



INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY

CP12.02

Authorisation & last review as shown in the Policy Review Record CD08A

CHANGE LOG	
v.1 May 2026	To consolidate IT related council policies: Electronic Communications policy (was CP08.03) Social Media Policy (was in development) IT equipment Loan Policy (to formalise contractual) To also reference Data Protection Policy (was CP07) & Document Retention Policy (was CP06)
v.1 May 2026	To include update to gov.uk domain name

I PURPOSE

This policy is designed to consolidate those Council policies related to information technology into one location for ease of reference. These fall into five areas:

- Legal & Regulatory Framework
- IT Equipment Management
- Electronic Communications – email.
- Electronic Communications – internet & website
- Social Media
- Electronic Data Control

Information Technology is the defacto means Council uses to conduct its business communications internally, with residents and with third parties. Unless by exception, the more traditional forms of communication such as fax and letter are effectively superceded by electronic or digitised text, media and files.

Grendon Underwood Parish Council recognises that the efficient management of its electronic communications, and the equipment that generates it, is necessary to comply with its legal and regulatory obligations such as to ensure transparency, accountability and to contribute to the effective overall management of the Parish Council.

This Policy provides the framework within which Council will effectively manage access to, the application of, and its mandatory administrative control arrangements in relation to the requirements of the relevant legislation such as to ensure compliance with its obligations and to deliver its duties in regard to the expectations of the residents of the Parish.

The provision and use of Grendon Underwood Parish Council equipment, email addresses and internet facilities are a privilege bestowed at the discretion of Council. It is not a right, either of Membership or employment, and it may be revoked at any time, for any reason at the sole discretion of the Council.

Council has made every effort to ensure all relevant statutory requirements to which a council is subject are encompassed in this Policy but confirm that, in any event, those requirements apply whether or not they are incorporated herein.

This Policy has been drawn up within the context of the Parish Council's obligations as an employer, its Freedom of Information Policy and its Data Protection Policy and every effort has been made to ensure this Policy is consistent with other Council Policies where relevant.

Breaches of this Policy may result in:

- Removal of posting privileges
- Referral to the County Democracy Monitoring Officer (for councillors)
- Disciplinary action (for employees)
- Reporting to law enforcement in cases of harassment, threats, or illegal activity

Notes:

- 'Council' means Grendon Underwood Parish Council.
- Where the word 'Councillor' or 'Member' is used, unless the context suggests otherwise, the meaning is intended to include both elected and co-opted Councillors, with or without voting rights, authorised, by Council, to access council electronic data, software and hardware for any council authorised, specialist or legal purposes.
- An 'employee' is a properly employed employee of the Council acting as their employer.

- A 'co-opted Member or Councillor' is a person who is not an elected member of the Council but who has been co-opted onto the Council, or a committee properly constituted by Council, by a majority of elected Councillors at a properly constituted meeting of Council and who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of Council or that committee or sub-committee.
- Where the word 'professional expertise' is used, it means any third party authorised by Council, by resolution, to provide expert advice in the use of electronic media.
- A 'meeting' is a properly constituted meeting of the Council, any of its committees, sub-committees, joint committees or joint sub-committees.
- Where gender specific wording is used, meaning is intended to be gender neutral.

II SCOPE – The policy covers all forms of electronic data management and social media, including but not limited to Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, Threads, YouTube, WhatsApp groups, community forums, and any emerging platforms used for public communication.

It applies to all Members, employees and professional expertise having been authorised to access council email accounts, incoming & outgoing, and the council web site.

III ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

(a) LEGAL & REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Council must ensure any use of council-controlled devices or software complies with the obligations defined by:

- Local Government Act 1972 (access to information and decision-making)
- Local Government Act 2000 and the Code of Conduct for Members (see CP04)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR (see CP07)
- Equality Act 2010 (see CP08)
- Defamation Act 2013
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Copyright law
- Nolan Principles of Public Life

(b) IT EQUIPMENT MANAGEMENT

The Council will issue a laptop and a printer to the Parish Clerk to facilitate the administration of Council business against delegated authority and/or resolution, subject to the following terms & conditions.

- The issue and retention of, the equipment is at the sole discretion of the Council and does not constitute any form of right or remuneration regarding employment.
- The equipment remains the property of the Council for the whole period of your employment.
- Use of the equipment must be EXCLUSIVELY for Council business. You must not access any website, emails, files or images not directly related to your Council employment.
- You must not use any other equipment for Council business at any time for any reason - the Council will not be responsible for any liabilities, costs or charges arising from such use, including hire charges, repair and maintenance of hardware or software, upgrading, removable media, software subscriptions, use of consumables or ancillary equipment etc.
- The cost of replacement (in the case of damage or loss at any time whilst you hold the equipment) is your responsibility. You are strongly advised to arrange your own insurance for any such loss or damage.
- The equipment is lent, for the period of your employment, on the understanding that it is returnable in an acceptable, working condition, taking into account reasonable wear & tear, at any time on demand and, in any event, it is automatically returnable immediately on termination of your employment.
- You must not modify or repair or authorise any change to the equipment yourself. In the event of failure, notify the Council for instructions.
- You must not delete, hide or modify files unilaterally.
- No files, documents or images may be copied to hard copy or to any electronic medium or removable device except as directed by the Chairman of Council for direct Council business or for loss recovery backup purposes to the relevant Council protocols. Note: The Council retains all rights to any such copies.

- You must not install, delete or modify any software or applications on the equipment.
- You are responsible for carrying out backup procedures, using the USB thumb drive provided, frequently enough to ensure that any work or information held on the equipment is recoverable such that you are not prevented from carrying out your duties to the Council or instructions from the Chairman.
- Any & all files, documents, images, backups and data on the equipment or on other third party storage media, authorised or not, remain the property of the Council.
- Use of the equipment to access the Internet, local or external networks, routers or other communications equipment must be legal & directly for the sole benefit of the Council. By allowing you to use its equipment, the Council does not accept any liability for internet charges or any apportionment or sharing of these.
- You will be issued with a Council email address strictly for use exclusively on Council equipment and exclusively for Council business. You must not use any other email address for Council business or for purporting to represent the Council in any capacity or for any reason whatsoever.
- Other than for routine day to day business, you must not use your email address to make yourself out as representing the Council on any matter without a minuted instruction authorising you to do so.
- Use of the equipment or your Council email address to receive or send any electronic media such as, but not limited to, e-mails, data file transfers or digital imaging for personal reasons is expressly forbidden.
- The equipment and any backup device or removable media containing Council data must be made available to a duly authorised representative of the Council on request for lawful auditing of content and security.
- You must not change or tamper with passwords, administration rights and other security, access or protection routines & protocols such as to prevent the Council from accessing the equipment or its web site.

(c) ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS; EMAIL

(i) **Email management.**

- Council issued email accounts are to be used exclusively for Council business and not for any personal purposes.
- All Council business is to be progressed through a Council issued email account only.
- All email transmissions are to be copied to all Councillors and the Clerk.
- Employees are not to encrypt their email messages or change any passwords or access codes unless by the express permission the Chairman of Council.
- Council email is not to be used for illegal or wrongful purposes or to infringe the copyright or other intellectual property rights of third parties or to distribute defamatory, fraudulent or harassing messages. Failure to comply with this will be a disciplinary offence.
- Authorised Members(s) may access, record or disclose any electronic messages or files on an employee's account for any valid legal or business purpose. Employees will not be informed when or if this is to take place.
- Where mandated by statute or for any other legal purpose or by directive of the Chairman, emails and electronic documents relevant to the course of business of the Council should be printed out and filed in the same manner as written correspondence via existing procedures.
- Email accounts are to be used only by those authorised by Council. Users are not to share their account name or password and will be held responsible for all activity on their account.
- Subscription to mailing lists, bulletin boards, chat groups and commercial online services and other information or entertainment services, unless specifically requested by a Councillor, is not allowed.
- The sending and receiving of pornographic material is strictly prohibited. Any member of staff found distributing or downloading such material may face disciplinary procedures.
- The Council recognises the difficulty in preventing unsolicited receipt of pornographic material, from third-party sites, to an employee's council email address. The employee must take every precaution to prevent such receipt, including keeping their email address secure.

- If malicious or pornographic material is received to a user's email address, to prevent a user from being held responsible for the receipt of such material, the Chairman of Council is to be contacted in order to exclude receipt of future messages from the offending or similar source.
- Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, which could lead to dismissal.

(ii) Content Standards for Official Posts

Council posts must be accurate, clear, written in a professional tone and must NOT contain

- personal opinions or political bias
- commercial branding, logos or advertising
- breaches of copyright and data protection
- names of individuals without explicit consent
- unverified information
- hate speech, harassment, or discriminatory language
- defamatory statements
- personal data
- political campaigning
- Repeated disruptive behaviour ("trolling")

(ii) Election Period (Purdah)

During the pre-election period:

- Council posts must remain strictly neutral.
- No political content, candidate promotion, or controversial issues may be posted.
- Routine service information may continue but must avoid influencing public opinion.

(d) ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS; INTERNET & WEBSITE

(i) Council-managed information technology will only be used to:

- Provide timely, factual information about council services, meetings, and decisions
- Promote community events, consultations, and public engagement
- Support emergency or urgent communications
- Strengthen transparency and trust
- Encourage constructive dialogue with residents, County and Stakeholders.

(ii) Access to the administrative functions of the council web site or other internet access on council equipment or accounts will be limited to authorised personnel only and must be used solely to facilitate the daily running of Council business.

- If non-authorised personnel wish to use the Council Internet facilities, they must request permission from the Chairman of Council, prior to use, and must justify both the desired usage and estimated surfing time.
- Internet facilities are not to be used for accessing dubious websites or for downloading free software unless such software is deemed to be pertinent to the running of systems by the Chairman of Council.
- Any unauthorised or authorised member of staff found viewing, accessing or downloading illicit/pornographic material or for any non-council business
- Council Internet facilities are not to be used for the retrieval or forwarding of any email messages from non-approved accounts, accessing bulletin boards, chat rooms and discussion groups unless specifically requested by a Councillor and passed by resolution of Council for valid Council business
- Failure to comply with this policy will be considered gross misconduct subject to appropriate disciplinary procedures.

(iii) Security and Data Protection

- Passwords must be strong, unique, and changed regularly.
- Two-factor authentication should be enabled where possible.
- Personal data must not be shared without consent.
- Screenshots or archives of abusive or unlawful posts should be stored securely for evidence.

(e) SOCIAL MEDIA

(iv) Official Council Accounts

- The Council does not own, maintain or subscribe to any social media account or social media platform.
- All council business is enacted at full meetings of Council and communicated through a free, access compliant council web site.

- No official posts or announcements are made through social media.

(v) Engagement with personal and third-party Social Media accounts

Members and employees should not normally use social media in an official capacity to engage with residents or third parties regarding council business or resolutions, unless by express permission of Council, and must, in any event, follow these principles:

- By exception, when acting in an official capacity, councillors must comply with the **Code of Conduct**.
- Social media will not be used to debate individual complaints, discuss confidential matters, or engage in political campaigning.
- Councillors must not disclose confidential information or discuss ongoing council business outside formal meetings.
- Personal accounts must not imply they speak for the Council unless authorised.
- Councillors must treat residents, officers, and colleagues with respect at all times.
- Political views should not be expressed as representing the Council and must be explicitly separated from council business.
- Councillors must avoid pre-determination when commenting on planning or regulatory matters.

(vi) Employees' Use of Social Media

Employees must:

- Not post content that could damage the Council's reputation
- Not engage in political activity in a way that conflicts with their role
- Maintain confidentiality and data protection
- Avoid discussing internal council matters publicly
- Seek approval before posting on official accounts.
- Personal use during working hours is not approved.

(vii) Handling Complaints, Queries, and Conflicts

- Routine queries may be acknowledged on social media but should be directed to official channels (email, website, Clerk).
- Complaints must not be debated publicly; users should be referred to the Council's Complaints Procedure.
- Offensive or threatening messages should be documented and reported to the Clerk, Monitoring Officer, or police where appropriate.

(f) ELECTRONIC DATA

- The Council is a Data Controller under GDPR legislation and all electronic data, however held, is subject to the Council Data Protection Policy CP07.
- All data sent from, received by and held on council equipment and in council accounts remains the property of the council.
- Members and Employees must ensure that all such data is held securely and is backed up periodically according to Council policies and direction.
- Data, text, media, images must not be forwarded or copied or passed to any third party without express permission of The Chairman.

IV Policy Maintenance

Council policies require periodic review – usually annually at the May meeting - to ensure their continued applicability. Whilst the Council remains responsible for the Policy, any questions or clarifications should be addressed to the Clerk by email.

V Policy Register with Versioning

All Councillors and residents of the parish should be able to access all appropriate policies all the time and to be able to tell if they are current.

Pursuant to statute, the Council will publish a Policy Register to its web site and review it annually.

The Council will maintain versioning, as policies evolve, to monitor development and to track changes over time.