SOUTH WOODHAM FERRERS TOWN COUNCIL

LORDS OF THE MANOR OF CHAMPIONS

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Town Council's usage guidelines for the information technology systems including email, document access and storage, instant messaging and video conferencing systems. This policy will help the Town Council reduce risk of an IT related security incident, foster good business communications both internal and external to the Town Council, and provide for consistent and professional application of the Town Councils principles via electronic communications.

Scope

This policy applies to all users of the Town Council's systems and all personal electric communications by Councillors and staff used externally from the Town Council.

Responsibilities

All staff and councillors must comply with this policy.

The Town Clerk and Council shall ensure that this policy is up to date, complies with relevant legislation and guidelines and that compliance with this policy is regularly reviewed.

Any breach of this policy by councillors will be reported to the Chelmsford City Council Monitoring Officer and disciplinary action may result. A breach of this policy by staff could lead to staff disciplinary action, or prosecution for legal and/or contractual breaches.

Policy - Email

The Town Council has provided all Councillors with a dedicated Town Council email account for use with Town Council business.

Email accounts provided are Town Council accounts, **NOT** private accounts, and may be accessed by other users in the absence of the account holder to ensure that the Town Council can continue to conduct its operations, with the appropriate authorisations.

All Councillors should use their own dedicated Town Council email address for all official Town Council business and not personal use. Town Council email addresses should not be used by anyone other than the Town Councillor to whom the Town Council email address has been assigned.

Any official Town Council business held by Councillors in their own private email accounts is still subject to the Freedom of information 2000 Act (FOI) and data protection 2018 Act and therefore their individual account can be searched for requested information.

Deleting or concealing information with the intention of preventing its disclosure following receipt of a FOI request is a criminal offence under section 77 of the FOI Act and the person concealing the information is liable to prosecution. (Refer to our data protection policy).

- When composing and sending emails, users should remember that it is the equivalent of sending the recipient(s) a memo or letter on Town Council stationery.

- While it is not compulsory for councillors to use a dedicated Town Council email address it is strongly encouraged. Doing so makes it easier for the Town Council to process personal data securely.
- The use of personal or other work email accounts makes it more complicated for the Town Council to comply with GDPR and therefore Town Councillors are strongly encouraged to use the Town Council email address assigned to them when acting in their capacity as a Town Councillor.

Users must ensure that:

- Emails and/or messages sent do not contain derogatory or defamatory comments or remarks. Nor contain indecent, sexist, racist or other discriminatory remarks. Such content may lead to legal action against the sender and/or The Town Council for defamation, libel or harassment claims. What may appear to be a joke to some, others may consider offensive and/or distressing.

- They do not use the email and/or messaging system to send or receive obscene, explicit, or illegal material.

- Should they receive an unsolicited email that appears to contain such material, users must note the sender and date and time of receipt and report the incident to the Town Clerk.

- Emails and messages sent do not contain, nor have attached, any document containing confidential information or information covered by non-disclosure conditions unless essential and agreed with the parties involved.

- Emails/messages do not contain, nor have attached any text or images that would breach copyright or intellectual property rights of third parties.

- The Town Council strongly discourage users from responding to, generating, or forwarding emails/messages received from friends or colleagues that contain jokes, pictures, games or other similar non-work-related content.

- Users should be aware that an exchange of emails/messages can be sufficient to be contractually binding on the organisations or individuals concerned.

- Emails are not sent that could contravene the Councillors' Code of Conduct, for example around pre-determination on agenda items.

- Councillors or officers are not CC'd emails unless the subject matter specifically relates to them or their responsibilities.

- It is recommended that Councillors change their passwords every 6 months.

Users should be aware that email is a tool used by malicious individuals to attack IT systems. By clicking on a link or opening an attachment a user malicious software to be downloaded onto the Council's systems. Effects can range from loss of service through to data theft. Defences are built into the system to reduce the risk, but these are not infallible. Users should always exercise caution and are advised not to open attachments or click on links especially if an email comes from an unknown source or is unexpected from a known contact. In case of any doubts Users are advised not to open the email or click on attachments or links and to contact the Town Clerk or the Town Council computer software provider.

Virtual Meetings

While all Council meetings must take place in person, the Council's chosen and supported online meeting platform for other meetings, such as working group meetings, is Microsoft Teams and councillors are encouraged to use this where appropriate for working group meetings.

In preparation for the meeting the Town Clerk will make available

- The Microsoft Teams meeting link (as well as the meeting ID and passcode for outside participants).

Councillors are reminded that normal standards of etiquette as outlined in the Councillors Code of Conduct apply to virtual and online meetings.

Councillors are also reminded that non-Council membership of working group meetings is allowed and should be conscious to remind non-councillor members of the need to adhere to the Code of Conduct and the need for respect for all participants.

Other electronic and instant messaging platforms

Councillors and staff are reminded that the same policies which apply to the use of email apply to other electronic and instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger and that messages sent on these platforms are subject to the FOI and Data Protection Acts where a staff member or Councillor are representing themselves as such.

Document Access and Storage

Councillors and staff will be provided with access to the Council's online storage systems as appropriate for their roles.

Access to the council's IT systems is controlled by the use of user IDs and passwords.

All User IDs and passwords are uniquely assigned to named individuals and consequently, individuals are accountable for all actions on the IT systems.

Individuals must not:

- Leave their user accounts logged in at an unattended and unlocked computer.
- Leave their password unprotected.
- Perform any unauthorised changes to the IT systems or information.
- Attempt to access data that they are not authorised to use or access.
- Exceed the limits of their authorisation or specific business needs to interrogate the system or data.
- Connect any unauthorised device to the council's network or IT systems.
- Store council data on any unauthorised equipment.
- Give or transfer council data or software to any person or organisation outside the council without the appropriate authority to do so.
- Line managers must ensure that individuals are given clear direction on the extent and limits of their authority regarding IT systems and data.
- Individuals must not store personal files, such as music, video, photographs or games on council IT equipment or cloud systems.

Review date: January 2025

Next review: January 2026