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1. Introduction

Since the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic emerged early in 2020, the need to work online with young people has increased for Stroud District Council (SDC).

The primary purpose of this policy, is to keep young people as safe as practicable whilst we work with them, particularly online. It relates to our Youth Work Engagement Policy, which can be found at:

www.stroud.gov.uk/community-and-living/youth-and-community-work

Some aspects of this policy will also relate to our policy on access to information and privacy, which can be found at:

www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-the-council/access-to-information/privacy-and-cookie-policy/privacy-notice

2. Consent

As with all our work with young people, we require parents / guardians to give us formal consent in which to consistently engage with the young person. This is obtained using the SDC Youth Service Consent and Medical Form, which includes a section entitled, 'Consent for Enhanced Communications and Online Working'.

Our methods are designed to increase their personal and social development, as highlighted in our 'Youth Work Engagement Policy'.

3. Enhanced Communication

Our methods of communication with young people are numerous - whether that be interacting face-to-face at meetings, events or activities; using phone and postal services; or using technology centred upon the internet, including email and text.

However, our need to offer an enhanced method of communication has emerged, to enable young people (who are actively involved with our service) to communicate with each other more formally.

Such enhanced communication, refers to the following:

Young people who are service users and in the same youth voice group (e.g. local youth forum group or Stroud District Youth Council) sharing their mobile phone number and email address with each other.

We acknowledge that this can happen informally through their own choices and relationships. However, it is through active encouragement and facilitation by the youth work team that we require consent from parents / guardians, as well as young people themselves.

Subsequently this will help increase young people's opportunities to be more involved in activities and programmes run by the youth service. It then leads onto greater personal and social development for them as service users.

4. Online Working

Young people in general, are naturally inclined to use online technology as a method of communicating. This essentially means that to ensure our communication methods are effective, we need to use online technology as well. By doing so, it will help increase young people's opportunities to be more involved in activities and programmes run by the youth service. Subsequently this leads onto greater educational, personal and social development for them as service users.

Youth workers will use (but not exclusively) platforms such as:

Facebook; Twitter; Instagram; Google Duo; WhatsApp; MS Teams; and Zoom.

In the case of Zoom, SDC will use the platforms School Subscriber Guide in managing young peoples access to the platform. We will obtain specific consent from parents / guardians for those under 16, to enable young people to be invited and participate in meetings or events that take place via Zoom.

Due to the nature of our work, it's highly likely that each participant will know the others present at the meeting or event. In line with our engagement policy, each youth worker will also know the participants.

Participants in each meeting or event will be involved through an 'invitation only' approach.

PLEASE NOTE: SDC do not hold responsibility for the young person using such platforms outside of our meetings, activities, events, projects and programmes.

5. Young Peoples Safe Participation Online

Safeguarding is at the forefront of all our work, whether that be planning or delivery of the service. We require young people to also hold appropriate responsibility towards themselves and others. Throughout our activities and programmes, we support them to develop knowledge, skills and capacity in which to participate and remain safe online. The following points stem from guidance given by the National Youth Agency www.nya.org.uk :

a) Choice of Platforms

There are a growing number of online platforms available to young people and we recognise that they may be accessed by young people in their social and leisure time.

Each platform has age limit restrictions, which remains the responsibility of the parent / guardian as to whether or how their child / young person uses the said platform.

We will only use those platforms that provide a suitable and safe place in which to engage with young people, for the purposes of our activities and programmes that are primarily educational.

b) Monitoring and Managing Groups

A staff member of the youth work team will be present at each online meeting or session for facilitation and monitoring purposes. For online groups of more than 10 young people, a minimum of two staff members or one staff member and one volunteers of the youth work team, will be present to support the facilitation and monitoring of the group.

The size of each group online is determined by the purpose and type of the project or meeting / session being undertaken.

Our age range for each online meeting or session will be 11 to 19 years, in line with face-to-face work. However, most participants are likely to be between 13 and 17 years.

Where possible (depending on the platform) and when required for reviewing the discussion and decision-making of the group, we may record each session. This information will be kept in accordance with our privacy policy (see link above).

All young people participating in online meetings or sessions, will be registered on our database and we will have consent for them to participate in this way.

We will avoid live streaming.

c) Advice for young people and their parents / guardians

We require parents to support their child / young person to understand and act accordingly with regards to remaining safe online. This includes us advising them to personally supervise their young person's use of the platforms.

Our advice to them and young people, includes the following;

- Encourage young people to manage their environment whilst online – for example:
 - i. *Ensure privacy settings are set to the highest most secure setting.*
 - ii. *Be aware of what can be seen or heard in a private or shared space at home, including by those interacting elsewhere online as well as in your own environment.*
 - iii. *Switch cameras and microphones on or off when appropriate.*
 - iv. *Dress and behave like you would at an in-person meeting or event.*
 - v. *Think about your 'stance' - would lying on a bed give the appropriate impression? or would sitting at a desk / table or soft seat present you in a 'more appropriate and ready' manner?*

- Encourage young people to carefully manage the sharing of information – for example:
 - i. *Avoid handing out personal contact details.*
 - ii. *Where possible avoid private messaging.*

- iii. *Avoid sharing details of your whereabouts at specific times and that of your family, particularly when referring to family days out and holidays.*
- iv. *Think carefully before posting pictures or videos of yourself or others.*
- *Encourage young people to developing positive relationships online – for example:*
 - v. *Only befriend people you already know or are likely to get to know more through group interaction.*
 - vi. *Don't meet up with people you've only met online (at least not alone & not in a private space).*
 - vii. *Use appropriate language and behaviour (see item below).*

d) Acceptable use, behaviour and language

Though typical youth work approaches, we encourage each young person to express themselves through language and behaviour. However, such expression and behaviour should not be derogatory or offensive to others and it should be conducive to forming positive relationships in small and larger groups.

We encourage peer to peer support and learning, which can be done online as well as face-to-face.

We ask each young person to respect other people's views, even if they don't agree with them.

We emphasise that disagreeing with someone's view doesn't mean you need to be rude towards them.

We encourage them to challenge discriminatory language and opinion, both in their participatory work and in social contexts.

We encourage young people to think carefully about what they say or write before they speak or post something online – it can be misconstrued or interpreted in a way they didn't intend.

Useful Contacts:

UK Safer Internet Helpline – 0344 381 4772

National Youth Agency – www.nya.org.uk