

FERRYHILL TOWN COUNCIL



POLICY

COMPUTERS AND I.T. EQUIPMENT

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to protect the quality and integrity of the Council's electronic communications and to provide employees with standards of behaviour when using them.

This document sets out guidelines for e-mail and internet use by all employees to encourage the correct use of e-mail and the internet in the business environment. **Any breach of this policy or misuse of electronic communications may constitute a serious disciplinary matter and may lead to dismissal.**

As a computer user, you have been given permission to use the computer equipment provided to carry out the functions of your role within the Council.

There is no doubt that the use of a computer is of great assistance and speeds up many processes that would otherwise be slow, tedious and laborious. It is your responsibility to ensure that you use the equipment within the guidelines set out in this guide. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action being taken against individuals who misuse or abuse the technology.

The Internet is an electronic communications network that provides vast, diverse and unique resources. E-mail is a powerful tool designed to increase productivity, efficiency and provide economies when properly used.

Electronic mail is fast becoming the most important communication tool not only within an organisation, but between organisations. It is important that users appreciate the potential risks.

We have considered the inherent risks attached to the provision of Internet and e-mail and taken steps to manage these risks by the introduction of this policy, which clearly sets out the guidelines within which employees are expected to use the facilities and the consequences of using them in any other manner.

This guide defines the trust that we place with you regarding your use of Council computers. We ask that you take certain precautions to safeguard the equipment and that you work with us to make sure that our systems (and you) remain active and productive.

2 To whom does the policy apply?

This policy covers all employees and elected members who have access to or use of computers or laptops as part of their job role.

3 Responsibility

All employees of the Council are expected to give the highest possible standard of service to the public, and where it is part of their duties. More detailed responsibilities are set out in the following sections.

4 Confidentiality

All information will be handled sensitively and used only for its proper purpose. Under the Data Protection Act 1998 individuals have the right to see their own personal data held subject to the rights of confidentiality of any other parties involved.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 1998 individuals have the right to access any data which the Town Council holds either in electronic or paper formats whilst protecting the rights of individuals.

5 Dealing with abuses of the policy

Employees who attempt to abuse this policy may face disciplinary action. The operation of the Internet and e-mail relies heavily on the proper conduct of users who must adhere to strict guidelines. Internet access is a privilege, not a right.

If a user violates any of the acceptable use provisions outlined in this Policy, his/her access will be terminated and future access will be denied. Some violations will also constitute a criminal offence and may result in legal action.

Actions in violation of the Council's Policy will result in appropriate disciplinary action under the Council's disciplinary procedures. In some cases, dismissal may result. Some of the most critical issues are:- Employee productivity · Potential liability under Data Protection and the Equality Act · Network vulnerability (users downloading virus-infected software)

6 Publicising/distribution of the policy

A copy of this policy is issued to every employee. A copy can also be viewed via the electronic filing folder or on the website www.ferryhill.gov.uk. New employees will be informed of the existence of this policy in recruitment and induction information.

7 The Need for Guidance

The Internet is a public transmission medium, a presence on the 'Web' opens the door to everyone including customers and mischief makers. At the same time, employees who previously had little or no reason to have contact with customers or vendors may now become Council emissaries through e-mail or the 'Web'.

Without acceptable use guidance, this type of interaction can create a multitude of problems including misrepresentation of Council practices and inappropriate use of Council resources. Furthermore, the potential for civil law suits on issues such as sexual harassment grows as Internet access widens.

8 Internet and E-mail Usage (Internal and External)

The Internet is probably the most important global information resource marking the convergence of our two most critical business tools: the telephone and the computer.

The Council's goals in providing Internet and e-mail services to employees are to promote communication, resource sharing and improved customer service. As e-mail and internet usage is a business tool, the Council retains the right to monitor, review and intercept, access or disclose e-mail created on Council property or the browsing history of users.

Crucial to the management task is the **Acceptable Use Guidance** for the Council that defines the rights of the Council and the employee regarding electronic communications and transactions carried out on the Council's computers.

Equally important is the use of software tools that can help the Council manage its employees Internet access, allowing access to work-related on-line resources, and blocking those that are considered not suitable. This keeps potentially objectionable material away from the workplace and dubious software off the network.

9 Vandalism & Harassment

Vandalism and harassment will result in the cancellation of e-mail and Internet access to the offending user. Vandalism is defined as any malicious attempt to harm or destroy data of another user, the Internet or the network. This includes, but is not limited to uploading computer viruses.

Actions of this nature would be classified as 'gross misconduct' and subject to disciplinary procedures. Harassment is defined as the persistent annoyance or discrimination against an individual or the interference in another user's work. This includes but is not limited to sending of persistent unwanted mail. Use of the e-mail facility or the Internet to harass or discriminate against an individual on the basis of gender, age, race, national origin, religion or sexual orientation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action under the Council's Equality and Diversity, Discipline and Grievance policies and procedures.

10 Security

If you identify a security problem (real or perceived), notify the System Administrator immediately. Do not show or identify a security problem to another. Do not reveal your log on password to anyone else. Attempts to log on as another user or use a computer while another person is logged on to it may result in cancellation of e-mail and Internet access. There are **few** exceptions to this rule, if in doubt, speak to your line manager.

Check to ensure that your anti-virus protection has been updated regularly. Keep passwords private - they are meant to be. The Town Clerk and Finance Manager however, will need to be advised of your password and also of any changes in password, for security reasons.

11 Acceptable Use Guidelines - General Principles

Council provided Internet and e-mail privileges, like computer systems, telephones and networks, are considered Council resources and are intended to be used for authorised purposes only.

Any authorisation for personal use must be granted by the Town Clerk.

Correspondence via e-mail is not guaranteed to be private. An e-mail is a postcard not a letter. Confidential e-mails should be marked according to sensitivity or a request for additional security to encrypt messages should be made to the System Administrator. Internet IDs and web pages should not be used for anything other than Council sanctioned communications.

Use of Internet and e-mail will be subject to monitoring for security and/or network management reasons. Users may also be subject to limitations on their use of such resources. The distribution of any information through the Internet, computer-based services, e-mail, and messaging systems is subject to the scrutiny of the Council. The Council reserves the right to determine the suitability of this information. **Your @ferryhill.gov.uk email address should only be used for Council or official business.**

If you need help setting up a personal account on Hotmail, Aol or one of the other providers please see the System Administrator who will be able to assist you. Users of the Internet must comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Computer Misuse Act 1990. All users must also comply with any relevant employment legislation such as the Equality Act 2010.

Any breaches of either relevant legislation or the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy will be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure, as the Council could be held liable for any illegal actions of its employees in this respect. Care must be exercised in selecting recipients of e-mails as once sent they cannot be retrieved. Strict confidentiality must be observed particularly in relation to any sensitive information or any documents opened in error. In this instance, the sender should be advised immediately.

The Council's spam filter filters most spam e-mail as it arrives but instances will occur when spam mail is not blocked and it is your responsibility to block the sender without opening the email. Please note that some e-mails will not arrive in your Council 'inbox' but may be held in the quarantine in your junk email box, a regular check on this box should be made in the event that the email is legitimate. You should therefore not expect private e-mails to be received automatically.

12 Conditions of Use – Unacceptable Behaviour

Users shall not:

1. Intentionally visit Internet sites that contain obscene, hateful or other objectionable materials unless *specifically* required to do so in the course of their duties and written authorisation has been received.
2. Send or receive any material that is obscene or defamatory or which is intended to annoy, harass or intimidate another person.
3. Access colleagues' e-mails without authorisation. If an individual is unexpectedly absent, help should be sought from that colleague's supervisor in respect of any outstanding or unopened e-mail. This will entail logging in as the absent colleague and the Town Clerk's permission should be sought for this.
4. Solicit and engage in e-mails that are unrelated to business activities and as a means of private conversation or gossip.
5. Divulge their password to other parties.
6. Solicit non-Council business for personal or political gain or profit.
7. Use the Internet or e-mail for any illegal purpose.
8. Represent personal opinions as those of the Council. Unless authorised to speak to the media or public gatherings on behalf of the Council, speak/write in the name of the Council to any newsgroup or associated organisation.
9. Make or post indecent remarks, proposals, or materials or use inappropriate language or jargon which would be unacceptable on a normal day to day basis.
10. Upload, download, or otherwise transmit commercial software or any copyrighted materials belonging to parties outside of the Council, or the Council itself unless authorised to do so.
11. Download any software or electronic files without implementing virus protection measures that have been approved by the Council.
12. Intentionally interfere with the normal operation of the network, including the

propagation of computer viruses and sustained high volume network traffic which substantially hinders others in their use of the network.

13. Reveal or publicise confidential or proprietary information which includes, but is not limited to: financial information, databases and the information contained therein, customer lists, technical information, computer/network access codes, etc.
14. Examine, change, or use another person's files, output, or user name for which they do not have explicit authorisation.
15. Alter security settings or permissions of documents or folders. If additional security is required see system administrator.
16. Waste time on non-Council business; for example visiting social networking sites. Users who violate any of the above guidelines may be subject to disciplinary action under the terms of Ferryhill Town Council's Disciplinary Procedure. The outcome of such actions may include written warnings, revocation of access privileges and, in more serious cases, could lead to the termination of an individual's employment. The Council also retains the right to report any illegal violations to the appropriate authorities.

13 Good Practice on the Use of Internal and External E-mail

Remember, viruses can adhere to incoming e-mail. They are not included on the email itself but they *are* on *attachments*. The Council guidance again is *do not open attachments* unless we know they are from a reliable source i.e. someone we are acquainted with. If there is any doubt, do not open the attachment and refer to the System Administrator or Town Clerk for advice.

With the widespread use of e-mail the following may help you to use e-mail effectively. Use of e-mail is to encourage good working practices:

- Keep messages short and to the point.
- Don't embed large and complex word documents, spread sheets or graphics unless these are vital to the message or have been specifically requested.
- Don't initiate correspondence via e-mail unless specifically requested.
- Do acknowledge correspondence electronically but follow up complex requests for service or information by other means.
- Use blank lines between paragraphs to improve readability.
- Use mixed uppercase and lowercase letters to improve readability.
- Spellcheck before sending *any* e-mail even internal mail – we are professional people doing a professional job.
- Pay attention to grammar and spelling - the recipient will form an opinion of you (and the Authority) based on what you write.
- Before sending an e-mail message read it and ask yourself 'Would I say what I have written to the person's face?' If you receive an e-mail which makes you angry, calm down before replying. Then after typing your response pause again before sending.

- If you are asking for something, be courteous - it doesn't hurt to say please and thank you. · Don't attach large files to e-mails. Don't use 'emoticons' or 'smiley faces' - these are groups of characters you may receive on incoming mail which are meant to look like a face turned on its side e.g. :-) = smiley face :- (= unhappy face.
- Don't make signatures (the standard block of text at the end of an e-mail) too long or too large.
Use the telephone whenever possible, e-mail is not an alternative to the telephone.
- Remember that content style should not differ markedly from other written communications – a legal binding contract can be created as can a libel action.
- Always use a salutation, e.g. Good Morning, Dear Sir even Hi is better than nothing, never start an e-mail with the message.

As an Internet and/or e-mail user (or possible user), after reading the Internet and email Usage and Security Guidance, you are reminded of the following guidance in respect of any personal usage (for which authorisation must be granted by your line manager).

14 Personal Use of e-mail and internet

Subject to approval from your line manager or the Town Clerk you may use email/ Internet Browsing for personal research outside your working hours (i.e. in your own time) *providing* you do not breach the above conditions of use and provided no disruption, disturbance or degradation of service is caused.

Whilst we are sympathetic to your need to use computers for your own use at times and therefore do not limit your use of computers to work projects only (subject to prior approval). We do, however, retain the right to amend this privilege for everyone if it is abused by anyone.

All the guidance in this document applies to Internet and E-mail (internal and external) irrespective of current levels of permission and if access levels change as additional access is granted.

15 Personal use of IT equipment

Computers are for Council matters only. However, the Council is sympathetic to courses of study by staff needing access to PCs. Should staff wish to use PCs for an outside use i.e. college or study work or completion of projects started at home, permission must be obtained from the Town Clerk.

Remember the risk of viruses explained in the following paragraph and the Internet and e-mail user information within this document. Staff can use IT equipment and facilities for personal use, provided that it is of an appropriate nature, is not during work time, and cannot be considered as 'excessive' based on the following:

Timing of personal use:

Staff may make personal use of e-mail & Internet, provided that they only do so during 'unpaid' break periods, such as lunchtime, coffee break or outside of 'general work' hours.

Social Networking:

Social networking sites must only be accessed during your breaks.

Regardless of when or where you access social networking sites you must not:

1. Share any Council information which includes names of colleagues including senior managers or elected members
2. Share or distribute photographic images or videos obtained of colleagues or taken initially for council purposes.
3. Refer to the council, its services or any of its practices in derogatory terms.
4. Make comments and/or use language that could reflect adversely on the reputation of the Council.

Infringements of the points above will result in an investigation under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. In respect of volunteers and students on placement, their engagement with the council will be terminated and the School/College/Training provider will be informed of the circumstances.

All employees should be aware that infringements of this policy may also lead to litigation under criminal and civil law. Staff wishing to use the computer or internet for personal use outside these times must have the permission of the Town Clerk.

The exception to these regulations is any employee who has permission to post news to the Council's website, or to the Twitter or Facebook pages, however, adverse or negative comments regarding the Council, its policies, services, employees or councillors is still prohibited.

16 Logging In /Out Procedures

To log off the main network, you must close the computer down properly, by using the menus provided on the Windows system. If this is done incorrectly, it can result in files being corrupted. If there is any reason whereby the computer will not allow you to close down i.e. a 'jam' or 'freeze' of any kind, refer to Systems Administrator for advice. Files of a confidential nature on a computer should be protected with passwords.

17 Viruses

Computer viruses are common today in the I.T. world – new viruses are being sent out daily; they can and do create havoc within business and even government agencies and departments worldwide.

Once established on a computer, viruses can destroy files and valuable work. Worse still, they can transfer to other PCs on the network and destroy other people's files.

Viruses are often brought into a business through outside sources like CDs, e-mail attachments and through installation of unauthorised programs.

The Council Policy therefore is that, **no** CDs, removable media storage or other unauthorised computer programs *of any kind* are to be used on *any* Council computers *without specific permission* of the Town Clerk.

Viruses also adhere to incoming e-mail and are equally damaging. They are not included on the e-mail itself but *are on attachments*. The Council guidance here then is *do not open attachments* unless you know they are from a reliable source.

If there is any doubt, do not open the attachment and refer to the System Administrator or Town Clerk for advice.

Check to ensure that your anti-virus software has been updated from Sophos each week. At the bottom, right hand side of your screen there will be a Sophos icon: If you hover your mouse over it, it will say when it last checked for updates. However, even with updated anti-virus software, it is not guaranteed that your machine will be virus-free and therefore it is vital that the above guidelines are adhered to.

18 Good housekeeping

If you are a keep-fit person, consider how easy it is to exercise with only a little on the stomach. Now consider doing that same exercise with a full stomach. We will be a lot slower; not perform as well and we may even crash out altogether! Our PC reacts similarly. If it is not maintained regularly and unnecessary files are not removed, it will, over a period of time, slow down noticeably; not perform as well as it should, and it too, may crash one day just when we really need it.

There are procedures we can do ourselves to help our PC perform as well as possible:

- Delete any work files we are completely finished with and which we will not need in the future. However, before doing so, you should seek advice from the System Administrator Town Clerk.
- Delete all temporary files that the computer has not deleted itself.
- Empty the Recycle Bin weekly. Run Disk Defragmenter weekly.
- If you are working on a computer with Internet access, delete Temporary Internet Files from the Windows folder of the same name. The Defragmenter can be set to run automatically each week, if you would prefer your machine to be set up to do this please see the System Administrator.
- Should a PC freeze or 'hang', don't panic! Do not switch the computer off in the middle of a program unless it cannot be avoided. Use Ctrl + Alt + Del keys to access the Task Manager and close the system down in a controlled manner. If in doubt, contact the System Administrator.
- If computer hardware or any part of it – printer, monitor, cables etc - is not working correctly do not attempt to repair it. Please advise the System Administrator who will arrange for an engineer to call.
- Keep the system clean. Dust the PC from time to time especially the entrances to CDROM drives if applicable. Keep the keyboard clean. There are cleaning agents available but ensure the PC is switched off first, before undertaking cleaning. Use only cleaning agents approved by the Council.

19 Home Economics

Correspondence to staff, e.g., memos, should be sent via the internal e-mail rather than by hard copy. The exception to this would be where the intended recipients are not connected to the system, when a hard copy of the e-mail should be used.

Documents including minutes, reports, budget documents etc. should be accessible to staff on the network, removing the necessity to produce hard copies for distribution to staff connected to the system. A simple e-mail informing staff of the availability and location of the file(s) should be sufficient.

20 Health & Safety

There are an increasing number of Health and Safety considerations when using a computer. National safety bodies provide everything from visual aids; advice on posture; time spent on a PC and these must be adhered to. Many are legal statutory requirements. These are dealt with and discussed further in the Council's Health & Safety manual. Please familiarise yourself with Health & Safety. If you have any concerns regarding Health and Safety regarding use of your I.T. please see the Health and Safety Officer.

Visual Display Unit (VDU) Assessments

Excessive usage of computers or sitting in an uncomfortable position over a period of time is liable to cause aches and pains in the shoulders, neck, back, arms, wrists, fingers or even several parts at once. Like any other equipment, sensible precautions must be taken when using computer equipment.

If you are a regular user of computer equipment you should have an annual VDU assessment.

21 Training

The Council is conscious of on-going training needs and will provide computer training from time to time. Training needs should be identified through the Employee Review procedure, but requests for further training or 'refresher courses' on computer use can be made at any time and should be addressed to the Town Clerk who will consider those requests and report back. Please share your IT knowledge with colleagues.

22 Disaster Recovery - Electronic data

In many cases where computer hard drives, or back-up disks/tapes are subjected to heat, smoke or water damage, most or all of the data can be recovered by specialists.

To be successful, certain pre-conditions must be met. The conditions also apply where computers or back-up material have been exposed to smoke, even though there may be no obvious signs of contamination. Where damage from smoke, heat or water, to computers or back-up material is obvious, (or even suspected), ensure you:

DO NOT;

- turn on the electrical power to any computer.
- attempt to 'run' any hard drive, back-up disk or tape in an attempt at do it-yourself data retrieval.
- tamper with damaged computers, disks or tapes.
- attempt to move damaged computers. Contact the nominated systems administrator without delay.