

Mayfield Parish Council - ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 The spread of electronic communication and access to electronic sources of information via the World Wide Web is an established method of working. Whilst offering many advantages this method of working also has many disadvantages and risks.

2 E-MAIL

2.1 The Council encourages the effective use of electronic communications and therefore, a Council only email account needs to be created for all Council business, and Councillors must use these email addresses for all official Council correspondence. The use of personal accounts for Council correspondence is not permitted. Internal correspondence within the Council, e.g., between Councillors and/or Councillors & Clerk, should be by email.

2.2 The Council recognises that access to professional information and advice in support of the function of Clerk is a necessary and important aspect of the work. Consequently, the Council permits and encourages Clerk to communicate with appropriate contacts via official e-mail accounts.

2.4 The Council expects Clerk and Councillors to use e-mail in a courteous, reasonable, responsible and respectful manner.

2.5 Unacceptable behaviours might include (not an exhaustive list):

2.5.1 Sending or displaying messages or images that are offensive or may be construed to be offensive in nature;

2.5.2 Using obscene language;

2.5.3 Using others' passwords and/or identities;

2.5.4 Issuing of passwords to third parties;

2.5.5 Trespassing in others' folders, works or files;

2.5.6 Sending or posting chain letters, solicitations, or advertisements not related to business purposes or activities;

2.5.7 Passing off personal views as representing those of the Council

2.5.8 Using official e-mails for commercial purposes; or

2.5.9 Using official e-mails for illegal activities.

2.6 E-mail users must be aware of the following:

2.6.1 Messages sent to groups of people must be relevant to all concerned;

2.6.2 E-mails are not necessarily seen immediately. Urgent messages from the Clerk, will have **IMPORTANT** in the Subject line;

2.6.3 The Council may, from time to time, choose to operate a filtering system in order to monitor offensive or inappropriate material and may quarantine any messages in that category.

2.7 Users are reminded that:

2.7.1 E-mails have the same status in law as any other written correspondence and are subject to the same legal implications;

2.7.2 The same high standards applied to other written correspondence must be applied to e-mails;

2.7.3 Inboxes must be checked regularly;

2.7.4 Any suspicious e-mails must be reported to the Clerk immediately;

2.7.5 Licence terms and conditions must be adhered to when copying and/or downloading material;

2.7.6 There is no guarantee an e-mail has been delivered unless a delivery receipt is requested;

2.7.7 The Data Protection Act/General Data Protection Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act must be complied with at all times.

2.7.8 Sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the Council is not allowed.

2.7.9 emails to Councillors from the Clerk should be for Councillor information only and not distributed outside of the Council, without prior permission from the Council.

3 INTERNET

3.1 Mayfield Parish Council Clerk and Councillors are expected to use the Internet responsibly and productively. Internet access on the Clerk computer is limited to job-related activities only and personal use is not permitted.

3.2 Job-related activities include research and educational tasks that may be found via the Internet that would help in an employee's role.

3.3 All Internet data that is composed, transmitted and/or received by the Council's computer systems is considered to belong to the Council and is recognized as part of its official data. It is, therefore, subject to disclosure for legal reasons, e.g., Freedom of Information requests, or to other appropriate third parties.

3.4 The equipment, services and technology used to access the Internet are the property of the Council and the Council reserves the right to monitor Internet traffic and monitor and access data that is composed, sent or received through its online connections.

3.5 All sites and downloads may be monitored and/or blocked by the Council if they are deemed to be harmful and/or not productive to business.

3.6 The installation of software such as instant messaging technology is strictly prohibited.

3.7 Unacceptable use of the internet by Clerk and Councillors includes, but is not limited to:

- 3.7.1 Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images on the Internet or via the Council's email service;
 - 3.7.2 Using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy;
 - 3.7.3 Downloading, copying or pirating software and electronic files that are copyrighted or without authorization;
 - 3.7.4 Sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the Council;
 - 3.7.5 Hacking into unauthorized websites;
 - 3.7.6 Sending or posting information that is defamatory to the Council; its services, colleagues; members and/or residents;
 - 3.7.7 Introducing malicious software and/or jeopardizing the security of the Council's electronic communications systems;
 - 3.7.8 If an employee or a Councillor is unsure about what constitutes acceptable Internet usage, then he/she should ask the Clerk for further guidance and clarification.
- 3.8 All terms and conditions as stated in this document are applicable to all users of Mayfield Parish Council's Internet use. All terms and conditions as stated in this document reflect an agreement of all parties and should be governed and interpreted in accordance with the policies and procedures mentioned above. Any user violating these policies is subject to disciplinary actions deemed appropriate by the Council.

4 SOCIAL MEDIA

4.1 The Council recognises and embraces the benefits and opportunities that social media can bring as a tool.

4.2 For the purposes of this policy, social media is defined as a type of interactive online media or app that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums, anonymous apps, blogs, video-and image-sharing apps and websites and similar facilities. It can be used to share news, information and successes, keep Clerk, Councillors and residents up to date with important developments and promote healthy debate about controversial subjects.

4.3 There is, however, an inherent risk involved in using social media, in that, it is an instantaneous and far-reaching form of communication and inappropriate use can impact upon Clerk, Councillors and the reputation of the Council.

4.4 The Council encourages Clerk and Councillors to engage with social media; however, wherever and whenever they do this, they must be aware of the potential impact on both themselves and the Council.(please see point 4.11 for further details)

4.5 This policy is intended to minimise the risks of social media which can impact on the well-being of Clerk, Councillors and the reputation of the Council, so that users can enjoy the benefits of social networking whilst understanding the standards of conduct expected by the Council.4.6 This policy relates to all Clerk and Councillors who contribute to any kind of social media. It should be applied to all use and all forms of social media where there is potential impact on the Council, whether for

work-related or personal use, whether during working hours or otherwise, whether social media is accessed using the Council's IT facilities and equipment, or equipment belongs to Clerk, Councillors or any other third party.

4.7 The underlying principles governing the use of social media are:

4.7.1 Clerk and Councillors should never represent themselves or the Council in a false or misleading way. All statements must be true and not misleading; all claims must be substantiated.

4.7.2 Only the Clerk/Chair may comment via social media accounts, after Council permission.

4.7.3 Councillors must make it very clear that any views are their own and not necessarily those of the Council

4.7.4 Use common sense and common courtesy

4.7.5 Councillors must not engage in social media debates, as a Councillor, only as a resident.

4.7.6 Social media activity around sensitive topics should be referred to the Clerk in the first instance;

4.7.7 If an Official's use of social media is considered to be derogatory, discriminatory, bullying, threatening, defamatory, offensive, intimidating, harassing, creating legal liability for the Council, bringing the Council into disrepute or breaching the Dignity and Respect policy or any other Council policy or procedure (this may include comments, videos, or photographs, which have been posted on social media sites about the Council, Councillors or work colleagues) then the Council may take action under the staff disciplinary procedure.

4.7.8 If a Councillor's use of social media is considered to be derogatory, discriminatory, bullying, threatening, defamatory, offensive, intimidating, harassing, creating legal liability for the Council, bringing the Council into disrepute or breaching the Dignity and Respect policy or any other Council policy or procedure (this may include comments, videos, or photographs, which have been posted on social media sites about the Council, Councillors or work colleagues) then the Council may take action under the Code of Conduct.

4.7.9 Clerk and Councillors should not engage in illegal activity through social media or engage in any activity that promotes terrorism. The very fact of possessing or disseminating terrorist material may be sufficient to warrant an investigation by the police and the official or Councillor would be put in the position of having to advance a credible defence.

4.7.10 The Council's response to any misuse of social media in a personal capacity will be reasonable and proportionate to the perceived offence; the nature of the postings/comments made and the impact or potential impact on the Council;

4.7.11 Social networking sites may be referred to when investigating possible misconduct/gross misconduct.

4.7.12 The Council may require Clerk to remove social media postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of these standards and failure to comply with such a request may, in itself, result in disciplinary action.

4.8 Employees and Councillors should be transparent and state that they work for/are members of the Council if they are posting about the Council. If you are writing about the Council use your real name, identify that you work for the Council, and be clear about your role. The Council discourages Clerk from posting online or via apps anonymously or using pseudonyms. You should never impersonate another individual.

4.9 The Clerk is responsible for addressing any concerns and/or questions arising out of the use of social media.

4.10 Clerk and Councillors are responsible for their words and actions in an online environment or via apps and are therefore advised to consider whether any comment, photograph or video they are about to post on a social networking site or app, is something that they would want Clerk, Councillors or people outside the Council to read.

4.11 A schedule of posts announcing meeting dates, the availability of minutes and other regular/annual/seasonal activities or events should be made in advance, approved by the Council and scheduled to appear on the appropriate dates. Further content created for the Council's social media accounts should be agreed by the Council before it appears and must reflect the view of the Council as a corporate body. Content from other organisations (including but not limited to East Staffordshire Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, UK Government) can be shared via the Council's social media platforms when agreed by Council.

5 COMPLIANCE

5.1 Each Councillor understands and will abide by this Electronic Communications Policy. They further understand that should they commit any violation of this policy, disciplinary action and/or appropriate legal action may be taken and have read and understand this policy and the Media Policy and have signed a documents to agree with compliance.

Date last Ratified/Approved	Version Number	Revision/Amendment Made	New Review date
02.10.2023	1	Policy adopted	May 2024