Stanion Parish Council

Information Technology, E Mail and Social Media Policy

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Document Information

Master Document: The electronic version of this document is the master. Printed copies may not contain the latest changes and should not be relied upon. The master document is published on the Stanion Parish Council (SPC) website.

Purpose: The purpose of this Policy is to provide governance in the use of IT, email and social media. It outlines the procedures for SPC staff and councillors to follow when using such communication technology and methods.

Distribution: this Policy will be made available to all SPC councillors and SPC staff via the SPC website.

Implementation: This Policy will be implemented following consideration and adoption by the full Council.

Review: This document will be reviewed three years after its adoption, unless there are changes in legislation, or recommended best practice guidelines, in which case, it will be reviewed earlier, to comply with the statutory or recommended changes.

EIA Requirement: An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and no adverse impact has been identified.

Financial Implications: This Policy has no financial implications for SPC.

Policy Statement

This Policy is a formal, strategic level document, which provides a statement of intent explaining how SPC will comply with the legislation and any related directives of its subject matter. This is a mandatory document and does not allow for variations of practice. It is relevant to all members of SPC, staff employed by SPC. Non-compliance with this procedure may result in formal complaints being registered and/or disciplinary action.

This Policy provides a corporate framework on which the use of communication methods and technology are to be used. It will be reviewed by a nominated councillor every three

years unless there are changes in the legislation, directives, or recommended best practice guidelines that warrant earlier review and amendment. All amendments require the agreement of the full council and for agreement to be formally recorded.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this Policy.

Duty to Undertake an Equality Impact Assessment

Public sector organisations have a legal duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between different groups and foster good relations between different groups. Due regard comprises proportionality and relevance.

The EIA Tool

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool to ensure that we don't unwittingly exclude anybody from accessing the services we provide. Undertaking and EIA involves assessing the likely effects of our policies on people according to their 'protected characteristics'.
These are:
- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy
- maternity
- race
- religion and belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

An EIA should be applied to a Policy, Strategy, Plan, Function, Project, Service and Event. EIAs' help to identify any inequalities in the provision of services, employment, or procedural practices, and minimise the risk of exposure to claims of discrimination.

Introduction

This procedure confirms the steps to be taken to ensure the appropriate use of information technology equipment, email and all forms of social media. The method outlined in this document provides an agreed standardised process for the use of such technology and communication tools. This process is managed by members of SPC.

Principles

All Councillors, and staff are required to comply with this policy in its entirety.

This policy covers all forms of electronic communications including computers, laptops and fax machines, and the use of email and social media tools in the conduct of Parish Council business.

The Council recognises that access to professional information by email, fax or through websites is a necessary requirement of the job of the Proper Officer/ RFO and members of the Council, and the use of such technology is permitted.

Use of the internet by staff is permitted where such use is part of the normal execution of the responsibilities the post.

The Council cannot control or be held responsible for the accuracy or content of information gathered over the internet.

The Parish Council's connection to the internet is only to be used for Parish Council business and/or the provision of services. Connection to the internet is to be made via IT equipment authorised for that purpose.

Unacceptable Use

Certain activities are unacceptable under any circumstances, and Parish Council staff or members of the Council found to be in contravention of this element of the policy will face investigation, and disciplinary or legal action may result. Such activities include, but are not limited to:

- Receiving, sending, displaying or posting indecent remarks & proposals, offensive messages or pictures, or distributing, disseminating or storing images, text or materials that might be considered indecent, pornographic, obscene or illegal

- Using obscene language

- Improper use of email and faxes

- Damaging computers, computer systems or computer networks

- Violating copyright laws including uploading or downloading any commercial or other software in violation of its copyright

- Using another's security passwords or identities

- Accessing another's work folders or files without express permission of the individual

- Intentionally wasting Council resources

- Using the Council's IT system for commercial purposes or illegal activities

- Uploading or downloading commercial or other software without the required and necessary virus protection measures in place

- Visiting websites that contain obscene, hateful or other objectionable material, or distributing & forwarding such material

- Using the Council's IT system to solicit for personal gain or profit

- Using the Council's IT system to gamble or enter chat rooms

- Hacking i.e. attempting unauthorised access into or intentionally interfering with any Internet/Intranet gateway/system/server. Breaking into the Council's or another organisation's system or unauthorised use of a password/mailbox

- Receiving list serve (newsgroup) emails that are unrelated to the business of the Council

- Sending electronic 'chain letters'

- Distributing, disseminating or storing images, text or materials that might be considered discriminatory, offensive or abusive, in that the context is a personal attack, sexist or racist, or might be considered as harassment

- Broadcasting unsolicited personal views on social, political, religious or other non-business-related matters

- Transmitting unsolicited commercial or advertising material

- Undertaking deliberate activities that waste time or network resources

- Deliberately introducing any form of computer virus or malware into the corporate network

Email

All councillor@gmail.com email addresses are not to be used for personal business.

If an email is received from an unknown source, or you receive "junk" email addressed to your councillor@gmail.com email address, you are to delete the email from your system immediately without opening it.

Emails that may contain file attachments should not be opened unless they are received from a trusted source, i.e. from another known individual, service provider or representative.

Confidential information about or relating to the business of the Council, its customers, suppliers or contacts, is not be transmitted outside the Council via email.

You are to ensure that there is no infringement of copyright when adding any attachments to emails.

Confidential information should not be left on display on an unattended computer screen.

You must ensure that commercially sensitive data is not distributed to competitive sources.

Use of Social Media

SPC staff are not permitted to access Social Media during working hours, unless it is required to update the Parish Council's official Social Media pages and accounts.

Security

Security is to be maintained by the use of appropriate software, internal computer security settings and passwords.

- Emails containing confidential information should only be sent when other methods of communicating the information are unavailable, and the distribution list for such email is to be restricted to those individuals who have a need to know, and in all cases, are to be marked **'Restricted Distribution - Private and Confidential'**

- All information received or retrieved over the Internet is to be authenticated and validated before being relied upon and used in the Parish Council communications or the services of the Council

- SPC staff and members of the Council are to report Internet security weaknesses to the Clerk/RFO and Chairman of the Council

- The distribution of any information via the internet, Parish Council website, any computer-based online services, and Parish Council email and messaging systems is subject to the scrutiny and approval of the Parish Council, which reserves the right to determine the suitability and confidentiality of the information to be disclosed

Virus Protection

It is essential that all material received over the Internet is checked before use or distribution. Any information that has been downloaded from the Internet is to be checked for computer viruses before being loaded onto any machine that is used for Parish Council business. In particular, all email and attachments must not be opened until virus checked. **If in any doubt - do not open.**

Detected viruses must be reported to the Clerk/RFO and the Chairman of the Parish Council.

The Council also has a responsibility not to distribute viruses. Consequently, items dispatched over the Internet must be checked to ensure they are virus free. The final responsibility for virus checking remains with the user.

Disclosure Rules and Individual's Liability

Staff and members of the Parish Council are prohibited from revealing or publicising proprietary, confidential or personal information via the Internet that they have not been specifically authorised to do. Such information includes but is not limited to:

- Financial information not already publicly disclosed through authorised channels
- Client information
- Operational information
- Information provided to the Council in confidence or under a non-disclosure agreement
- Computer & network access codes and similar or related information that might assist unauthorised access
- Legal proceedings

- Information that might provide an external organisation with a business advantage
- Computer programs
- Databases and the information contained therein

Access to Parish Council Laptop

All Parish Council laptops are to be password protected at all times and use of the laptops is restricted to the Clerk/RFO.

In case of emergencies and the absence of the Clerk/RFO, access to a Parish Council laptop may be gained to undertake critical business functions. All access passwords are to be stored securely in a sealed envelope and held by the Chairman of the Parish Council. The Chairman of the Parish Council, with another member of the Council present, may, in extreme need, open the envelope to gain access to the relevant passwords.

Once opened, all passwords are required to be reset, and the new passwords give to the Clerk/RFO on their return to work, and a record of the new passwords logged and sealed in an envelope, which is to be held by the Chairman of the Parish Council.

Monitoring

All of the Council's IT resources are provided for business purposes. The Council reserves the right to examine any system and inspect any data recorded in those systems. Such examinations shall only be undertaken in the presence of the Clerk /RFO and the Chairman, with one other member of the Council present.

Sanctions

Where it is believed that an employee of the Council has failed to comply with this policy, an investigation of the facts will be undertaken. The investigation will be undertaken by a team of two Councillors, who will report their findings to the full Council. If the employee is found to have breached the policy, disciplinary sanctions may be imposed. The actual sanction imposed will depend on the seriousness of the breach and any other relevant factors that are deemed to be significant to the matter.

Where it is believed that a Councillor has failed to comply with this policy, an investigation of the facts will be undertaken by the Clerk/RFO and the Chairman of the Parish Council (unless the Chairman is the subject under investigation) and the Councillor will be immediately restricted from using the Council's IT systems until the conclusion of the investigations. Where the findings of the investigation indicate that there is a strong indication that a serious breach may have occurred, the Chairman of the Parish Council will inform the Monitoring Officer of the facts of the matter.

Social Media Policy

Introduction

The term 'Social media' is commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and new generation technology such as iPads.

Examples of social media websites include:
- Social networking – (e.g. www.facebook.com)
- Video sharing – (e.g. www.youtube.com)
- Blogs (e.g. london2012.com/blog)
- Micro-blogging (e.g. www.twitter.com)
- Message boards (e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbsn/home)
- Wikis (e.g. www.wikipedia.org)
- Social bookmarking (e.g. www.delicious.com)

Council Use of Social Media

a) **Principles of Use**
- To publish information about the work of Stanion Parish Council to a wider audience.
- To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council's work.
- Social Media must **NOT** be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors - other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements - as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues.

b) **Approved Council Social Media**
- SPC website
- SPC Facebook page

c) **Approved Users of the Parish Council Social Media Accounts**
The nominated administrators for the Parish Council Facebook page are:

The Clerk/RFO to the Council

The nominated administrator for the Parish Council Website is:
The Clerk to the Council

The nominated publishers for the Parish Council website are:
The Clerk to the Council
Appointed Councillors

The Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases is the Chairman of the Parish Council. No other member of the Parish Council has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

Policy on the use of Council Social Media

- Anyone using Social Media is required to be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites, e.g. Facebook - and adhere to those terms of use at all times
- No information is to be published that is not already known to be in the public domain, i.e. available on the Council's website, contained in Minutes of meetings, or stated in Council publicised Policies and Procedures
- Information that is published is to be lawful, relevant, factual, and fair
- It should be noted that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval or deletion
- Copyright laws are to be complied with
- Reports of conversations or other reports that are meant to be private, or confidential are not to be published
- Other organisations are not to be referenced without their prior written authorisation, and when referencing the organisation, a link back to the original source must be made wherever possible
- Anything that might reasonably be regarded as unacceptable is not to be published. **If in any doubt – don't publish**

Conduct Online

- Posts online are public messages, and will be retrievable forever
- If you are in any in doubt as to whether the information should be posted – don't post it
- Re-read every comment before you post it, and check the content and tone of the message to be sure that it says exactly what you want to say
- Make sure your comment is accurate, factual, respectful and timely
- Be aware of how your comment may be interpreted by the public

Dealing with antagonistic posts

Posts that are regarded as personal attacks are to be reported to the Chairman of the Parish Council. The Chairman will advise on the response to be provided or action to be taken.

Where responses are required, the response must be accurate and based on evidenced facts. A Balance needs to be achieved between providing a clear a detailed response, while not developing a formulaic response that might be regarded as an attempt to discount the point being raised.

Trolls

A 'troll' is internet slang for **"One who posts a deliberately provocative message to a message board with the intention of causing maximum disruption and argument".** It is a common phenomenon that all individuals and organisations that are active on the internet may face at some point. 'Trolls' may be corporate or government-funded troublemakers but are more often private individuals.

Any reply to such an individual, no matter how reasonable you think it is, will usually trigger a further antagonistic response from them. Online arguments with Trolls are very rarely resolved, so it is often best to step away from the argument.

Administration of the Parish Council Social Media Accounts

Administration - The administrators of the Parish Council social media sites are chosen by the elected consensus of the Parish Council, and the social media sites they administer will only be used to promote and inform about the work of the Parish Council. Under no circumstances are they to be used for personal gain, or to promote personal agendas.

Facebook - By using a 'Facebook page' type account, the main posts may be made by the page administrator, but members of the public may comment on a side bar. Any comments received may be responded to by the Parish Council.

Twitter - Twitter is to be used to inform in short bursts of information, any points or information the Parish Council wishes to share.

Administrators of social media accounts are required to follow these rules at all times:

All Parish Council affiliated social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) should adhere to a uniform style of wording in the 'About' section, so that the Parish Council affiliation is clear and that members will know what kind of posts can be expected in the group, and what type of conduct is not acceptable.

Only consider deleting other people's posts and comments in extreme cases. All other options to resolve the situation should be attempted first, including explaining politely to the individual why the posts are regarded as unacceptable. If that fails, then a first, and then final warning of deletion should be made if the individual refuses to modify their post language or tone.

In cases of posts that include libellous or obscene content, or are marketing unrelated products or services, the individual should be advised that the post is being deleted and the post deleted without any further notice being provided.

Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed by Stanion Parish Council every three years.

Signed: Signed on original   Date: 11.3.19