

Draft Information and Communication Technology Policy (September 2025, M Sharpe)

Need for a new policy

A new requirement for the Parish Council was introduced early in 2025, with the publication of the guidance known as 'SAAA Proper Practices'.

In the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) form 2026, there will be 'Assertion 10'. The Parish Council is required to be in a position to say 'yes' to the assertion on 'digital and data compliance'.

In detail, the guidance states:

"To warrant a positive response to this assertion, the authority needs to have taken the following actions:

1.47 Email management - Every authority must have a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain, for example clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk rather than abcparishclerk@gmail.com or abcparishclerk@outlook.com for example.

1.48 All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must meet legal requirements for all existing websites regardless of what domain is being used.

1.49 All websites must meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (where applicable)

1.50 All websites must include published documentation as specified in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities (where applicable).

1.51 All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must follow both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018.

1.52 All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must process personal data with care and in line with the principles of data protection.

1.53 The DPA 2018 supplements the GDPR and classifies an authority as both a Data Controller and a Data Processor.

1.54 All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must also have an IT policy. This explains how everyone - clerks, members and other staff - should conduct authority business in a secure and legal way when using IT equipment and software. This relates to the use of authority-owned and personal equipment.

Purposes of this policy

To satisfy the requirement laid down in 1.54 of 'Proper Practices' above ;

to further regulate ICT practices within Newchurch Parish Council ;

and thereby to minimise cybersecurity risks.

(continued on next page)

Newchurch Parish Council ICT Policy

1. Introduction

Newchurch Parish Council recognises the importance of effective and secure information and communication technology (ICT) and email usage in supporting its business, operations, and communications.

This policy outlines the guidelines and responsibilities for the appropriate use of ICT resources and email by council members, employees, volunteers, and contractors.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals who use Newchurch Parish Council's ICT resources, including computers, networks, software, devices, data, and email accounts.

3. Acceptable use of ICT resources and email

Newchurch Parish Council ICT resources and email accounts are to be used for official council-related activities and tasks. Limited personal use is permitted, provided it does not interfere with work responsibilities or violate any part of this policy. All users must adhere to ethical standards, respect copyright and intellectual property rights, and avoid accessing inappropriate or offensive content.

4. Device and software usage

Where possible, authorised devices, software, and applications will be provided by Newchurch Parish Council for work-related tasks. These will be identified on the Asset register. Councillors may use their own devices, with arrangements for suitable software on those devices for Parish Council purposes.

5. Data management and security

All sensitive and confidential Newchurch Parish Council data should be stored and transmitted securely using approved methods. Regular data backups should be performed to prevent data loss, and secure data destruction methods should be used when necessary.

6. Network and internet usage

Newchurch Parish Council network and internet connections should be used responsibly and efficiently for official purposes. Downloading and sharing copyrighted material without proper authorisation is prohibited.

7. Email communication

Email accounts provided by Newchurch Parish Council are for official communication only. Newchurch Parish Council's Code of Conduct applies to online communications. Emails should be professional and respectful in tone. Confidential or sensitive information must clearly state that it is such.

Be cautious with attachments and links to avoid phishing and malware. Verify the source before opening any attachments or clicking on links.

8. Password and account security

Newchurch Parish Council users are responsible for maintaining the security of their accounts and passwords. Passwords must be 'strong' and not shared with others. Regular password changes are encouraged to enhance security.

9. Mobile devices and remote working

Mobile devices provided by Newchurch Parish Council should be secured with passcodes and/or biometric authentication.

10. Email monitoring

Newchurch Parish Council reserves the right to monitor email communications to ensure compliance with this policy and relevant laws. Monitoring will be conducted in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR. Since the Freedom of Information regime applies to Parish Council communications, Councillors should be circumspect about any communications they are the authors of.

11. Retention and archiving

Emails and messages on other platforms should be retained and archived in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Regularly review and delete unwanted text to maintain an organised inbox.

12. Reporting security incidents

All suspected security breaches or incidents should be reported immediately to the Clerk for investigation and resolution. Report any email-related security incidents or breaches to the Clerk and other Councillors immediately.

13 Training and awareness

Newchurch Parish Council will provide sector-specific training and resources to educate users about ICT security best practices, privacy concerns, and technology updates. All employees and Councillors can avail themselves of such training opportunities on request.

14. Compliance and consequences

Breach of this ICT Policy may result in the suspension of ICT privileges and further consequences as deemed appropriate, for instance under the Newchurch Parish Council Code of Conduct and the Localism Act 2011..

15. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed as and when necessary to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Updates may be made to address emerging technology trends and security measures.

16. Contacts

For ICT-related enquiries or assistance, users can contact the Clerk

All staff and councillors are responsible for the safety and security of Newchurch Parish Council's ICT and email systems. By adhering to this ICT and Email Policy Newchurch Parish Council aims to create a secure and efficient ICT environment that supports its mission and goals.

Conclusion

The draft above may be reworded by decision at a council meeting to further suit the particular circumstances of Newchurch Parish Council. When adopted, the ICT Policy should carry a Version Number, which will change when alterations are made.