

PATCHWAY TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy has been devised so that employees are able to obtain the maximum benefit from Town Council communications equipment including electronic mail, the internet, office phones and mobile phones. It is designed to protect employees, the Council and the Council's equipment.
- 1.2 The policy applies to all employees who use Patchway Town Council's communications facilities.
- 1.3 The policy reaffirms the Town Council's general requirements in terms of ensuring that:
 - There is no misuse of Town Council facilities;
 - Standards of behaviour and language are maintained in internal and external communications;
 - Material that could be considered as racist, sexist or otherwise cause deliberate offence is banned.
- 1.4 It is the responsibility of each employee to ensure that they understand and adhere to the principles forming this policy.

2. E-mail and the Internet

- 2.1 The policy states the requirements that apply to the standards to which users are expected to observe in the use of electronic mail and internet facilities provided by the Council.
- 2.2 Misuse of electronic mail and/or internet facilities is a misuse of Town Council resources, which may lead to action under the disciplinary procedure.
- 2.3 The following must be adhered to:
 - E-mails must be composed with care. The content and language used in the message must be consistent with best practice;
 - E-mails containing sexist, racist, derogatory or inappropriate comments which advocate the commission of unlawful acts of violence or discrimination towards other people must not be sent;
 - Aggressive, abusive or offensive language must not be used;
 - E-mails must not be sent to more than 50 people simultaneously;
 - Employees must not copy, download or forward material written by anyone else that is potentially libellous or otherwise unlawful;
 - Employees must not give out e-mail addresses carelessly;
 - E-mails are not to be sent hastily or in anger;
 - Employees are to be aware that external e-mail is not secure and delivery is not guaranteed;
 - Unauthorised, illegally copied or other unofficial software must not be used.
- 2.4 Unacceptable use or behaviour on the Internet by employees includes:
 - Allowing non-authorised users to access the internet using employees log in or while logged on;

- Visiting internet sites that contain obscene, hateful, pornographic or otherwise illegal material;
- Passing on such material to colleagues or external people;
- 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, its employees, members, your colleagues and/or our customers on social networking sites, 'blogs' (online journals), 'wikis' and any online publishing format;
- Undertaking deliberate activities that waste staff effort or networked resources;
- Introducing any form of malicious software into the corporate network; Gambling on-line;
- Disclosure of any confidential corporate information without express consent;
- Any other area that the Council reasonably believes may cause them problems.
- When sending sensitive data, such as items with regard to council finances or personnel issues, the sender has to ensure that the data is encrypted using password protection and only circulating this password to the relevant people. This is to ensure complete compliance with the GDPR legislation 2018.

3. Privacy/Security

- 3.1 Security is essential. Employees may be held personally liable for any misuse by another person.
- 3.2 There is no central log or monitoring of electronic mail. However, in certain circumstances it may be necessary to enter an employee's e-mail account. These circumstances include sudden absences and allegations of serious wrongdoing. Emails may also be accessed when collating information for Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests.
- 3.3 All staff are required to ensure that they do not disclose their passwords to anyone.
- 3.4 Access to the internet is recorded and traceable.

4. Personal Use

- 4.1 Reasonable personal use on an occasional basis is allowed, provided it does not interfere with employee workload.

5. Mobile Phones

- 5.1 Where employees have been provided with a mobile telephone for use in their work, such phones are for business purposes and not for private use. However, if in exceptional circumstances it becomes necessary for an employee to use a council mobile phone for private calls, the cost of the calls must be reimbursed to the council.
- 5.2 Where the itemised bill shows the cost of a private call, the employee is required to reimburse this sum to the council, plus VAT at 20%.

- 5.3 If the bill shows the duration of the call but there is no identifiable charge, then the employee making the call must make a contribution to the cost on the basis of 0.5p for every 1 second of call time, plus VAT at 20%.
- 5.4 The employee must identify any private calls made and make payment to the Responsible Finance Officer/Deputy Town Clerk at the end of each month.
- 5.5 Personal mobile phones should be switched off and kept in a safe location during working hours except recognised breaks. Failure to do so will result in disciplinary action.
- 5.6 If the employee can provide a reasonable explanation as to why they would need their personal mobile phone switched on during working hours, they need to provide this verbally or written to their line manager.

6. Mobile Phones and Driving

- 6.1 In respect of the laws which came into effect on 1 December 2003, Patchway Town Council forbids employees to use mobile phones whilst driving. This applies to hands-free sets as much as conventional mobiles as accident evidence shows that even hands-free sets are a major distraction.
- 6.2 If an employee needs to stop, s/he must do so in a safe place. Stopping is only permitted on motorway hard shoulders in the event of an emergency. (Receiving or making a mobile call is very rarely an emergency).
- 6.3 Employees should ensure mobiles are switched off or diverted to voicemail before embarking on a journey in order to minimise distraction.

7. Office Phones

- 7.1 In the event of an emergency, staff are permitted to receive incoming calls/make outgoing calls of a personal nature. Frequent use of office phones is not permitted for a number of reasons including:
 - disruption of work productivity;
 - ties up the phone lines;
 - calls of an outgoing nature incur expenditure.

8. Violation of the Policy

- 8.1 Should the Town Council consider that there has been an unacceptable violation of the policy, it will be dealt with in accordance with the Town Council's Managing Employee Performance Procedure.

Adopted by Patchway Town Council – 27/11/2018