INTERNET & EMAIL POLICY

ADOPTED: 27 FEBRUARY 2023

REVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 2026

Acceptable use

Any employee may use email and the Internet for Otley Town Council business purposes. Email services and Internet browsing should be used in a responsible manner and their use should not adversely impact on work performance. Any personal use should be reasonable.

Legal considerations

The Data Protection Act applies to email as it does to all forms of stored information. This means that Otley Town Council employees, must take care that an email containing personal data:

- is not disclosed to unauthorised persons;
- is only kept if it is required for our work, and
- is kept secure at your place of work including printouts.

Only keep email which needs to be kept. Users are responsible for managing their own records, ie protection from unauthorised access, filing records in an appropriate and organised manner and safeguarding against loss.

Information of a proprietary confidential nature must not be disseminated or disclosed.

It is the users responsibility not to use any communication means such as the post, email or the Internet for the creation or transmission of defamatory or libellous material. Users should not forward email to communicate informal personal information, such as gossip, which may infringe upon the personal privacy of others, or for the transmission of material such that infringes the copyright of another person.

All email addresses should be treated as confidential and care taken that private email addresses are not wrongly circulated. Email to multiple addresses outside of Councillors and the Staff Team should be sent as blind copy (bcc).

Intellectual property rights must not be violated. Also, permission must be sought from the copyright owner before sending or publishing copyrighted material.
Users should report to their line manager any suspected illegal or unauthorised use of Otley Town Council email services or Internet access.

Security

It is important to be security conscious and to adhere to Otley Town Council security procedures. All employees computers will be password protected.

The biggest threat to any computer system is unauthorised access. It is the users responsibility not to leave their PC unattended once logged on to the system.

Users must not use email or Internet access facility to intentionally evade, or attempt to evade, the security/authentication mechanisms in existence.

Access to email and the Internet must be authorised by your line manager. When access has been given, passwords must not be disclosed.

Offensive material

Intentional use of the computer to access, transmit or retrieve any material or communications that are offensive, obscene, pornographic, or sexually explicit; of a discriminatory or harassing nature or which are derogatory to any individual or group; or are threatening in nature is prohibited.

Users who experience any offensive email should inform their line manager immediately. Such inappropriate behaviour is covered by the Equal Opportunities Policy and any offence will be treated seriously.

Software received with email or downloaded from the Internet

Users who intend to receive software by email or to download software from the Internet, must first check with the Executive Officer.

Privacy

Email cannot be considered private. It should be regarded as the electronic equivalent of a postcard in respect of privacy.

Unacceptable use of email and the Internet

Activities with any of the following characteristics:

- wasting employees effort or networked resources and the effort of people involved in the support of those systems.
- corrupting or destroying other users' data.
- violating the privacy of other users.
- disrupting the work of other users.
- using the Internet in a way that denies service to other users for example, deliberate or reckless overloading of access links or of switching equipment.
- continuing to use an item of networking software or hardware after OTC has requested that use cease because it is causing disruption to the correct functioning of the Internet.
- the introduction of viruses.
- for any uses that violate other OTC policies or guidelines including issues on racial or sexual abuse or harassment.
- use of email or the Internet to advertise, lobby, act as consultancy, design or carry out other commercial purposes or for deliberate unauthorised access to facilities or services.

Policy violation

Any contravention of this policy will be dealt with under the appropriate procedures. This may involve the disciplinary procedure being invoked. Since this policy refers to minor issues through to illegal activities, the sanctions for breaches may range from informal warning to dismissal on the grounds of gross misconduct. Furthermore, publication of some materials may not only amount to a disciplinary offence, but also a criminal offence, in which case the issue will be reported to the police for them to take appropriate action.