West Horsley Parish Council

EMAIL AND INTERNET USAGE POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 The council recognises that email and internet are important information and communication systems which are used for council business. This policy provides guidelines and procedures to protect users and the council.

1.2 This policy applies to staff who have access to the internet and email facilities via council computers (the clerks).

1.3 The email policy also applies to all councillors in their correspondence with the clerk and other councillors, and any other correspondence that is council business.

2. Internet usage

2.1 The clerk is encouraged to use the internet responsibly as part of official & professional activities.

2.2 Information obtained via the internet and published in the name of the council must be relevant and professional. A disclaimer must be used where personal views are expressed.

2.3 The use of the internet to access and/or distribute any kind of offensive material will not be tolerated and anyone misusing the internet may be subject to disciplinary action.

2.4 The equipment used to access the internet is the property of the council, however the internet services used currently are not those of the council (the council uses the Clerk's home internet services without payment). The council therefore has no right to monitor internet traffic.

3. Unacceptable use of the internet

3.1 Unacceptable use of the internet includes, but is not limited to:

a) sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or image
b) using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film, or music piracy
c) sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the council
d) hacking into unauthorised websites
e) sending or posting information that is defamatory to the council, its services, councillors and/or members of the public
f) introducing malicious software onto council computers and/or jeopardising the security of the council's electronic communication systems
g) sending or posting chain letters, solicitations or advertisements not related to council business or activities
h) passing off personal views as those representing the council
i) accessing inappropriate internet sites, web pages or chat rooms

3.2 If the Clerk is unsure about what constitutes acceptable internet usage, he/she should ask the Chairman for further guidance and clarification.

4. Email

4.1 Use of email is encouraged as it provides an efficient system of communication.

4.2 Email should be regarded as written paper documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Personal information should be kept in accordance with the principles established in the Data Protection Act 1998 and subsequent Data Protection Legislation.

4.3 The council reserves the right to open any email file stored on the council's computer system.

4.4 The following guidelines for email use should be observed by the Clerk and all councillors:

a) use appropriate language to avoid unintentional misunderstandings
b) respect the confidentiality of information contained within emails, even if encountered inadvertently
c) check with the sender if there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of a message
d) do not open any attachment unless certain of the authenticity of the sender
e) only copy emails to others where appropriate and necessary
f) emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the council must be sent by the Clerk only, not councillors
g) emails must comply with common codes of courtesy, decency and privacy
h) The Clerk & councillors should use WHPC provided email addresses for conducting Council business. WHPC emails should not be sent from personal email accounts nor should WHPC emails be forwarded to personal email accounts.

5. Reporting and sanctions

5.1 If a councillor receives an email from the Clerk which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, it should be reported to the Chairman or the Employee Advisory Group who will consider use of the council's formal disciplinary procedure.

5.2 If a staff member receives an email from a councillor which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, the Clerk is entitled to consider use of the council's grievance policy and/or report the issue through the procedures outlined in the Member's Code of Conduct.

6. Security

6.1 Only software purchased by the council shall be installed on the council's computer system. Software licences shall be retained.

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