



SOMPTING PARISH COUNCIL

POLICY ON: E-mail and Internet Policy

Introduction

As modern technology improves and the use of the e-mail and internet becomes more accessible to employees of the Council, it is important for all employees to be aware of the danger to the Council and the individual employees of the misuse of the system and the potential for legal liability.

Employees should note that the primary purpose of the email and internet systems are to improve communication within the Council, with external agencies and to allow access to the world wide web to assist in performing the Council's function.

The Council recognises the use of email and Internet is growing all the time, these are vital tools in what is effectively our virtual office. Developments are occurring rapidly and appropriate usage is to be encouraged however facilities may become available not specifically covered by this policy.

Scope

The policy will apply to all employees and Members of the Council.

Employees and members may not use the Council's e-mail system for general messages to sell, acquire or dispose of personal items or to advertise events not supported by the Council.

The use of the Internet for reasonable personal use shall be limited to lunch times or either end of the working day (not within individual employees working hours).

The Council by the authority of the Parish Clerk reserves the right to remove the external e-mail, internet privilege from any employee who fails to observe the policy or its principles.

The use of the e-mail is subject to the Data Protection legislation and users must ensure that they are aware of its effects.

The Council and/or individual employees may be legally liable for the content of any message sent by e-mail. The Council or individual employees may be liable for the following:

Infringement of copyright and other intellectual property rights caused by the downloading of information and multimedia files (such as music and pictures) without authority.

Breach of confidence (sending information on an insecure line, or failing to limit the persons to whom it is made available).

Sexual, racial, religious, age related or disability harassment

Inadvertent formation of contractual relationships

The negligent transmission of a virus or assisting or encouraging another to breach security controls or create a computer virus.

Personal political lobbying

On line gaming.

Breach of data protection regulations

Breach of the Obscene Publications Act 1959

Knowingly engaging in or in any way assisting in anything that is illegal under English law or the law of any other country to which you are sending.

(This is not an exhaustive list but highlights the main areas where employees should exercise care)

Messages and attachments sent by e-mail are to be written in accordance with the best practice standards of any form of written communication e.g. in plain English and should not contain any material which the writer can not substantiate as truthful.

The Council will not tolerate the use of e-mail to communicate material that disparages others on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, culture, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability or any other personal characteristic.

The use of Skype or similar types of communication is not permitted.

Directly downloading programmes and zip files from the Internet can be high risk and is only allowed from sites authorised by the Parish Clerk.

All passwords are to be securely held. Users are required to take all reasonable precautions to maintain the confidentiality of their passwords and will be solely responsible for their use. If users feel their passwords have been compromised at any time they must get them changed.

A Councillor's and / or employee's deliberate use of an un-authorised password in order to gain access to information which they are not entitled to see would normally be regarded as gross misconduct.

Sensitive or confidential information should only be sent by e-mail if it is encrypted and should, only include as much of the document as is necessary.

The Council will carry out routine monitoring of the Internet and e-mail. The content of messages will be inspected where such monitoring/auditing has indicated a potential abuse of the policy, or where a request is made in writing to the Parish Clerk by someone who has reason to believe that there has been inappropriate use of the e-mail, or Internet facilities.

The downloading, storing or retransmission of indecent, obscene, pornographic or blasphemous material is an unacceptable activity and would be deemed to be an act of gross misconduct which may lead to instant dismissal. The accessing by an employee of any Internet site containing such material will be deemed an act of gross misconduct, which may lead to instant dismissal.

The downloading of software, including programmes or similar products onto PC's, floppy disks, usb memory sticks, CD or DVD by users is not permitted except with the consent of the Parish Clerk. The downloading of games, screen savers, multimedia files such as music and other 'fun' software is not considered to be a legitimate business activity. These are more likely to contain viruses and programming errors, which can severely compromise the Council's system.

Goods and services ordered or purchased via the Internet must be supported by an official Council order and a hard copy should be retained. E-mails are legally enforceable correspondence and may lead to the formation of a legally binding contract unless the e-mail is headed 'Subject to Contract'. Caution should be exercised before submitting any personal or Council details via the Internet.

Failure to comply with the policy is likely to result in disciplinary proceedings against councillors and individual employees. The ultimate sanction in such proceedings is instant dismissal should this be warranted