

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
- ☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314
- 💻 **Website:** <https://colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk>
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COMPUTER USE POLICY

1. Introduction

This Policy sets out the correct use of Colney Heath Parish Council owned computers and any other similar devices or related equipment such as external hard drives/USB, laptops and portable/mobile computers, and “Smart Phones” etc.

2. General Computer Use

All employees must adhere to the following Computer Use Policy and rules on the use of the Council’s computer systems and equipment. All computer systems, software, and network systems provided by Colney Heath Parish Council are to be used exclusively for the Parish Council’s business.

The Clerk is responsible overall for the proper use and maintenance of any computer owned by Colney Heath Parish Council which includes the prompt installation of all software and security updates and annual renewal of anti-virus software subscription.

This Policy applies whether a person is using the equipment at work or off Council property. Any necessary maintenance or repairs outside of the Council’s ability must only be carried out by the manufacturer or an agent approved by the Council.

No person other than the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk, a Councillor or other person authorised by the Council may use Council owned computers or any associated equipment.

All Council IT equipment with a value other than nominal must be included on the Council Inventory of Equipment, whether or not it is also included on the Council Asset Register and must be security marked.

3. User Accountability

If as a computer user an employee is accountable for their actions and may be held liable to disciplinary or criminal sanctions for any unauthorised actions on any computer or devices provided by the Parish Council found to be intentional, malicious, or grossly negligent.

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4. Passwords

Use of the Parish Council owned computers and any other device capable of storing information will be password protected. Passwords should be 'strong' and be at least 8 characters long, a mix of alphabetic, numeric and special characters and not based on a simple numeric pattern.

All passwords must be renewed regularly and all passwords, alarm codes, and safe codes will be placed in a sealed envelope and kept securely. Personal data must be password protected with authorisation, from the Clerk or Chair as appropriate.

5. Unauthorised Access

Employees are:-

- not to attempt to enter computer systems unless authorised;
- not to use email in a fraudulent manner, either by faking another's identity or by sending messages of inappropriate content;
- prohibited from intercepting messages or files by impersonating another user or person; and
- not to attach any equipment to the network without prior approval of the Clerk.

6. Computer Software Licences, Viruses and Games

The Parish Council licenses the use of computer software from a variety of providers and does not own this software and, unless authorised by the software developer, neither the Parish Council nor employees have the right to reproduce it and to do so constitutes an infringement of copyright. Possession or use of illegally copied software is prohibited. The Parish Council's computer network makes it vulnerable to viruses and therefore only authorised personnel have the authority to load new software onto the network system. Even then, software may be loaded only after only having been checked for viruses by the Clerk. Employees are not allowed to access or play any computer games on the Parish Council's computer network.

7. Data Protection

When an employee is a computer user, they are advised to take appropriate measures to protect information and applications as computers and network systems are inherently insecure. It is the Clerk's responsibility to ensure that adequate protective measures have been installed and are used to transmit and secure data and to act at all times in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy and the General Data Protection Regulations.

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8. Restrictions

Employees must:-

- not load software on to any Parish Council computer or device without the permission of the Clerk and are prohibited from changing or circumventing access controls to allow them or others to perform actions outside their authorised privileges;
- must not reconstruct or recreate information or software for which they are not authorised;
- must not take unauthorised actions to intentionally modify or delete information or programs;
- must not introduce or use malicious software such as computer viruses, Trojan horses or worms etc;
- may not deliberately interfere with other users accessing system resources;
- not exchange protected data or programs between the Council IT systems and/or network and any third-party computers or network without the prior written approval of the Clerk.

If an employee has their own electronic device e.g. a smart phone, Kindle, iPad or similar they are only allowed to use it during working hours with prior approval. Appropriate use of a personal device during authorised breaks is allowed as long as it does not interfere with the rights of other people e.g. noise, inappropriate content being shared with others.

9. Waste, Fraud and Abuse

All computer users are required to address, safeguard against and report misuse, abuse and criminal activities. The Parish Council will review the contents of computer files at unannounced intervals and by means of random sampling. Any misuse of the Council's resources may lead to disciplinary action and/or criminal prosecution.

10. Internet Access

Access to the internet is primarily provided to effectively enable employees to carry out their role and therefore:-

- downloading or storage of copy right material is prohibited;
- personal use of instant messaging or chat-based websites is only to be used during lunchtime periods;

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- access to pornographic or similar unacceptable or related sites or internet use for private commercial gain is strictly prohibited for example selling items on e-bay using the Parish Council's computer hardware and network;
- occasional personal use of our equipment is only allowed with the prior approval of the Clerk and as long as it does not:-
 - involve illegal activities;
 - involve personal gain;
 - violate our policies;
 - embarrass the Parish Council, Councillors or colleagues;
 - consume excessive resources or interfere with the employee's work.

In addition the following operational rules apply to all Internet usage:-

- unauthorised Cloud storage such as Drop Box, Google Docs and similar applications should be used for Council data without the permission of the Clerk or the Council Chair/Vice Chair;
- no unauthorised modifications may be made to the Council computers or systems other than those required for normal system and security updates and more advanced modifications must only be made either by the Council's appointed Specialist Contractor or by the Clerk as System Administrator under the guidance of the Specialist Contractor;
- the use of the Council IT systems or the internet for personal gain, examples include gambling and trading are not permitted and no personal websites may be hosted on Council equipment;
- Internet activity must normally be limited to those activities that relate to Council matters or matters approved in advance by the Council;
- no person may use Council computers to post messages on any internet message boards, or other similar web-based service, that would have an adverse effect on the Council, or which a reasonable person would consider to be offensive or abusive;
- an individual may not knowingly use a Council computer to write, send, read or received data that contains content that could be considered discriminatory, offensive, obscene, threatening, harassing, intimidating or disruptive to the Council, any employee, Councillor or other person;
- if any employee deliberately accesses the internet via a Council owned computer in a way that violates the law or the Council's policies they will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment and any Councillor accessing the internet inappropriately via the Council owned computers will be reported to the District Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct;
- if an employee is unsure about what constitutes acceptable Internet usage, then they should refer the matter to the Clerk or the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council, as appropriate, for further guidance and clarification.

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The Parish Council reserves the right to monitor and record all internet usage while using hardware or software provided by the Parish Council for business use. Failure to comply with this Policy could result in disciplinary action being taken in accordance with the Parish Council Disciplinary Procedure.

11. Use of E-mail

Colney Heath Parish Council has established the following rules with regard to the use, access and disclosure of e-mail created, sent, received or stored either via the Internet on the Parish Council's computers (electronic material includes e-mails, or any material that can be downloaded via the Internet or sent across the Parish Council's computer network):-

- all emails created, sent, received or stored on our systems are Council property;
- messages are not employees' private property and as such there should be no expectation of privacy in any circumstances;
- if an employee uses our e-mail address for communication that is not business related they waive any privacy or any other rights that they have in relation to such communications and consent to them being read, monitored, recorded and otherwise intercepted by the Parish Council;
- we reserve the right to access, read and monitor all messages created, sent, received or stored on our systems and the contents of e-mail messages may be disclosed internally and to third parties without an employee's further permission and at our discretion (employees must remember that even when an e-mail message is deleted it is still possible for the message to be retrieved and read and the use of passwords does not assure confidentiality and the existence of a password does not restrict our right to access e-mail messages);
- e-mails and the internet should not be used to create, send, receive or store any material which is offensive, obscene, contains images depicting sexual activity or bodily parts in a lewd manner, pornographic, disruptive or infringe copyright or are generally offensive or harmful to others;
- our policies with regard to discrimination or harassment apply fully to the Internet and use of e-mail;
- employees should remember the same laws apply to e-mail as to any other written documents and therefore any comments that could be regarded as defamatory, inaccurate or misleading must be avoided;
- employees use of our computers, telephone lines, telephone systems, Internet connection or any other system or software or equipment owned or controlled by, leased or rented to the Parish Council to access Internet sites or download or receive e-mail or other electronic images or media that

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- contains pornography or other obscene or illegal contents will constitute gross misconduct that can lead to disciplinary proceedings and summary dismissal;
- all e-mails and downloads can contain viruses and employees must therefore ensure that all downloads and e-mail messages are virus-checked before opening;
 - a 'Confidentiality Statement' must be added to all outgoing emails;
 - no person may use a Council computer for emails containing ethnic slurs, racial comments, racial or religious jokes or anything that another person might consider to be harassment or disrespectful, anything that incites or depicts violence or describes techniques for criminal or terrorist acts or relates to any unlawful endeavours including hacking;
 - it is the duty of all employees to ensure that the information used in emails and other transmissions is accurate, appropriate, ethical and does not contravene the Council's Data Protection Policy or the General Data Protection Regulations so the Council reserves the right to find and read any data that any person writes, sends or receives, through the Council's IT systems and computers.

12. Intellectual Property

All copyright, trademarks, design rights, patents and other intellectual property rights (registered and unregistered) in and/or on the Council's computers or similar devices and all content (including any applications) located on the site, will remain vested in this Council or its' licensors.

13. Eye Tests

Employees are entitled to request a free eye test and a contribution of £30 towards the cost of new spectacles if they are a display screen computer user. The Council recommends that employees have such a test regularly and should request the Clerk for approval to arrange it.

14. Enforcement

If an employee or Councillor using a Council computer or similar device who knowingly and/or materially contravenes any aspect of the above Policy and rules for computer email and Internet access and use, they will face disciplinary action under the Parish Council's Disciplinary Procedure which could be treated as gross misconduct and summary dismissal or in the case of a Councillor it may be reported to the District Council Monitoring Officer.

Any person who becomes aware of a breach of this Policy is therefore required to report the matter to the Clerk or Chair as appropriate.

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15. Contractual Position

The above rules and Policy form part of employees' terms of employment and it is a term of employees' employment that they comply with them and their signed acceptance of the employment contract signifies consent to these terms.

16. Review

This Policy will be reviewed periodically by the Council, as appropriate, to assess its effectiveness or as required by legislation and any appropriate changes will be made in consultation with employees.

This policy was adopted 27th February 2023 for a period of 4 years or until legislation changes.