



EAST HANNINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer: Miss Lucy White, CiLCA, BA(Hons)

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IT AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

(Adopted: May 2026)

1. INTRODUCTION

East Hanningfield Parish Council recognises that digital and electronic communications are essential to effective modern local government. They enable the Council to communicate efficiently with Councillors, staff, residents, businesses, and external organisations.

The Council uses a range of communication channels including email, its website, social media platforms, and messaging services. The Council will use the most appropriate channel for each type of communication and will review and update this policy as new technologies or platforms are adopted.

2. PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

All communications issued on behalf of the Council must be:

- lawful, accurate, and appropriate in tone;
- civil, respectful, and professional;
- free from discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, or offensive content;
- relevant to Council business;
- compliant with data protection and confidentiality requirements;
- consistent with the Council's Code of Conduct.

No communication must include content that infringes copyright or discloses personal data unlawfully.

All official Council communications must normally be issued through, or authorised by, the Clerk as Proper Officer.

3. WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Council maintains a website and may operate social media accounts (including Facebook) to share information and engage with the community.

- Information published must be accurate, relevant, and kept up to date.
- The Clerk (or delegated officer) is responsible for moderation and publishing.
- Approved local organisations may be permitted to maintain content on Council platforms, provided it meets Council standards.
- The Council reserves the right to remove content that is inaccurate, inappropriate, or no longer relevant.

Content published by third parties must be clearly identified as not being Council-authored content.

4. EMAIL COMMUNICATION

The Council provides official email addresses for Council business.

- All formal Council correspondence should be conducted using Council email accounts.
- The Clerk manages incoming correspondence and ensures appropriate distribution.
- Councillors should use Council email accounts for all Council-related business.
- Personal email accounts should not normally be used for Council work.

Freedom of Information and Public Access

Emails and electronic communications may constitute recorded information held by the Council and may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and/or Environmental Information Regulations 2004, subject to applicable exemptions.

Retention

Emails will be retained in accordance with the Council's document retention policy and statutory requirements. Emails must not be deleted or destroyed where they form part of Council records, ongoing business, or legal obligations.

5. MOBILE AND MESSAGING APPLICATIONS (INCLUDING WHATSAPP)

The Council recognises that messaging applications may be used for convenience in limited circumstances.

- Messaging apps (including WhatsApp) must not replace formal Council decision-making processes or official records.
- Any Council-related discussion via messaging apps is subject to the same standards of conduct as other communications.
- Sensitive, confidential, or personal data must not be shared via messaging apps unless secure and appropriate safeguards are in place.
- Messages relating to Council business may constitute Council records and may be subject to FOI or legal disclosure.
- Records should be retained where they form part of Council business in accordance with the retention policy.

Messaging applications must be used sparingly and appropriately, and not as a substitute for official Council communication channels.

6. COUNCILLOR EMAIL AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

All Councillors are provided with a dedicated Council email account.

- Councillors must use Council email accounts for official business.
- Councillors are responsible for ensuring secure access to their accounts.
- Emails should be accessed using secure, updated devices and browsers.
- Councillors must not share login credentials.

The Clerk may circulate meeting agendas, papers, and summonses electronically in accordance with relevant legislation, including amendments permitting electronic communication of Council meeting documentation.

Councillors must maintain confidentiality of information received in their official capacity and must not disclose confidential or exempt information.

7. DATA PROTECTION AND INFORMATION SECURITY

The Council is committed to complying with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Councillors and staff must:

- process personal data lawfully, fairly, and securely;
- only use Council-approved systems for Council business;
- ensure devices used for Council work are password protected and kept up to date;
- avoid sharing personal data unless necessary and lawful;
- take reasonable steps to prevent unauthorised access or disclosure;
- report any suspected data breach to the Clerk without delay.

Personal data includes, but is not limited to:

- names and contact details;
 - addresses;
 - telephone numbers;
 - email addresses;
 - online identifiers (including IP addresses where applicable).
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8. DEVICE AND SYSTEM SECURITY

All devices used for Council business must:

- run a supported and security-updated operating system;
- have active antivirus and firewall protection where applicable;
- be kept secure with strong passwords or authentication methods.

Unsupported or insecure systems must not be used to access Council systems or data.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY

Councillors and staff must respect the confidentiality of information obtained in the course of Council business.

Confidential or exempt information must not be shared outside the Council unless properly authorised.

Unauthorised disclosure may constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and may result in formal action.

10. GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

Councillors and staff are expected to:

- use Council communications responsibly and professionally;
 - avoid unnecessary duplication of email chains;
 - use discretion when copying others into communications;
 - ensure communications are relevant to recipients;
 - consider whether information should be directed to the Clerk for action.
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11. REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated as required to reflect changes in legislation, technology, or Council practice.