



IT ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Adopted by Loughton Town Council
at its meeting on 25 February 2026
(Reviewed and recommended at the Resources & General Services
Committee meeting on 11 February 2026)

Introduction

Loughton Town Council recognises the importance of effective and secure information technology (IT) and email usage in supporting its business, operations, and communications. The Council works with IT providers that are appropriate for local government public service compliance. This policy is intended to provide guidance and criteria for Councillors and staff to outline responsibilities for the appropriate use of IT resources and email by council members, employees, volunteers, and contractors.

This policy applies to all individuals who use Loughton Town Council's IT resources, including computers, networks, software, devices, data, and email accounts.

Purpose of this Policy

The purpose of an IT policy is to establish clear parameters for how councillors, staff, and other authorised users use council-provided technology or equipment in the course of their duties.

A well-defined policy helps to:

- Set expectations for appropriate use of equipment and systems;
- Raise awareness of risks associated with IT use;
- Safeguard the council's data and digital assets;
- Clarify what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable use;
- Outline the consequences of policy breaches.

Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all councillors, staff, and other authorised users, regardless of their working location or pattern, including those who are home-based, office-based, or work on a flexible or part-time basis. It sets out the expectations for the appropriate use of IT equipment and systems provided by the council.

1. Computer use

1.1 Council computer equipment is provided for council purposes only. Any personal use of our computers and systems should not interrupt our daily council work in any way. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users are asked to restrict any personal use to official lunch breaks or before or after working hours.

1.2 Computer and electronic hardware should be kept clean, and every precaution taken to prevent food and drink being dropped or spilled onto it.

1.3 Equipment should not be dismantled or reassembled without seeking advice.

1.4 Councillors, staff, and other authorised are not to purchase any computer or mobile equipment (including software). Unless previously authorised.

1.5 Personal disks, USB stick, CDs, DVDs, data storage devices etc cannot be used on council computers without the prior approval of the Council.

1.6 Any faults or necessary repairs must be reported to the necessary IT /website provider and Clerk.

2. Emails

- 2.1 Councillors are provided with a Loughton Town Council email address – name@loughton-tc.gov.uk and all Town Council correspondence should be managed from this address. Councillors should not use their personal email for Council business. It will be a requirement under Assertion 10 in the next AGAR submission for the Council to be using gov.uk email address for all Councillors and staff.
- 2.2 Staff are encouraged to be cautious with attachments and links to avoid phishing and malware. Verify the source before opening any attachments or clicking on links. Under no circumstances should council business emails be forwarded on to a personal email account held by an officer or councillor outside of the Loughton Town Council account network. This can compromise the Council and breach Data protection regulations.
- 2.3 A wrongly delivered message must be rectified immediately and any confidential information must not be disclosed.
- 2.4 Loughton Town 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.
- 2.5 All emails sent on Loughton Town Council email are subject to Freedom of Information disclosure requests.
- 2.6 Sending offensive emails, such as racist or sexist will never be tolerated and may be subject to report under the Code of Conduct to the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.7 The Town Council reserves the right to intercept, monitor and view all data sent electronically by you whether internally or externally.
- 2.8 Emails should be retained and archived in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Regularly review and delete unnecessary emails to maintain an organised inbox.
- 2.9 For office staff, limited personal use is permitted, provided it does not interfere with work responsibilities or violate any part of this policy.

3 Software

- 3.1 Where possible, authorised devices, software, and applications will be provided by Loughton Town Council for work-related tasks.
- 3.2 Unauthorised installation of software on authorised devices, including personal software, is strictly prohibited due to security concerns. Loughton Town Council IT resources and email accounts are to be used for official council-related activities and tasks.
- 3.3 All users must adhere to ethical standards, respect copyright and intellectual property rights, and avoid accessing inappropriate or offensive content.
- 3.4 Viruses and other malicious software (typically introduced through email or infected files) are a significant threat to computer security therefore every precaution must be taken when using email and downloading software.

3.5 You must notify the Town Clerk and IT support if your virus protection software notifies you that a virus has been found.

3.6 You must notify the Town Clerk and IT support if you are in receipt of a suspicious email.

4 Data management and security

4.1 All sensitive and confidential Loughton Town Council data should be stored and transmitted securely using approved methods.

4.2 Regular data backups should be performed to prevent data loss, and secure data destruction methods should be used when necessary.

4.3 You must adhere to the Town Council's password regulations. You must never provide inappropriate access to the Town Council / passwords to any other individual.

4.4 You are responsible for the security of your allocated device, and this must not be used by any unauthorised person.

4.5 The device will be for Loughton Town Councils purposes only, do not set up your personal email address or any other email accounts on the allocated device.

4.6 Do not link up or download or access personal third-party apps or services, including on-demand TV and other media streaming services.

4.7 Loughton Town Council users are responsible for maintaining the security of their accounts and passwords. Passwords should be strong and not shared with others. Regular password changes are encouraged to enhance security.

4.8 All suspected security breaches or incidents should be reported immediately to the designated IT point of contact for investigation and resolution. Report any email related security incidents or breaches to the IT administrator immediately.

5. Use of social media

5.1 Social media includes blogs; Wikipedia and other similar sites where text can be posted; multimedia or user generated media sites (YouTube); social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, etc.); virtual worlds (Second Life); text messaging and mobile device communications and more traditional forms of media such as TV and newspapers. Care should be taken when using social media at any time, either using council systems or at home.

5.2 Personal use of social networking/media are not permitted during working hours and should be restricted to breaks during working hours, or after hours with permission.

5.3 The council recognises the importance of councillors, staff, and other authorised users joining in and helping to shape sector conversation and enhancing its image through blogging and interaction in social media. Therefore, where it is relevant to use social networking sites as part of the individual's position, this is acceptable.

However, inappropriate comments and postings can adversely affect the reputation of the council, even if it is not directly referenced. If comments or photographs could reasonably be interpreted as being associated with the council, or if remarks about external stakeholders could be regarded as abusive, humiliating, sexual harassment, discriminatory or derogatory, or could constitute bullying or harassment, the council will

treat this as a serious disciplinary offence. Councillors, staff, and other authorised users should be aware that parishioners or other local organisations may read councillors, staff, and other authorised users' personal weblogs, to acquire information, for example, about their work, internal council business, and employee morale. Therefore, even if the council is not named, care should be taken with any views expressed.

6. General

- 6.1 Mobile devices and tablets provided by Loughton Town Council should be secured with passcodes and/or biometric authentication. When working remotely, users should follow the same security practices as if they were in the office. Please refer to the Laptop Policy for more details.
- 6.2 Loughton Town Council will provide regular training and resources to educate users about IT security best practices, privacy concerns, and technology updates. All employees and councillors will receive regular training on email security and best practices.
- 6.3 Breach of this IT and Email Policy may result in the suspension of IT privileges and further consequences as deemed appropriate.
- 6.4 This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Updates may be made to address emerging technology trends and security measures.
- 6.5 For IT-related enquiries or assistance, users can contact Mark Webster (Docendo Limited).
- 6.6 All staff and councillors are responsible for the safety and security of Loughton Town Council's IT and email systems.
- 6.7 By adhering to this IT and Email Policy, Loughton Town Council aims to create a secure and efficient IT environment that supports its mission and goals.
- 6.8 Loughton Town Council must ensure their website complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 AA standards/. The Council must have a WCAG 2.2 AA rated compliant website, website accessibility statement and accessible documents and a process to regular monitor and review the website.
- 6.9 This policy should be read in conjunction with Loughton Town Council's 'Lap Top Policy' agreed at the Resources and General Services Committee 21 April 2021 and reviewed at the Resources & General Services Committee meeting of 11 February 2026.

Mark Squire
Town Clerk
31 July 2025