

The Bolton News

Health alert over mobiles

By [Rob Devey](#) 06 09 2007

PHONE masts opponents have accused council bosses of double standards after town hall staff were advised to cut down on using work mobiles.

[Bolton Council](#)'s new mobile phone policy advises staff to minimise use of their phone and keep calls as short as possible because the possible health risks are not fully known.

About 4,000 of the council's 13,500 employees have work mobiles, but the policy urges them to use a landline or email where possible and keep their fingers away from the phone's antenna.

But campaigners who have fought fruitless battles against masts near their homes, have accused the council of hypocrisy.

Joesph Crook, vice-chairman of governors at Church Road Primary School in Smithills, was powerless to stop councillors approving plans for a 45ft mast just 200 yards from the school.

The O2 mast, at the junction of Moss Bank Way and Captain's Clough Road, was approved after the council's planning committee said its hands were tied because the mast met emissions guidelines.

Mr Crook said: "They are virtually acknowledging there might be a problem and it is accepted that children would be the most at risk if there is, but they still approved this mast near the school."

He accused the council of double standards, claiming it was simply protecting itself against legal action if staff became ill after using a mobile.

"Perhaps they are not as worried about the general public," he said.

Conservative group health spokesman Cllr Andy Morgan, who has opposed mast applications during planning meetings, said: "I agree with the stance of this policy.

"But it flies in the face of planning guidance which says we have to agree to masts because we are not allowed to use health grounds to object.

"We cannot in one breath protect our employees, then in the next disregard the same doubts about the health impact when it comes to the general public and applications for masts."

Sylvia Wright, a spokesman for anti-mast campaign group Mast Sanity, said the policy was a step in the right direction but added: "The council should be applying the same stance to applications for masts."

A council spokesman said the council took a prudent approach to its mobile phone policy, reflecting guidance from the Health and Safety Executive.

Government guidance prevents councillors considering health and safety aspects involving masts which meet International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection criteria.