

Great Tey Parish Council

Use of Social Media, Internet and Email Policy

INTRODUCTION:

The Council acknowledges that email, internet, and social media are vital communication tools used for Council business. This policy establishes guidelines and procedures to ensure responsible and lawful use, protecting users and the Council in line with the Local Government Act 1972, the Data Protection Act 2018, and other relevant legislation.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY:

This policy applies to all employees, Councillors, and volunteers. Compliance is mandatory to protect privacy, confidentiality, and the Council's interests. Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary actions, including the Code of Conduct, Disciplinary Procedures, or dismissal in severe cases.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

The Council is responsible for implementing and reviewing this policy. The Clerk will monitor compliance, propose updates, and address any questions or concerns regarding the policy. Any breaches must be reported to the Clerk.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Authorised Users

Only the Parish Clerk may post material on the Council's official social media accounts and website. Employees, Councillors, and volunteers may be granted permission to use social media on the Council's behalf, but they must adhere to this policy's rules.

General Rules:

- Do not upload, post, or forward abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory, or defamatory content.
- Report any harassment or offensive material to the Clerk.
- Do not disclose confidential, personal, or commercially sensitive information.
- Verify the terms and conditions of any third-party website before sharing a link.
- Follow the platform's terms of use and respect privacy.
- Avoid discussing sensitive topics such as politics or religion, and never publish personal contact details without permission.
- Be honest, but mindful of how your content may affect the Council's reputation.
- Escalating heated discussions should be avoided. Be respectful, factual, and conciliatory.

Monitoring and Consequences:

Social media activity may be monitored. Breaches of this policy can lead to disciplinary actions, including possible criminal liability. Gross misconduct, such as posting pornographic or defamatory content, may result in dismissal. Misuse that involves a breach of law may be referred to the police for investigation.

EMAIL:

General Use

Email is encouraged as an efficient communication tool and must be treated like any official document, with

Great Tey Parish Council

compliance to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018. The Council reserves the right to access email files stored on its systems.

Email Etiquette

- Only use approved email signatures and waiver clauses.
- Ensure all emails use appropriate business language.
- Do not circulate offensive, indecent, or obscene material.
- Confidential information must not be shared.
- Attachments should only be downloaded from trusted sources.
- Verify recipient addresses and ensure 'reply to all' is used appropriately.
- Save essential files before deleting email messages.
- Emails creating obligations or giving instructions must be sent only by the Clerk.

Reporting and Sanctions

Non-compliant emails must be reported to the Clerk. Depending on severity, the incident may lead to formal disciplinary actions or referral to the Personnel sub-committee.

INTERNET:

Acceptable Use

Employees, Councillors, and volunteers are encouraged to use the internet responsibly for official duties. Any content published in the name of the Council must be professional and relevant. Personal opinions expressed online must include a disclaimer stating they are personal views and not the Council's.

Unacceptable Use

The following activities are prohibited:

- Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images.
- Engaging in fraud, piracy, or other illegal activities.
- Unauthorized sharing of passwords or confidential information.
- Hacking or accessing unauthorized areas.
- Defamatory statements about the Council, Councillors, employees, or the public.
- Introducing malicious software.
- Sending unsolicited advertisements unrelated to Council business.
- Misrepresenting personal views as those of the Council.

Monitoring

The Council may monitor internet traffic and access data sent or received through its systems. Violations of this policy can result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, or legal consequences.

SECURITY:

Great Tey Parish Council

Only software approved and purchased by the Council is to be installed on Council computers. Regular audits will be conducted to ensure compliance with software licensing agreements and data protection regulations.

REVIEW:

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required due to changes in legislation or operational needs.

References:

- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)