

# Necton Parish Council

## Use of Email & Social Media



### Document Control

Adopted: 7 March 2016

Minute ref: 2016/11/4 item 8 (part of Council's communication policy)

Review: March 2017

This document applies to

- employees
- elected members (councillors)
- members of the public
- other people, companies and organisations in contact with Necton Parish Council

The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We will ask those who contact us for their preferred method of communication when we deal with them.

The Parish Clerk is responsible for the management and monitoring of the Council's email and social media communication channels.

Over time, the Parish Council may add to the methods of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers.

Necton Parish Council endeavors to ensure that any communications from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Will not contain content that is unlawful, libelous, defamatory, abusive, obscene; or contravenes any of the Parish Council's policies in relation to Equality & Diversity, Bullying & Harassment.
- Will not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

The Parish Council expects any in-coming communications to meet the following criteria:

- Not to contain content that is unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive or contravenes any of the Parish Council's policies in relation to Equality & Diversity, Bullying & Harassment.
- Not to contain content copied from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright.
- Not to be spammed by individuals or businesses.
- Not to contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

To meet Council obligations under Data Protection legislation all information must be treated sensitively and securely. Members and employees are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of all information that they have access to and not to share that information with anyone unless they are sure that it is reasonable and appropriate to do so.

Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct/Employment terms and will be dealt with through prescribed procedures.

## **Email**

All users must use email responsibly. Necton Parish Council reserves the right to take disciplinary or legal action against any person who fails to comply with this policy.

All users must accept that communications via the Clerk's email system is not secure<sup>1</sup> or encrypted and they should take particular care when sending potentially sensitive or confidential information.

All users must accept and agree that communications both to and from the Council via email may be monitored for ensuring appropriate use of this methodology. Users should also be aware that deleted emails may still be accessible from back-up procedures.

## **General guidance**

Email users should be aware of the following:

- Messages sent to groups of people must be relevant to all concerned.
- Messages sent by this method are not necessarily seen by the recipient within the current week. If the message is urgent, an alternative method of contact should be used
- The Parish Council cannot be held responsible for damages, losses, expenses, demands and/or claims that may be suffered by a user of this facility.
- The Clerk may, from time to time, choose to operate a filtering system in order to monitor offensive or clearly inappropriate material and may quarantine any messages in that category.

## **Business use**

- The Clerk has the sole authority<sup>2</sup> to purchase or acquire goods or services on behalf of the Council via email.
- Where Parish Councilors need to communicate to external bodies on behalf of the Parish Council they should send their communication to the Clerk for onward distribution using the official Council communication channel.
- If this is not practical then the Parish Councillor must always ensure they copy the Clerk into the correspondence
- Users are informed that email messages have the same status in law as written correspondence (letters and faxes) and are subject to the same legal implications, e.g. may be required to be disclosed in Court.
- Users are required to apply the same high standards to emails as those applied to written correspondence.
- Email inboxes must be checked regularly by to ascertain all correspondence within that system.

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<sup>1</sup> Recommended security measures in place with council email account & reviewed annually.

<sup>2</sup> Ref: Financial regulations policy

- The Clerk must ensure they check their inbox when they are away because of business, holiday or sickness. Alternatively, there must be a designated person to cover these periods.
- All users must comply with the relevant licence terms and conditions when copying and/or downloading material.
- Users accept that there is no guarantee of delivery of emails unless acceptance of delivery is requested of the recipient.
- All users must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 when placing personal data in messages or attachments.

### **Inappropriate use**

Users must not use email to abuse or inflame others or to harass or threaten anyone. Responding to abuse, harassment or threatening will not be accepted as an excuse for inappropriate language and/or behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

Recipients of abusive or threatening emails related to the business of the Council must immediately inform the Clerk or Chairman.

Users must not send emails containing obscene, abusive or profane language.

Users must not send, access, display, download, copy or circulate information containing stories, jokes or anecdotes that contain:

- pornography or sexually orientated images
- gambling
- gaming (playing computer games)
- promotion of unlawful discrimination of any kind
- promotion of racial or religious hatred
- threats including the promotion of violence
- fraudulent or illegal material promotion of illegal and/or unlawful acts
- information considered to be offensive, inappropriate or disrespectful
- unauthorised and copyrighted material including music.

Necton Parish Council will report to the police all known incidents in which users intentionally send or receive emails containing the following:

- images of child pornography or child abuse (i.e. images where children are or appear to be under the age of 16 and are involved in sexual activities or posed to be sexually provocative)
- adult material/pornography that breaches the Obscene Publications Acts (1959 & 1964)
- criminally racist material

Users must not send, receive or disseminate proprietary data or any confidential information belonging to Necton Parish Council to or from a third party unless authorised.

### **Accidental access to inappropriate material**

If inappropriate material is accessed accidentally, users must report this immediately to the Chairman. It can then be taken into account as part of the Council's monitoring procedure.

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<sup>3</sup> Ref: Dignity at Work, Bullying & harassment policies

## Monitoring

Serious breaches of this policy by a Council employee will amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal.

Serious breaches of this policy by councillors, members of the public or members of any other organisation or company will result in legal or police action.

## Responsible Officer

The Clerk will be responsible for the administration of this policy on behalf of Necton Parish and will report breaches to the Chairman of the Council for advice about further action.

**Necton Parish Council email** [nectonparishcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:nectonparishcouncil@gmail.com)

Our e-Mail account is monitored during office hours, Monday and Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can and usually within 5 working days.

The Parish Clerk is the account holder and manager. They are responsible for dealing with e-Mail correspondence received.

### Operational management of this account

- The account is accessed by the Clerk via Outlook on PC laptop. Messages are downloaded with a copy also left on server.
- Emails are filed within Outlook and sync'd with Gmail server continuously.
- Important attachments are downloaded to hard drive file directory.
- Password in place and only 2 people know it (clerk & chair).
- Online access is available directly via google site.
- Other mobile devices that have authorised access are the clerk's smartphone and tablet.

### Is Gmail safe?

Various sites suggest that it is safe once their safety features are enabled.

- 2 step verification (in place)
- Strict password control and regular change (in place)
- Ensure access is over a secure network (in place)
- Updating back-up contact details, in the event of a hacker changing passwords (in place)
- Keeping an eye on account activity (in place)

## Social Media

Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.

Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor/Clerk, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

All staff and councillors must ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.

The Parish Clerk is the nominated Social Media Moderator and is responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with this Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed inflammatory or of a defamatory or libelous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook).

The Parish Clerk is the nominated 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the Parish Council website. The website may be used to:-

- Post notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Publish the Council's policies and procedures
- Post good news stories & new information appropriate to the Council or village
- Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Advertise vacancies of the Council or village community organisations
- Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, library, district council etc.
- Post of share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
- Post other items as the Council see fit

Facebook and/or Twitter etc. may be used to support the website and its information as above.

Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

When participating in online communication, staff and councillors must:-

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
- Never make false or misleading statements
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points

- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or video from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright
- Spell and grammar check everything.

At any meeting of the Council or any of its committees, the following persons should sit in a separate designated area, although they may be included in a panning or panoramic shot –

- Any members of the public who do not wish to participate in the meeting and who object to being filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about
- and children and vulnerable adults where the relevant responsible adult has not given consent for them to be filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about.

Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either the open forum or as full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. Again the 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the Clerk by direct means. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required.

**Necton Parish Council website** [www.nectonparishcouncil.norfolkparishes.gov.uk](http://www.nectonparishcouncil.norfolkparishes.gov.uk)

Norfolk County Council hosts the Council's website under the Norfolk Parishes project. There is currently no charge to the Council for this hosting.

The website uses WordPress technology. Again, there is no charge for use of this software.

The Parish Council Clerk is responsible for publishing and moderating content.