

Buckland Parish Council
Digital Communication Policy governing use of
Information Technology, Email and Internet

Buckland Parish Council (“Council”) promotes the use of internet and electronic mail to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Council’s functions. However, these facilities must be used responsibly and lawfully.

Communications from Council will meet the following criteria:

- (i) Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- (ii) Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libelous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- (iii) Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which Council does not own the copyright;
- (iv) Not contain any personal information – i.e. names, addresses, email addresses, IP addresses and cookie identifiers;
- (v) Email communications shall include the standard Council disclaimer.

Use of Email

The following procedures are intended to ensure a complete and proper record is kept of all Council correspondence:

- (i) The use of email to exchange correspondence requires the same professional standards as other forms of communication – be aware that agreements made by email may have the same status as letters or formal contracts.
- (ii) The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action;
- (iii) All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk and any other correspondence should always be copied to the Clerk;
- (iv) Until such time as a Councillor is using their formal parish council designated email address for council business, at any time that Councillor is representing Council they should only issue the Clerk’s email address as their point of contact.
- (v) Any correspondence from a new email address that requires data to be passed on, will need to be followed up (by the Clerk) with a Data Consent Form to be completed and returned (to the Clerk) before any action is taken with that correspondence;
- (vi) Councillors who choose to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views will need to consider whether it is appropriate to copy the Clerk. Councillors should remain mindful that copying an email to the Clerk “makes it official and subject to the Freedom of Information Act” and are advised all such emails should be sent from the email address provided to each Councillor to be used for Council business.
- (vii) In order to protect from viruses, email attachments which might contain macros (word processor and spreadsheet files) or applications, should not be opened if they are from an unfamiliar sender; they should be deleted.
- (viii) Junk mail is a hazard of internet life and efforts should be made to isolate it at source; junk mail should otherwise be deleted without opening any attachments.

Data protection

- (i) Sensitive personal data should not be included in the text of emails sent, nor in files attached to them, unless the files are password protected and the password is provided to the intended recipient via a separate channel. This is to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- (ii) Email addresses should be treated as confidential and care taken that private email addresses are not wrongly circulated. Parish Updates, issued to members of the village email group are distributed using the blind copy addressee field.

Internet

Material should not be downloaded to the Council laptop if there is any suspicion that it may contain a virus. Material from the Internet should not be used without checking whether it is restricted by copyright or licensing law.

Website

The village website is hosted by an external company on a server located in the EU (Ireland) and encrypted using AES 256bit. A backup of the village website is automatically generated on a regular basis to safeguard against failure of the hosting company. Updates to the website are published by the volunteer webmaster and the Clerk. The parish council provides a grant to the volunteer webmaster to fund the hosting, licence and domain fee for the village website.

Computers

The Council laptop operating system is Windows 10 Pro, Council subscribes to Office 365 and updates to windows and office are automatically applied. Bitlocker has been activated to encrypt the data held locally on the hard drive and Windows Defender is active.

Information held on the Council laptop is backed up using Microsoft OneDrive (cloud storage feature of Office 365). The data held on the Council laptop is also backed up periodically, with the benefit of password protection, to a stand-alone hard drive.

Microsoft has stated its commitment to Windows 10 and Office 365 remaining GDPR compliant.

The Clerk is responsible for ensuring the Council laptop is kept clean, is not used to access offensive material and for reporting any unresolved faults to Council.

Text messaging

Councillors and the Clerk may use text messaging as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing e.g. Skype, Zoom, GoTo

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

Social media

Social media for work purposes should be used only with the permission of Council.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council

As more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital all information is treated sensitively and securely.

Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures.

Members should take care only to copy recipients on a "need to know" basis (i.e. avoid use of "reply to all") and ensure email correspondence is deleted on a timely basis.

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