

WESTERLEIGH & COALPIT HEATH PARISH COUNCIL – IT AND EMAIL POLICY

1. Introduction

Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council recognises the importance of effective and secure information technology (IT) and email usage in supporting its business, operations, and communications.

This policy outlines the guidelines and responsibilities for the appropriate use of IT resources and email by councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals who use Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council's IT resources, including computers, networks, software, devices, data, and email accounts.

3. Acceptable use of IT resources and email

All councillors and employees are issued with a Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council email account.

Council IT resources and email accounts are to be used for all official council-related activities and tasks. Private email addresses must not be used for council-related communications.

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 Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council for work-related tasks.

Council employees are issued with a lap top and mobile phone and have access to shared files and applications via MS365. At this time, councillors use personal devices to access council email accounts. Councillors do not have access to shared files and applications via MS365.

Unauthorised installation of software on authorised devices, including personal software, is strictly prohibited due to security concerns.

5. Data management and security

All sensitive and confidential Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath 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

Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council's 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 Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council are for official communication only. Emails should be professional and respectful in tone and comply with the council's **Equality & Diversity Policy** and **Code of Conduct** for council members.

Emails must comply with the council's **Information & Data Protection Policy**. Confidential or sensitive information must not be sent via email unless it is encrypted. Personal information contained within emails should not be forwarded on to people/ groups outside of the council; this includes names, addresses, and email addresses. Use BCC when sending emails to mailing lists including people/ groups outside the council.

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

Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish 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.

9. Mobile devices and remote Work

Mobile devices – lap tops and phones - provided by Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council should be secured with passcodes and/or biometric authentication.

10. Email monitoring

Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath 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.

The council also reserves the right to access email accounts to collate information for Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests. Employees and councillors will be informed should access to their council accounts for this purpose be required.

11. Retention and archiving

Emails should be retained and archived in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Regularly review and delete unnecessary emails to maintain an organised inbox. Refer to the council's **Document Retention Policy** for further guidance.

Councillor email accounts will be deleted by the Clerk immediately after a councillor leaves their role. Emails that have been sent to/ from that address should not be saved or forwarded to a personal email account.

12. Reporting security incidents

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

13 Training and awareness

Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council will provide regular training and resources to educate employees about IT security best practices, privacy concerns, and technology updates. Members will receive regular information on email security and best practices, and training will be provided as required.

14. Compliance and consequences

Breach of this IT and Email Policy may result in the suspension of IT privileges and/ or further consequences in accordance with the council's **Disciplinary Procedure** (employees) or **Code of Conduct** (for members) if deemed appropriate.

15. Policy review

This policy was first adopted by Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council in June 2025. It is based upon a model policy provided in the Practitioners' Guide 2025 – Governance and accountability for smaller authorities in England. It will be reviewed annually to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Updates may be made to address emerging technology trends and security measures.

16. Contacts

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

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

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Role: _____