

BLUNDESTON & FLIXTON PARISH COUNCIL

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & RECORDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

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1 IT AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

1.1 The Council's IT and communications systems are intended to promote effective communication and working practices. This policy outlines the standards users must observe when using these systems and the action the Council will take if users breach these standards.

1.2 Breach of this policy may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct.

2 EQUIPMENT SECURITY AND PASSWORDS

2.1 Councillors and officers are responsible for the security of the equipment allocated to or used by them, and must not allow it to be used by anyone other than in accordance with this policy. Passwords must be set on all IT equipment and passwords must remain confidential and be changed regularly.

2.2 Users must only log onto Council systems using their own username and password. Users must not use another person's username and password or allow anyone else to log on using their username and password.

3 SYSTEMS AND DATA SECURITY

3.1 Users should not delete, destroy or modify existing systems, programs, information or data (except as authorised in the proper performance of their duties).

3.2 Users must not download or install software from external sources. Downloading unauthorised software may interfere with the Council's systems and may introduce viruses or other malware.

3.3 Users must not attach any device or equipment including mobile phones, tablet computers or USB storage devices to our systems.

3.4 Users should exercise particular caution when opening unsolicited e-mails from unknown sources. If an e-mail looks suspicious do not reply to it, open any attachments or click any links in it.

3.5 Users must inform the Chairman immediately if they suspect a computer may have a virus.

4 E-MAIL

4.1 Users should adopt a professional tone, including the use of correct grammar and spelling, and observe appropriate etiquette when communicating with third parties by e-mail.

4.2 It should be noted that e-mails can be used in legal proceedings and that even deleted e-mails may remain on the system and be capable of being retrieved.

4.3 Users must not send abusive, obscene, discriminatory, racist, harassing, derogatory, defamatory, pornographic or otherwise inappropriate e-mails.

4.4 For the purposes of council business, users must use the generic email account allocated to the Parish Clerk in order to receive or send email correspondence.

4.5 The Clerk will be responsible for taking down email addresses when someone leaves.

5 USING THE INTERNET

5.1 Users should not access any web page or download any image or other file from the internet which could be regarded as illegal, offensive, in bad taste or immoral. Even web content that is legal in the UK may be in sufficient bad taste to fall within this prohibition. As a general rule, if any person (whether intended to view the page or not) might be offended by the contents of a page, or if the fact that our software has accessed the page or file might be a source of embarrassment if made public, then viewing it will be a breach of this policy.

6 PROHIBITED USE OF COUNCIL SYSTEMS

6.1 Misuse or excessive personal use of our telephone or e-mail system or

inappropriate internet use will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure. Misuse of the internet can in some cases be a criminal offence.

6.2 Creating, viewing, accessing, transmitting or downloading any of the following material will usually amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):

- pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- offensive, obscene, or criminal material or material which is liable to cause embarrassment to us or our local community;
- a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- material which is discriminatory, offensive, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to others (including material which breaches our Equal Opportunities Policy or our Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy);
- confidential information about the Council or any of our staff or our community (except as authorised in the proper performance of your duties);
- unauthorised software;
- any other statement which is likely to create any criminal or civil liability; or
- music or video files or other material in breach of copyright.

7 SOCIAL MEDIA

7.1 This policy is in place to minimise the risks to our Council through use of social media.

7.2 This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media including, but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs. It applies to use of social media for Council purposes as well as personal use that may affect our business in any way.

7.3 Users must avoid making any social media communications that could damage the Council's interests or reputation, even indirectly.

7.4 Users must not use social media to:-

- defame or disparage us, Council staff or any third party;
- harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against staff or third parties;

- make false or misleading statements;
- or impersonate colleagues or third parties.

7.5 Any misuse of social media should be reported to the Chairman.

7.6 Users should make it clear in social media postings, or in their personal profile, that they are speaking on their own behalf and not on behalf of the council, and that any opinions expressed are their personal opinions and not representative of the council as a whole.

7.7 Be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that they are personally responsible for all communications which will be published on the internet for anyone to see.

7.8 A data protection breach may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, or in the case of councillors a contravention of the Code of Conduct.

7.9 Members or staff may be required to remove any social media content that the Council believes constitutes a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

8. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

8.1 It is necessary for the Council to retain a number of data sets as part of managing council business. The Council shall apply the framework as noted in Appendix 1.

8.2 An annual review of all documentation should be carried out and the items that have reached their deletion or destruction date being deleted/destroyed and the remainder being considered for archiving.

8.3 All documents that are no longer required for administration purposes will be shredded and disposed of.

This policy was adopted by the council at its meeting held on 17 March 2025

Date of next review – March 2026

Reviewed -March 2026

Next Review date is March -2027

Appendix 1

Document/File	Minimum retention period	Reason
Contractors		
Timesheets	Last completed audit year	Audit, Legal
Councillor Information		
Declaration of Acceptance of Office	Term of Office + 1 year	Legal
Declarations of Interest	Indefinite	Legal
Register of Members interests	Duration of Office + 1 year	Legal
Contact details	Duration of Office	Management
Finance and Payroll		
Annual Accounts	Indefinite	Archives
Annual Return (Audit)	Indefinite	Archives
Asset register	Indefinite	Archives
Bank statements	Last completed audit year	Audit
Cheque book stubs	Last completed audit year	Audit
Quotation and tenders	6 years	Audit, Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)
Paid invoices	6 years	Audit, VAT
Sent invoices	6 years	Audit, VAT
Bank paying in books	Last completed audit year	Audit
Purchase Orders	6 years	Audit/VAT
Paid cheques	6 years – retained by bank	Limitation Act 1980 (as amended), Audit
Receipt books of all kinds	6 years	VAT
Receipt & Payment Accounts (or Income & Expenditure)	Indefinite	Archives
Payroll, wages books, Tax and NI Records	12 years	Audit, HMRC, Superannuation
Scale of fees and charges	6 years	Management
VAT Records	6 years generally but 20 years for VAT on rents	Audit, VAT
Halls, Centres and Recreation Grounds		

Application to hire	6 years	VAT
Lettings diaries		
Copies of bills to hirers		
Record of tickets issued		

Health and Safety		
Accident/incident reports	20 years	Potential claims, Legal, Management
Risk Assessment	3 years from last assessment	Management
Playground Inspections	21 years	Legal, insurance
Premises inspection records	25 years	Management
Insurance		
Certificate for insurance against liability for employees	40 years	The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1998 (SI.2753), Management
Insurance policies/schedules	While valid	Management
Insurance company names and policy numbers	Indefinite	Management
Insurance Claim Records	7 years after closure (allowing for claimant to reach age of 25)	Legal, Management
Legal		
Deeds, conveyances, leases, agreements and contracts	Indefinite	Audit, Management, Limitation Act 1980 (as amended)
Documents for legal purposes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breach of Trust • Contract • Defamation • Leases • Negligence • Personal injury • Rent • Sums recoverable by statute • To recover land 	Category Limitation period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None • 6 years • 1 year • 12 years • 6 years • 3 years • 6 years • 6 years • 12 years 	Legal
Trust documents	Indefinite	Audit, VAT
Minutes and Correspondence		
Minute Books	Indefinite	Archives
Draft/rough/notes of minutes taken at meetings	Until minutes are approved	Management
Agendas	5 years	Management
Emails/general correspondence and any information not covered within other areas of this policy	1 year or for as long as relevant/useful	Management

Other Information		
Complaints	2 years after conclusion	Management
FOI requests	2 years after conclusion	Management
Documents, plans, maps or articles having local or historic interest	For as long as relevant/useful	Archives
Magazines, journals, advertising material published by or on behalf of the Parish Council	For as long as relevant/useful	Management
Reports and Newsletters	For as long as relevant/useful	Management
Press Releases	6 years	Management
Public Consultation: surveys/questionnaires	5 years	Management
Personnel		
Application Forms (unsuccessful)	6 months	Management, Discrimination Acts
Application Forms (successful)	6 years after ceasing employment	Management, Discrimination Acts
Personnel Records, Contracts	6 years after ceasing employment	Management
Training Records	Term of Office or period of employment plus 6 months	Management
Planning		
Planning application correspondence received from residents	1 year	Management
Planning applications	All planning applications and relevant documents and decision notices are retained by and available from (depending on application authority) either East Suffolk Council or Broads Authority	
Parish and Neighbourhood Plans and similar documents	For as long as they are in force plus 2 years	Management