



NEEDHAM MARKET TOWN COUNCIL
IT and Electronic Communications Policy
(Adopted 11th November 2025)

INTRODUCTION:

The Town Council understands that the use of digital and electronic communication enables it to interact in a manner that improves the communications both within the Town Council and between the Town Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Town Council has a website and uses email to communicate. The Town Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Should the Town Council add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

RATIONALE:

Needham Market Town Council is required, as part of its governance and accountability framework, to adopt and implement policies that safeguard public money, assets, and information. This IT and Electronic Communication Policy forms part of the Council's internal controls and demonstrates compliance with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), particularly Assertion 10.

Assertion 10 requires the Council to confirm that it has taken steps to ensure arrangements are in place to secure the proper and effective use of its resources. In today's environment, the use of digital systems, email, websites, and social media are integral to the Council's operations. By adopting this policy, the Council is ensuring that:

- IT systems are used in a secure and controlled manner.
- Public data and information are properly protected.
- Communications with residents, businesses, and partners are reliable, transparent, and professional.
- Risks associated with misuse, loss of data, or unauthorised access are mitigated.

This policy is therefore a key part of the Council's commitment to effective governance, transparency, and accountability.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL – BUSINESS USE: Communications from the Town Council are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Town Council does not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- If official council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Town Council as the Proper Officer.

Town Council website:

Occasionally, the Town Council may direct those contacting the Council to its website to see the required information if it is in the public domain. The website can be found at (<https://needhammarket-tc.gov.uk/>).

The Town Council allows and enables approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website to present information about the group's activities. The local group will be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Town Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site. The Town Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Town Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the web site is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Town Council.

Town Council email:

The Town Council has a dedicated email address (clerk@needhammarket-tc.gov.uk). The email account is monitored and responded to during office hours, and the Town Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as practically possible.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or Deputy Clerk and otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

The Town Council may not respond to every comment it receives particularly if it is experiencing a heavy workload or the comment is for information purposes only.

Emails to the Town Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

SMS (texting):

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

Internal communication and access to information within the Town Council:

The Town Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Town Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in all their work on behalf of the Town Council.

All Town Councillors have a dedicated email given to them once elected or co-opted onto the Council and should ensure that they remove any council email addresses from their personal devices. Council members should access their email via webmail from any browser.

To gain access to Councillors email addresses, members should navigate to Spacemail and use their existing username and password which will enable them to log in. Members can easily bookmark this page to enable speedier access.

By using webmail, the council has removed the danger of a security breach on a member's own device as the emails viewed on webmail are not downloaded to the device used to access them.

Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 covers meetings and proceedings of local authorities. Previously, paragraph 4(2)(b) requires principal and town councils to send summonses to attend meetings by post to their members' home addresses, or under 4(4), by post, to an alternative address specified. In practice, this covered all the papers to be considered at meetings, not just the agenda. The Government,

under The Order made under Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 amended Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 to allow local authorities to send their members summonses to attend meetings, including agendas and related papers to meetings, electronically. The Town Council has amended its own Standing Orders to allow the authorising of the use of electronic communication. Occasionally, the electronic communication may include attachments, such as a meeting agenda or papers, or a web-link enabling a parish councillor to view meeting papers.

As more and more information becomes available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Town Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Town Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails and avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option (whilst ensuring that the people who need to know the information are copied in) and ensure that email trails have been removed.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION AWARENESS:

Whilst Town and councils are expected to comply with Data Protection legislation, individual Councillors will also need to ensure that they protect an individual's personal data whether it is stored electronically or as a hard copy. This applies only to living individuals (not the deceased, companies, other authorities and charities)

Personal data includes:

- Names and addresses
- Telephone numbers
- Email addresses
- IP addresses

Councillors are required to implement the following agreed measures to comply with the legislation:

Only use Needham Market Town Council email account for Town Council correspondence

Ensure all council correspondence includes the Needham Town Council footer containing the Privacy Statement or a link to the relevant page on the website (this will be provided by the Clerk)

Ensure that all devices (computers, laptops, phones) are password protected

Not forward on emails or email threads as they may contain personal data

Delete emails which are no longer required

Where possible direct all correspondence to the Clerk who can obtain the necessary consent

Where possible avoid holding an individual's information in a Councillor's home or on a Councillor's own PC. If a Councillor has to hold any information containing personal data on behalf of the Town Council, it needs to be stored securely in a locked room or cabinet (if hard copies) or if on a PC, in a secure folder.

Ensure that their antivirus software and operating system is up-to-date

Ensure that their computer's firewall is turned on

Inform the Town Council Office of any breaches within 48 hours

Digital inclusion and support:

Needham Market Town Council is committed to enabling all councillors to take part fully in the work of the Council. Access to technology or differing levels of digital skill must not be a barrier to participation or to meeting the requirements set out in this policy. The Clerk/Council will consider requests for reasonable support, training or equipment to ensure that councillors are able to meet their responsibilities in a secure, effective and confident manner.