



# Wotton-under-Edge Town Council

## INTERNET AND E-MAIL POLICY

*Reviewed Feb 2017, next Review Feb 2019*

This document applies to all employees, officers and Councillors, both elected and co-opted, and the purpose is to ensure the proper use of Wotton-under-Edge Town Council's (WTC) internet and email systems and to make users aware of what WTC deems as acceptable and unacceptable. WTC reserves the right to amend this policy at its discretion. In case of amendments, users will be informed appropriately.

### LEGAL RISKS

Email is a business communication tool and users are obliged to use this tool in a responsible, effective and lawful manner. Although by its nature email seems to be less formal than other written communication, the same laws apply. Therefore, it is important that users are aware of the legal risks of e-mail:

- If you send emails with any libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks, you and WTC can be held liable.
- If you visit inappropriate websites, you will be held liable.
- If you forward emails with any libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks, you and WTC can be held liable.
- If you unlawfully forward confidential information, you and WTC can be held liable.
- If you unlawfully forward or copy messages without permission, you and WTC can be held liable for copyright infringement.
- If you send an attachment that contains a virus, you and WTC can be held liable.

By following the guidelines in this policy, the internet and email user can minimize the legal risks involved in the use of e-mail. If any user disregards the rules set out in this Internet and email policy, the user will be fully liable and WTC will disassociate itself from the user as far as legally possible.

### LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The following rules are required by law and are to be strictly adhered to:

**It is strictly prohibited to send or forward emails containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks. If you receive an e-mail of this nature, you must promptly notify the Town Clerk, Mayor or Deputy.**

- 1) Do not forward a message without acquiring permission from the sender first (This applies to mail received from a third party being forwarded to another third party. Mail received or sent via the x@wotton-under-edge.com mail system is the property of the Council and can therefore be circulated within the Council.)
- 2) Do not send unsolicited email messages whereby you would be invading someone's privacy.
- 3) Do not forge or attempt to forge email messages.
- 4) Do not send email messages using another person's email account.
- 5) Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator.
- 6) Do not disguise or attempt to disguise your identity when sending mail.
- 7) If you find yourself in receipt of any email which you find breaches any of these legal requirements or that you feel constitutes harassment or bullying, you must report it immediately to the Town Clerk or the Mayor.

### DATA PROTECTION ISSUES

Personal data is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998. Under the terms of the Act, personal data includes any information about a living identifiable individual, including their name, address, phone number, email address and any other information about the individual. If you include such information in an email or an attachment to an email, you are deemed to be "processing" personal data and must abide by the law. In particular, you must not collect such

information without the individual knowing you propose to do this. You may not disclose or amend such information except in accordance with the purpose for which the information was collected and you must ensure the information is accurate and up to date. In addition, the individual has the right to inspect what is held about him or her on the email system, or held in separate archives of emails. The individual can demand correction of inaccurate information, can request blocking or erasure of damaging information, and can sue for damage caused by inaccurate information. The law also imposes rules on storing of personal data. Such data should be kept only for as long as it is needed for the purpose for which it was collected. If you maintain your own stores of emails, you should ensure that such stores are not maintained for longer than is necessary for the purpose for which they were collected. Emails should be held in such a way that they can be easily identified, reviewed and when necessary, destroyed. Finally, the law imposes strict rules on the transfer of personal data outside the European Economic Area (EEA). Transfer is not just the deliberate sending of information outside the EEA, but also allowing third parties from outside the EEA access to the personal data held in the UK.

Therefore, you should **NOT**:

- a) Use emails for any purpose that is not permitted under the Council's notification under the Data Protection Act.
- b) Use a false identity in emails you send out.
- c) Exploit mail servers or other systems to facilitate the widespread distribution of unsolicited and unwanted email.
- d) Use emails for communicating confidential or sensitive matters relating to individuals obtain, handle or disclose personal information without ensuring you are complying with the law or with the organization's notification to the Data Protection Commissioner.
- e) Allow third parties to read personal information in emails or attachments by leaving your screen in view of such third parties.
- f) Create or forward advertisements, chain letters or unsolicited emails.
- g) Read other peoples' emails sent to someone else without their express permission.
- h) Pass your username and/or password to any third party.
- i) Invade someone's privacy by any means using email.
- j) Send emails containing personal information outside the EEA, or allow third parties outside the EEA to read your emails containing such information, without checking with the Data Protection Officer.

And you **SHOULD**:

- a) Be cautious about putting personal information in the body of the text, especially if it is of a sensitive or confidential nature.
- b) Comply with a request from the Town Clerk or the Mayor to inspect your email archives and/or to print out items relevant to a particular individual if that individual demands a copy of his/her file. This will only be requested when required under the Act, or where there is good reason to believe that violations of the law or of Council policies have taken place, or for other compelling or time critical reasons.
- c) Agree to turn over all email records in your possession if you leave the employment of the Council or cease to be a Councillor. Note that the recipients of your emails, the originators of emails you receive and the content of all emails sent or received may be subject to scrutiny.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

WTC considers email as an important means of communication and recognizes the importance of proper email content and speedy replies in conveying a professional image and delivering good customer service. Therefore WTC wishes users to adhere to the following guidelines:

### **GUIDE TO WRITING EMAILS**

1. Write well-structured emails and use short, descriptive subjects, WTC email style may be informal. This means that sentences can be short and to the point. You can start your e-mail with 'Hi', or 'Dear', and the name of the person. Messages can be ended with 'Best Regards'. The use of Internet abbreviations and characters such as smileys however, is not encouraged. Emails should be polite at all times.
2. Signatures must include your name, job title and Council name. Signatures are not necessary for internal e-mails. A disclaimer should be added underneath your signature for external e-mail. (See Disclaimer).
3. Use the spell checker before you send out an email.
4. Do not send unnecessary attachments. Compress attachments larger than 1Mb before sending them

(instructions available on request).

5. Do not write emails in capitals, as this gives the impression of shouting.

6. If you forward mails, state clearly what action you expect the recipient to take.

7. Only send emails of which the content could be displayed on a public notice board. If they cannot be displayed publicly in their current state, consider rephrasing the email, using other means of communication, or protecting information by using a password.

8. Only mark emails as important if they really are important.

### **Replying to emails:**

Emails should be answered within the same time scale afforded to other forms of Communication.

### **Newsgroups:**

Office users need to request permission from the Town Clerk before subscribing to a newsletter or news group.

### **Maintenance:**

Delete any email messages that you do not need to have a copy of. It is good practice to review your deleted items folder each month and clear any items being stored unnecessarily.

### **INTERNET USE**

The Council encourages authorized staff to access the Internet during working hours, when direct work-related benefits can result. The Council reserves the absolute right to block access to certain internet sites when it perceives this to be necessary. Software systems may be put in place if deemed necessary that can monitor and record all internet use. The Council reserves the right to monitor the type and frequency of use of the internet at any time to ensure that the system is not being abused and to protect the business from potential damage or disrepute. Although limited personal use is permitted, no member of staff should have any expectation of privacy as to their internet usage. The Council may employ software to identify inappropriate or sexually explicit internet sites. Material from such sites may not be archived, stored, distributed, edited or recorded using any Council network or computing resources. Access may be blocked from within our networks to all such sites that we know of.

**If you find yourself connected accidentally to a site that contains sexually explicit or offensive material, you must disconnect from that site immediately, regardless of whether that site had been previously deemed acceptable by any screening or rating program and report the site address to the Town Clerk.**

### **PERSONAL USE**

Although WTC internet and email system is meant for business use, the Council allows the reasonable use of internet and email for personal use if certain guidelines are adhered to:

Personal use of the internet and email services should not interfere with work. Limited use of the internet is permitted during breaks and outside working hours. Please note that the reporting tools within any monitoring package can record the time and duration of internet use and the address of each site visited.

Do not visit sites containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene material. An internet monitoring package can immediately inform you and the systems administrator of attempted access to sites that the monitoring package considers inappropriate. In this regard the monitoring package is there to protect the user as well as the Council.

Personal use of emails must also adhere to the guidelines in this policy.

The forwarding of chain letters, junk mail and explicit content is strictly forbidden.

Do not send mass mailings.

All messages distributed via the Council's email system, even personal emails, are the property of WTC.

Do not send personal e-mails of a political nature using the Council's systems.

Do not send personal e-mails where there is a potential conflict of interest using the Council's systems.

### **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

Avoid sending confidential information by e-mail. If you do, you should secure the information by including it in a Microsoft Word or Excel file and password protecting it if possible. Then provide the recipient with the password by means of other communication, for instance by telephone.

**DISCLAIMER**

The following disclaimer should be added to each outgoing email:

*'This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please contact clerk@wotton-under-edge.com. Please note that any views or opinions presented in this email are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Wotton-under-Edge Town Council. All messages sent and received by the Council are virus checked but it is advisable for the recipient to check this email and any attachments for the presence of viruses. The Council accepts no liability for any damage caused by any virus transmitted by this email.'*

**SYSTEM MONITORING**

You must have no expectation of privacy in anything you create, store, send or receive on the Council's computer or email system. Your internet visits and emails can be monitored without prior notification if WTC deems this necessary. If there is evidence that you are not adhering to the guidelines set out in this policy, WTC reserves the right to take appropriate action.

**QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or comments about this Internet and e-mail policy, please contact the Town Clerk  
If you do not have any questions WTC presumes that you understand and are aware of the rules and guidelines of this Internet and Email Policy and will adhere to them.

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