HARWICH TOWN COUNCIL
IT and E Mail POLICY
(Including Social Media Guidelines)

THIS DOCUMENT OUTLINES THE POLICY ADOPTED BY HARWICH TOWN COUNCIL

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Approving committee: Finance and General Purposes
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1. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of an IT and E Mail Policy is to set parameters on how Council staff and Councillors should use technology that has been provided to either undertake their job or duties as a Councillor.

All Harwich Town Council's IT facilities and information resources remain the property of Harwich Town Council and not of individuals. This policy will ensure that the Council's IT facilities are used:

- legally
- securely
- without undermining or causing reputational damage to Harwich Town Council
- effectively
- and in a spirit of co-operation, trust and consideration for others.

The policy relates to all Information Technology facilities and services provided by Harwich Town Council. All staff; Councillors and volunteers are expected to adhere to this policy.

2. Email – General Guidelines

E Mail is used to communicate with people quickly and to help reduce paper use. Think and check messages before sending (just as you would a letter or paper memo).

Use the phone (including voicemail if no reply) for urgent messages.

Use Harwich Town Council's intranet (www.harwichtowncouncil.co.uk) to communicate all relatively static information (e.g. policy, procedures, briefing documents, reference material and other standing information). Record information on the intranet in a well-structured manner, (consulting with the Clerk who is the Web Systems Administrator as appropriate). Use email merely as a pointer to draw attention to new and changed information on the intranet.

Only send Email to those it is meant for; don't broadcast (i.e. send to large groups of people using email aliases) unless absolutely necessary since this runs the risk of being disruptive.

Harwich Town Council's email should not be used to broadcast non-work-related information or requests, for example e.g. information or opinions on political matters outside the scope of Harwich Town Council's campaigning, social matters or personal requests for information.

When publishing or transmitting information externally be aware that you are representing Harwich Town Council and could be seen as speaking on Harwich Town Council's behalf. Make it clear when opinions are personal. If in doubt, consult with the Clerk to the Council.

- Check your inbox at regular intervals.
- Keep electronic files of electronic correspondence, only keeping what you need to.
- Use prefixes in the subject box whenever appropriate
- Treat others with respect and in a way, you would expect to be treated yourself
- Being courteous is more likely to get you the response you want.
- Make your subject headers clear and relevant to your reader(s)
- Try to keep to one subject per email, especially if the content is complex.

- Capitals (e.g. NOW) can also be used to emphasise words, but should be used sparingly as it commonly perceived as 'shouting'.
- Don't open email unless you have a reasonably good expectation of what it contains.

This is one of the most effective means of protecting **Harwich Town Council** against email virus attacks.

3. Website

3.1 Purpose and Scope of the website

Harwich Town Council's website (www.harwichtowncouncil.gov.uk) is a useful tool in communicating information which the council believes is of benefit to the residents of the parish of Harwich & Dovercourt and surrounding areas, as well as visitors and tourists, businesses and those working in the third sector.

3.2 Content

The website shall only contain content that is informative (i.e. meeting notices, events information, funding opportunities, weather warnings) or meets with the council's obligations in terms of Transparency and Accountability (i.e. Constitution, audit/accounts information, policies, procurement information). No content will be permitted that intends to promote or endorse commercial activity of any nature. Additionally, content will be unbiased and politically neutral, although the promotion of elections (either local or national) is permitted.

The website should be used to communicate information on an as required basis once it has been verified.

3.3 Web editing permissions

The website will be monitored and updated periodically by Harwich Town Council employees under the supervision of the Clerk to the Council. Any content added to the site is on behalf of Harwich Town Council and the editor should refrain from including personal opinion. On occasion and when of benefit to the wider users of the website, the Clerk will arrange access to the 'back end' of the site to a trusted third party so that posts, amendments, updates etc. may be carried out direct. Access to the site by a third party will only be on the understanding that all material meets the conditions as specified in 4.1 and 4.2 above and are communicated with the clerk at the earliest possible opportunity. Any breaches of these conditions will result in the content being removed and access rights to the website may be withdrawn.

4. Disciplinary Measures

Deliberate and serious breach of the policy statements in this section will lead to disciplinary measures which may include the offender being denied access to computing facilities.

4.1 Copyright

Take care to use software legally in accordance with both the letter and spirit of relevant licensing and copyright agreements. Copying software for use outside these agreements is illegal and may result in criminal charges.

4.2 Security

Don't attempt to gain unauthorised access to information or facilities. The Computer Misuse Act 1990 makes it a criminal offence to obtain unauthorised access to any computer (including workstations and PCs) or to modify its contents. If you don't have access to information resources you feel you need, contact the Clerk to the Council.

Personal system passwords or other security details must not be disclosed to other staff, volunteers or external agents and don't use anyone else's login, this compromises the security of Harwich Town Council. If someone else gets to know your password, ensure you change it or seek assistance from the Clerk.

Do not leave PCs unattended without logging off and always check removable devices for viruses, even if you think they are clean.

4.3 Information about People

If you're recording or obtaining information about individuals make sure you are following the Council's Data Protection policy.

4.4 Electronic monitoring

Any information available within IT facilities must not be used to monitor the activity of individual staff in anyway (e.g. to monitor their working activity, working time, files accessed, Internet sites accessed, reading of their email or private files etc.) without their prior knowledge. Exceptions are:

- In the case of a specific allegation of misconduct, when the assigned Hearing Panel can authorise accessing of such information when investigating the Allegation
- When the IT Support provider cannot avoid accessing such information whilst identifying/fixing a problem.

In such instances, the person concerned will be informed immediately and information will not be disclosed wider than is absolutely necessary. In the former case their access to IT facilities may be disabled pending investigation.

5. Social Media Guidelines

Many Council staff and Councillors will use various social media platforms. These guidelines are relevant for use of social media both within the remit of Harwich Town Council and on personal accounts and platforms.

Council staff and Councillors must not post any disparaging or defamatory statements about the Council or its stakeholders. You should make it clear when posting that you are speaking on your own behalf (unless you are posting as part of your job role).

You must not post comments about sensitive community topics, such as planning applications.

You must not post anything that could be considered to be discriminatory, bullying or deemed to be harassment or an individual.

The Council has the right to monitor a member of staff's usage of the internet or e mail at work if there are concerns that there is a breach of these guidelines

Any query relating to social media usage should be raised with the Clerk and it should be noted that any breach of these guidelines could lead to action being taken under the Council's disciplinary policy.

6. Miscellaneous

- Hardware and Software: All purchases should be authorised by the Clerk to the Council, preferably through the IT budget.

- Do not install any Software without first obtaining permission from the Clerk to the Council on equipment owned and/or operated by Harwich Town Council.

- Limited use of facilities for leisure or personal purposes (e.g. sending and receiving personal email, playing computer games and browsing the Internet) is permitted so long as such use does not:

  incur specific expenditure for Harwich Town Council

  occur during working hours or impact on your performance of your job (this is a matter between each member of staff and their line manager)

  break the law

  bring Harwich Town Council into disrepute.

References /Further Information

Please read this policy alongside the Data Protection Policy and Council's Privacy Notice.

https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/