Toppesfield Parish Council

Information Technology and Communications Policy

This policy advises staff on IT and Communications whilst working for Toppesfield Parish Council.

To maximise the benefits of our computer and communication resources and minimise potential liability, you are only permitted to use our various communication systems in accordance with the following guidelines.

Technology and the law change regularly, and this policy will be updated to take account of these changes as and when necessary. You will be informed when the policy has changed but it is your responsibility to read the latest version of this document.

General Rules
Our computers, telephone and communication systems, software and their contents are intended for business purposes. You are permitted to use the systems to assist you in performing your job.

Our devices are intended for business use. In normal circumstances prohibit personal use of our devices except in your break. If you breach these rules you may be subject to disciplinary action.

We have the right to monitor and access all aspects of our systems, including data which is stored on our computer systems, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

Security
We require you to log on to our computer systems using your own password (where provided) which must be kept secret. You should select a password that is not easily broken (e.g., not your surname).

You are not permitted to use another employee's password to log on to our computer system, whether or not you have permission to do so. If you log on to the computer, deliberately using another employee's password, you will be liable to disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal on the grounds of gross misconduct.

If you deliberately disclose your password to another employee, you will be liable to similar disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal on the grounds of gross misconduct.

To safeguard our computer systems from viruses, you are not permitted to load or run unauthorised games or software, or to open documents or communications from unknown origins.

This Information Technology and Communications Policy was adopted by Toppesfield Parish Council on 3rd November 2022.

Review date: September 2023

We reserve the right to require you to hand over all data relevant to our business held in computer useable format.

USE OF E-MAIL

We encourage you to use e-mail and the internet at work where this can save time and expense. However, we require you to follow our strict rules below.

If you are unsure about whether something you propose to download or to which you intend to respond may breach this policy, you should seek advice from the Clerk/Chairman immediately.

Although we encourage the use of e-mail and the internet where appropriate, their use entails some risks. Accordingly, you must be prudent and take care not to introduce viruses onto our system and you must take proper account of any security advice we give to you.

You should also ensure that you do not send libellous statements in e-mails or use e-mail in an unprofessional way; such actions could expose us to the risk of legal action and liability for damages.

These rules are designed to minimise the legal risks to the business when you use e-mail at work and access the internet. Where something is not specifically covered in this policy, you should seek advice from the Clerk.

Contents

E-mails should be checked very carefully prior to sending. E-mail should be treated like any other form of written communication and, as such, what is normally regarded as unacceptable in a letter is equally unacceptable in an e-mail communication. The content of any e-mail sent by you should be in accordance with the principles set out in our Equal Opportunity Policy.

The use of e-mail to send or forward messages which are defamatory, obscene or otherwise inappropriate will be treated as misconduct under our Discipline and Dismissal Procedure. In serious cases this could be regarded as gross misconduct and lead to your dismissal.

Other examples of misuse include, but are not limited to, the following:

- sending, receiving, downloading, displaying or disseminating material that insults, causes offence or harasses others;
- accessing terrorist, pornographic, racist or other inappropriate or unlawful materials;
- engaging in on line chat rooms or gambling;
- forwarding electronic chain letters or similar material;
- downloading or disseminating copyright materials;
- transmitting confidential information about us or our clients;
- downloading or playing computer games; and
- copying or downloading software

Equally, if you receive an obscene or defamatory e-mail, whether unwittingly or otherwise, and from whatever source, you should not forward it to any other address.

Statements to avoid in e-mails include those criticising other Councils or their staff, those stating that there are quality problems with goods or services of suppliers or customers and clients, and those stating that anyone with whom we have dealings is incompetent.

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SOCIAL NETWORKING
We recognise that you may wish to access social networking websites on the internet for personal use. You are not permitted to do so on our IT systems even during authorised breaks or after working hours.

Personal conduct
We respect your right to a private life. However, we must also ensure that confidentiality and our reputation are protected. Accordingly, while using social networking websites at any time, we require you to:

- ensure that you do not conduct yourself in a way that is detrimental to us;
- take care not to allow your interaction on these websites to damage working relationships between members of staff and our customers/clients/contractors; and
- if you have social networking 'friends' who are customers/clients/contractors please take additional care to ensure you do not conduct yourself in a way that may damage the reputation of the council or harm our commercial relationships.

Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including summary dismissal, being taken against you.

You should note if you have a Facebook page/twitter account or other social network platform you will be regarded by us as responsible for any comments, tweets or posts found on your page regardless of whether made by you personally or not.

Security and identity theft
You should be aware that social networking websites are a public forum, particularly if you are part of a "network". You should not assume that your entries on any website will remain private. You should never send abusive or defamatory messages.

You must also be security conscious and should take steps to protect yourself from identity theft by restricting the amount of personal information that you give out.

Social networking websites allow people to post detailed personal information such as date of birth, place of birth and favourite football team, which can form the basis of security questions and passwords. In addition, you should:

- ensure that no information is made available that could provide a person with unauthorised access to our business and/or any confidential information; and
- refrain from recording any confidential information about us on any social networking website.

Websites/weblog
You are free to set up personal weblogs or "blogs" on the internet, provided that they do not breach the law or disclose confidential information, breach copyright, defame us or our suppliers, clients, customers or employees, or disclose personal data or information about any individual that could breach the General Data Protection Regulations.

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We do not encourage you to write about your work in any way and would prefer you not to do so. If you choose to do so, then you should state to the readers that the views that you express are yours only. You should include a notice such as the following: "The views expressed on this website/weblog are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer".

- You must not disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to us, or to any third party that has disclosed information to us. Our rules on confidentiality provide guidance about what constitutes confidential information.
- You should be aware that other organisations in our industry/profession may employ staff to read the personal weblogs of their competitors' employees to glean information about, for example, your work, products, technical developments and staff morale, and that your weblog may be being read in this way.
- If you choose to write about your work even without identifying our name, it may still be possible for people to work out our identity. You should always be conscious of your duty to act in good faith and in our best interests. Your duty of fidelity is a very strong legal obligation. We will not countenance criticisms in weblogs. Even where they are true and not defamatory, they may amount to a breach of your duties to us and could lead to action under our disciplinary policy against you which could result in your summary dismissal on the grounds of gross misconduct. You should not link your site to our site. Any such links require our consent.
- You must not use our website, internet systems or intranet for your weblog. You must not write your weblog during working hours.
- If you are asked to contribute to an official weblog connected to us, then special rules will apply and you will be told in detail how to operate and about what to write. Although you should take your own legal advice on your weblog, you should be careful not to:
- include material that breaches copyright, link it to other material rather than cutting and pasting it;
- defame (libel) anyone;
- include personal information about an individual without their consent, otherwise you risk breaching the General Data Protection Regulations, which is a criminal offence;
- include material that is sexist, racist or otherwise actionable;
- bring our organisation into disrepute.

Breach of this policy

Any breach of this policy will be treated as misconduct. Whether it is minor or gross misconduct will depend on the particular circumstances.

Queries If you have any questions about this policy, you should refer them to the Clerk.

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