

THRAPSTON TOWN COUNCIL

77 High Street
Thrapston
Northamptonshire
NN14 4JJ
Tel: (01832) 734 673
Email: clerk@thrapstontowncouncil.gov.uk
Website: www.thrapstontowncouncil.gov.uk



E-MAIL AND INTERNET POLICY

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1. E-mail and Internet usage

Some employees have access to e-mail and the Internet for exclusive use in connection with the Town Council's business and as part of the normal execution of their job duties. The purpose of this policy is to protect the Town Council's legal interests. Unregulated access increases the risk of employees inadvertently forming contracts through e-mail and increases the opportunity for wrongful disclosure of confidential information. In addition, carelessly worded e-mail can expose the Town Council to other risks such as but not limited to an action for libel.

All e-mails sent internally and externally, e.g. to contractors, suppliers, residents, must follow the Town Council's designated house style, which will be supplied to authorised users. Furthermore, employees must not, under any circumstances, include unacceptable, offensive, derogatory or profane language within the text of any internal or external e-mail. Failure to follow house style and the rules on use of language is a disciplinary matter and will be dealt with under the Town Council's disciplinary procedure. E-mail should not be used for unsolicited correspondence or marketing campaigns and employees may not commit the Town Council financially by e-mail unless they have been granted a specific level of delegated authority to do so.

Employees who are authorised users are not permitted to surf the Internet or to spend excessive time "chatting" by e-mail for personal and private purposes during their normal working hours. Employees are also prohibited from using e-mail to circulate any non-business material. Not only does excessive time spent online lead to loss of productivity and constitute an unauthorised use of the Town Council's time moreover sexist, racist or other offensive remarks, pictures or jokes sent by e-mail are capable of amounting to unlawful harassment. As "cyber bullying" is an emerging risk, employees are also prohibited from using the Town Council's electronic communications as a means of intimidating or bullying employees or third parties.

Employees who are discovered contravening these rules may face serious disciplinary action under the Town Council's disciplinary procedure. Depending on the seriousness of the offence, it may amount to gross misconduct and could result in summary dismissal.

Use of instant messaging systems must be expressly approved in advance by the Clerk.

Employees who are authorised users are permitted to surf the Internet for personal purposes outside their normal working hours. The Town Council considers acceptable personal use of the Internet to include activities such as but not limited to personal online shopping, booking holidays and banking. It does not include visiting online gambling sites or participating in online gaming. Employees should note that any purchases or other transactions made online whilst at work are made entirely at their own risk.

Employees must never use their work e-mail address to make orders for personal goods and services or to sell their personal goods and services or to sign up for any services (except those expressly authorised by the Town Council). Likewise, if an employee wishes to make a complaint to a third-party supplier or manufacturer about personal goods or services received, a work e-mail address must never be used under any circumstances. These are entirely personal transactions and so the employee must not hold themselves out as acting for or on behalf of the Town Council or must not in any way indicate that the transaction is connected to the Town Council.

Employees who are authorised users are also only permitted to log on to eBay (or any other online auction websites), social networking and video sharing websites such as but not limited to Facebook, MySpace, Reddit, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Tumblr, Flickr and YouTube or use the Town Council's IT systems to keep a personal weblog ("blog") outside their normal working hours. The Town Council nevertheless reserves the right to restrict access to websites of this type at any time. All usage must be in line with the Social Media Policy.

Logging on to sexually explicit websites or the downloading and/or circulation of pornography or other grossly offensive, illegal or obscene material or using the Internet for gambling or illegal activities constitutes gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal under the Town Council's disciplinary procedure. "Rogue" websites exist that appear harmless but instead direct the user automatically to another website that may contain inappropriate material. If this occurs, please contact IT support immediately.

2. Downloading information from the Internet and file sharing

Employees may be tempted to make illegal downloads of material that is subject to copyright. This includes, but is not limited to, music, film and business software. As this and any subsequent file sharing of this material constitutes an infringement of copyright, it is prohibited on any Council computer. This also applies to any download or dissemination of material made outside of normal working hours. Any breach is likely to lead to disciplinary action being taken.

You may need to download documents and information from the Internet in order to undertake your job duties. You should only download documents and information that you are sure about and which is required to fulfil the job duties you are undertaking. With the rapid spread of computer viruses via the Internet, care should be taken when accessing websites that you are not familiar with or when downloading documents or information.

You must not download any programs from the Internet without the prior approval of IT support. Some websites require additional add-in software to display the page completely. These add-ins usually provide additional sound or visual effects. Under no circumstances should these be downloaded without the prior approval of IT support.

3. E-mail and Internet monitoring

The Town Council reserves the right to monitor employees' internal and external e-mails and use of the Internet, both during routine audits of the computer system and in specific cases where a problem relating to excessive or unauthorised use is suspected.

The purposes for such monitoring are to:

- promote productivity and efficiency
- ensure the security of the system and its effective operation
- ensure there is no unauthorised use of the Town Council's time, e.g. that an employee has not been using e-mail to send or receive an excessive number of personal communications
- ensure the smooth running of the business if the employee is absent for any reason and communications need to be checked
- ensure that all employees are treated with respect and dignity at work, by discovering and eliminating any material that is capable of amounting to unlawful harassment
- ensure that inappropriate websites are not being accessed by employees
- ensure there is no breach of confidentiality.

Communications of a sensitive or confidential nature should not be sent by e-mail because it is not guaranteed to be private.

When monitoring e-mails, the Town Council will, except in exceptional circumstances, confine itself to looking at the address and heading of the e-mails. However, where circumstances warrant it, the Town Council may open e-mails and access the content. In this case, the Town Council will avoid, if possible, opening e-mails clearly marked as private or personal.

The Town Council reserves the right to restrict, deny or remove e-mail or Internet access to or from any employee.

4. Reading and storing e-mails

You must check your mailbox regularly during normal working hours. It is your responsibility to read and action any e-mail you receive.

The e-mail system is not to be used as a storage area. Unwanted messages should be deleted completely. Important information or files should be saved into your private or communal data areas or into e-mail folders.

If you are going to be out of the office for a day or longer and as such you will be unable to check your e-mail, you should switch on your "out of office assistant" message. E-mail received in your absence will not normally be read by other members of staff unless you have specifically requested a colleague to undertake this task. However, e-mail may need to be checked by Managers for business-related reasons when the employee is absent for any reason. It may therefore be unavoidable that some personal e-mails might be read in these circumstances.

5. E-mail viruses and spam

All incoming and outgoing external e-mails are checked for computer viruses and, if a virus is found, the message will be blocked.

If you receive an e-mail or data file that is in a format or comes from a source that you do not recognise, do not open the item but contact IT support immediately. Any executable (.exe) files received by e-mail must be referred to IT support for clearance before any other action is taken.

If you receive any unsolicited e-mails or spam that manages to bypass the Town Council's spam software, you must not respond in any way. Please forward the e-mail to IT support and they will add the sender to the list of banned users. Some spam e-mails may offer the option to opt out of receiving them. Be aware that this is sometimes used as a way by unscrupulous spammers of validating a live e-mail address.

6. Contravention of this policy

Any breach of this policy, which should be read in conjunction with the Social Media policy, can lead to disciplinary action being taken, up to and including termination of your employment.

The Town Council reserves the right to amend and update this policy from time to time.

Adopted by the Town Council
23rd June 2020

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Chairman

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Town Clerk