



Chard Town Council

COUNCILLOR EMAIL, INTERNET AND DEVICE ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Use of devices and dedicated email accounts will enable Councillors to access information on the move, take advantage of Wi-Fi and contribute to a reduction in paper and printing costs.

1. Introduction

Under the Data Protection Act 2018 it is important that Chard Town Council (the 'Council') ensures that its data is kept secure. Councillors are required to comply with this policy. Please note additional instructions may be issued from time to time regarding the use of devices or systems.

This policy sets out general rules for acceptable use of digital systems;

- How use of the facilities made available reflects on the Council;
- Responsibilities for handling personal and sensitive information properly and that email addresses themselves may be personal information;
- Consideration required before sending confidential or sensitive information via email;
- How and when personal use of email and the internet is permissible;
- Removal of personal email from the Council's systems;
- Prohibition of the use of Council's email addresses on public websites for non-Council purposes; and,
- Circumstances in which the Council may monitor communications.

2. IT Devices

The devices referred to in this policy include workstations, laptops, smartphones, tablets and other portable devices.

Your equipment and system passwords are an important piece of confidential information and you should treat them in that way. Do not share them with others and make sure that they are not written down anywhere an unauthorised person can access them.

You must not delete any of the Council installed software and must not install any software to a Council device without the permission of the Town Clerk.

You must take care of any allocated devices and ensure that they are safe and secure at all times. Any loss of or compromise to equipment must be reported immediately so the device or account can be disabled.

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You should raise as soon as possible any issues relating to accessing system so that investigation can take place and advice can be given.

3. EMAIL

All email correspondence should be dealt with professional and diligently. Emails are subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information requests. Only Council email accounts should be used to conduct Council business. Under no circumstances should emails be forwarded either individually or in bulk by means of an auto-forward to other email accounts (personal, business or other authorities) to be actioned.

When using your Council email account, you should be mindful of the fact that any email you send will be identifiable as coming from the Council. You should therefore take care not to send anything via email that may reflect badly on the Council. In particular, you must not send content of a sexual nature or racist nature, junk mail, chain letters, cartoons or jokes from your Council email address.

Using a Council email address to sent inappropriate material, including content of a sexual or racist nature, is strictly prohibited. Should you receive any offensive or inappropriate content via email you should delete it. Councillors should inform the Town Clerk of this as soon as possible so he can ensure that it can be fully removed from the system.

Attachments in email messages are commonly used to introduce computer viruses and malware to systems. An email containing such an attachment is likely appear to come from someone you know. If you feel the email is not genuine, do not attempt to open the attachment. Delete the email immediately and advise the Town Clerk of the presumed sender and outline content so he may consider whether to alert other Councillors or staff.

You should also take care that emails will be seen only by the person intended. Particular care should be taken when sending confidential information that the email has been correctly addressed, marked 'private' and not copied in to those not authorised to see the information. Sending confidential information via email without proper authorisation or without taking proper care to ensure that it is properly protected will be treated as misconduct.

In cases where you are sending an email to more than one personal account you must blind copy all recipients to avoid a data breach.

While a limited amount of personal use of email is perfectly acceptable, your email remains the property of the Council and you should not use your Council email to send or receive any information that you regard as private.

The Council may, in the course of its operation, read emails that you have sent or received – although in the absence of evidence of wrongdoing the Council will try to avoid reading personal emails, if possible.

4. Internet Use

Councillors with access to the internet on Council-owned devices should use that access responsibly. In particular the following is deemed unacceptable use or behaviours:

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- visiting internet sites that contain obscene, hateful, pornographic or otherwise illegal material
- using the computer to perpetrate any form of fraud, or software, film or music piracy
- using the internet to send offensive or harassing material to other users
- downloading commercial software or any copyrighted materials belonging to third parties, unless this download is covered or permitted under a commercial agreement or other such licence
- hacking into unauthorised areas
- publishing defamatory and/or knowingly false material about the Council, the Councillors, staff or the public on social networking sites, blogs, wikis and any other online publishing format
- revealing confidential information about the Council in a personal online posting, upload or transmission
- undertaking deliberate activities that waste staff effort or networked resources
- introducing any form of malicious software into the Council's network

5. Social Media

When using social media, councillors must be mindful of the information they post, in both a personal and Council capacity, and keep the tone of the comments respectful and informative. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Councillors behaviour on any social networking or other internet site must be consistent with the behaviour required of being a representation of the Council generally.

Councillors must not:

- present personal opinions as that of the Council;
- express any views which may have a Party-political bias;
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council;
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council;
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks;
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission;
- post any information that infringes copyright of others;
- post any information that may be deemed libel;
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment;
- bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity;
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief; and,
- conduct any online that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.

Councillors should not operate a social media account or profile that purports to be operated on or behalf of the Council without the express permission of the Town Clerk.

Any Councillor receiving unwelcomed comments, threats, or harassment online should report it to the police. If you feel your account is being attacked by someone acting as a 'Troll' it is best practice to ignore this person or persons and report the issue to the social media site on which the problem is occurring. There are also a number of options in relation to 'blocking' a person if the behaviour is particularly upsetting or abusive.

6. Personal/Business Use

The Council's communication facilities are provided for the purposes of the Council's business. Limited and responsible personal use by users is also permitted.

Although the Council's email facilities are provided for the purposes of Council business, you may occasionally want to use them for your own personal purposes. This is permitted on the condition that all the procedures and rules set out in this policy are complied with. Be aware, however, that if you choose to make use of Council facilities for personal correspondence, you can expect very little privacy because the Council may need to monitor communications.

Under no circumstance may the Council's facilities be used in connection with the operation or management of any business or for commercial activity. The facilities should not be used by councillors for general party-political activity, and in particular, must not be used for campaigning or election activities. They may, however, be used for correspondence within the political group, general political research, casework as a councillor and similar activities. If you have any doubts, please ask the Town Clerk.

You must also ensure that your personal email use:

- Does not take priority over your responsibilities as a councillor;
- Is minimal;
- Does not cause unwarranted expense or liability to be incurred by the Council;
- Does not have a negative impact on the Council in any way; and,
- Is lawful and complies with this policy.

After being read, personal email should be deleted or forwarded to a personal email account and then deleted. You should note that email is backed up regularly and deleting it from the live system may not necessarily result in it being deleted for good.

If you make personal use of the Council's facilities for sending and receiving email, you will be treated as having agreed to abide by the conditions imposed for their use, and consented to the Council monitoring your personal email in accordance with this policy. If you do not agree or consent to this, then you must not use the system to send or receive personal email.

7. What happens if this policy is breached

If the rules and procedures are not followed, then use of the Council's facilities may be curtailed or withdrawn. Serious breaches of this policy may amount to breach of the Code of Conduct and the withdrawal of permission to use the Council's equipment for personal purposes.

Some aspects of this policy also deal with matters which amount to criminal offences under the Computer Misuse Act 2020.

If there is anything in this policy that you do not understand, please ask the Town Clerk for clarification.