Holbeach PARISH COUNCIL

Coubro Chambers, 11 West End
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Councillor IT Policy

Adopted at Full Council on:

Minute Reference:

Policy Review Date:

This policy is supplemental to, and does not in any way override, the Parish Council Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Communications Policy, or GDPR Policy.

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1. Introduction

Holbeach Parish Council recognises that not all councillors will have equal access to personal IT equipment. The Parish Council commits to equipping councillors with the IT equipment to enable them to fully carry out the requirements of the role of councillor.

This typically includes:

- To access and respond to emails
- To attend online meetings or training sessions
- To access the summons, agenda and papers for council meetings

It is also the case that some councillors may wish to use their own devices. The requirements for this are set out under section 4 ‘Bring Your Own Device’. Parish Councillors must comply with this policy where they use a Parish Council device, or a ‘Bring Your Own Device’, as applicable.

This policy must be read in conjunction with other relevant ICT policies.

2. Provision of IT Equipment

Holbeach Parish Council will provide the following equipment to councillors who request it in order to carry out the requirements of the role:

1 x Android Tablet

1 x Microsoft 365 software subscription

Requests for IT equipment shall be made to the Clerk who shall have delegated authority to place the necessary orders in accordance with this policy.

Replacement shall be on a 4-yearly basis. This may be amended/extended on recommendation from the Parish Council’s IT provider.

3. Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

Holbeach Parish Council grants Councillors the use smartphones and tablets of their choosing for council business.

This policy is intended to protect the security and integrity of personal data controlled and processed by Holbeach Parish Council.

Holbeach Parish Council reserves the right to revoke this privilege if Councillors do not abide by the policies and procedures outlined below. Councillors must agree to the terms and conditions set forth in this Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy in order to be able to connect their devices to the Parish Council network.

- Councillors may use their own smartphones or tablets for council business, provided they comply with this policy.
- Rooted or jailbroken devices are strictly prohibited.

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- All council data must still be stored on the Council's Microsoft 365 account.
- MFA and password requirements apply to BYOD devices.
- Council data will be erased from personal devices at the end of a councillor's term or if a security breach occurs.

4. Data Storage and Security

- **All council data and information must be stored on the Council's Microsoft 365 account**, not on the device itself.
  This ensures:
  - Data can be accessed by the Council when required.
  - Devices can be wiped remotely if necessary.
- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)** is mandatory for accessing the Council's Microsoft 365 account on any device.
- Passwords must:
  - Be at least six characters long.
  - Include upper and lower case letters, a number, and a symbol.
  - Be kept confidential and changed immediately if compromised.
- Devices must:
  - Lock automatically after five minutes of inactivity.
  - Use encrypted home Wi-Fi networks.
  - Avoid public Wi-Fi where possible.
- Public cloud services (e.g., Dropbox, Google Drive) must **not** be used for council data.
- Lost or stolen devices must be reported within 24 hours.
- Council issued devices must be returned within 48 hours of ceasing to be a councillor.

5. Communication

5.1 Email (Internal or External Use)

On commencement of your term as Councillor, you will be assigned a Holbeach Parish Council email address for conducting communications related to Council business, receiving meeting papers and meeting summons.

Internet email is not a secure medium of communication; it can be intercepted and read. Do not use it to say anything you would not wish to be made public. If you are sending confidential information by email this should be sent using password protected a attachments where possible.

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Email should be treated as any other documenta on. If you would normally retain a certain document in hard copy you should retain the email.

Do not forward email messages unless the original sender is aware that the message may be forwarded. If you would not have forwarded a copy of a paper memo with the same information do not forward the email.

Your email inbox should be checked on a regular basis.

As with many other records, email may be subject to discovery in li ga on, or a Freedom of Informa on request. See sec on six below). Like all communications, you should not say anything that might appear inappropriate or that might be misinterpreted by a reader.

Viewing, displaying, storing (including data held in RAM or cache) or disseminating materials (including text and images) that could be considered to be obscene, racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive may constitute harassment and such use of the facilities is strictly prohibited. The legal focus in a harassment case is the impact of the allegedly harassing material on the person viewing it, not how the material is viewed by the person sending or displaying it.

Councillors will be required to surrender their email account and all of its contents to the Parish Clerk at the end of their term of office or if they decide to leave the Council.

5.2 Social Media

Councillors using personal social media must make it clear that opinions expressed are their own, not those of the Council. Posts made on behalf of the Council must comply with the Communications Policy.

5.3 Internet

Posting online is equivalent to publishing in print. Defamatory, libellous, or harassing content can result in legal action against both the individual and the Council.

Council internet facilities must only be used for council business. Trading or other personal business activity is prohibited. This includes all wireless access.

6. Council Informa on Held in Private Email Accounts

Use of **private email accounts for Council business is strictly prohibited**. This ensures compliance with GDPR and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

6.1 Freedom of Informa on Act (FOIA)

FOIA grants public access to information held by public authorities. Official information stored in private email accounts may still fall under FOIA if it relates to Council business.

Key Points:

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- FOIA applies to official information held in private accounts when it is on behalf of the Council.
- In rare cases, individuals may be asked to search private accounts if relevant information is not held elsewhere.
- Good records management reduces risks associated with private email use.

Legal Basis: Under Section 3(2) of FOIA:

- Information is considered held by a public authority if it is for its own purposes or held by another person on its behalf.
- This includes councillors' private accounts if used for Council business.

ICO Guidance:

- Information in personal accounts (e.g., Gmail, Yahoo) may be subject to FOIA if it relates to official business.
- Councillors must maintain a clear separation between Council work and personal matters.
- Information unrelated to Council business is not subject to FOIA, but may need review to confirm relevance.

If relevant information is only in a private account, the individual may be asked to search and provide it.

6.2 General Data Protec on Regula on (GDPR)

GDPR requires the protection of all personal information. As a rule, **personal data must be encrypted**, whether transmitted or accessed on a mobile device.

The ICO advises that data transfers must be secure from the point of transmission. This includes:

- **Transport Layer Security (TLS)** for network encryption.
- Protection of DNS and email integrity during transit.
- Governance to block untrusted or spoofed emails.

Rejecting suspicious emails reduces the risk of malware but should be balanced to avoid blocking legitimate correspondence.

Secure information exchange is more than email—it involves **risk management, governance, and network security**. When sharing data, these factors must be considered.

Government Classification

Information is classified under three levels: **OFFICIAL, SECRET, TOP SECRET**. For councils, all data is classified as **OFFICIAL**, including personal information under the Data Protection Act.

Some data may be marked **OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE**, requiring stricter handling and access on a "need-to-know" basis (e.g., reports containing personal details).

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7. Declaration

This declaration should be signed by the Councillor upon joining the Council, and/or where IT equipment is accepted.

☐ I wish to use my own IT device for Council business

☐ I wish to request a device issued by the Parish Council

Model Number:

Serial Number:

Date of Issue:

I confirm that I have read, understood, and accept the conditions of the Holbeach Parish Council IT Policy.

Councillor Name: _____

Councillor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witnessed By:

Officer Name: _____

Officer Signature: _____ Date: _____