referred to the Chief Executive for a response. Questions like (c) are often impossible for Mind to answer and callers should be referred to the Director of Public Health.

### **N.B. NON-SENIOR STAFF ARE NOT PERMITTED TO MAKE STATEMENTS OR RESPOND TO QUERIES FROM THE MEDIA IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES**

This includes all staff members except the senior staff and project leaders specifically referred to above.

### **Press Releases**

Where Mind in Croydon has an agreed view on an issue and wishes to use the press to publicise it or help in campaigning on it, it is advisable to prepare a press release. A press release is also a helpful way of keeping the press informed of the opening of new projects or other achievements. Such prepared statements for the press must be approved by the Chairman before release.

### **Submitting Articles for Publication**

All articles must be approved by the Chief Executive or Chairman before they are submitted for publication.

### **Radio and TV Programmes**

No trustee or member of staff apart from the Chief Executive may agree to participate in a radio or television programme in connection with their work for Mind without the permission of the Chairman or the representative to whom s/he has delegated responsibility in this matter.

Interviews carried out or responses given over the phone must be carried out strictly within the provisions of these guidelines.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers are not permitted to respond to queries or otherwise give information to the media except under the direct supervision of a senior staff member (project leader or above) or an Hon. Officer.

## **General guidelines on contact with the media**

When a call from the media is received note down who is calling, from which agency, and the subject of the enquiry or request for comment. If possible take notes of the conversation as you go along, or ask someone else to note down at least what you say.

Remember to make it clear who you are, what your status is within Mind, and whether or not you are able to speak for Mind as a whole.

If you are unable to answer a query or make a comment say why you can't (you're not permitted to do so, you don't know the answer etc.) Refer the caller to another agency or the Chief Executive/Chairman if appropriate. This preserves good relations with the calling agency better than stonewalling or avoiding the question.

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