



Thurlaston Parish Council

Information & Communications Technology Policy

Adopted July 2020

Version	Author	Date	Review date
v1-1	Keith Boardman	Aug 2019	Sep 2020
v3	Keith Boardman	Jul 2020	Due Sep 2023

1. Definitions & Scope

Information & Communications Technology (ICT) is a generic term which encapsulates the use of Information Technology (eg computing equipment) and the role of unified communications using telecommunications equipment (telephony, data networking for the transmission of textual data, audio and video).

ICT equipment is extensively used across all industrial sectors and for domestic purposes. For the purposes of this policy the scope primarily concerns the use of computer technology as relevant to Thurlaston Parish Council (TPC)¹ for conducting its business which, inter alia, includes the dissemination and communications of information.

ICT equipment refers to all technologies that may be used to transmit, operate on, or store data in electronic form. Such devices include, but not limited to:

- Computing equipment (of any form such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets or mobile devices) and ancillary storage peripherals such as disk drives;
- Portable or removable storage devices such as USB memory sticks, CD/DVD devices; media card readers;
- Ancillary equipment such as telecommunications equipment (eg network routers, switches, hubs etc);
- Access and use of equipment managed by third parties – such as the TPC website and email services.

The TPC has also a *Data Protection & Security Policy* which complements this *ICT Policy*, albeit the former relates to both paper and electronic held information.

2. Legislation & Standards

TPC recognises its responsibility to ensure its policies and procedures comply with relevant legislation and de facto standards.

Computer Misuse Act 1990

It is a criminal offence, if any of the following actions are undertaken intentionally:

- (a) unauthorised access to a computer system or data;
- (b) unauthorised access preparatory to another criminal action;
- (c) unauthorised modification of a computer system or data;
- (d) creation or transmission of any offensive, obscene or indecent images, data or other material, or any data capable of being resolved into obscene or indecent images or material.

TPC will use best endeavours to ensure all ICT users are made aware that deliberate unauthorised use, alteration, or interference with a computer system or its software or data, may be treated as gross misconduct. In some circumstances such a breach may also be a criminal offence.

Copyright, Design & Patents Act 1988

It is an offence under the Copyright, Design and Patent Act to copy licensed software without the consent of the copyright owner. All copying is forbidden by the Act, unless it is in accordance with the terms and conditions of the respective licence or contract.

¹ For the purposes of this Policy TPC refers to all members of the Parish Council, its staff, and its authorised agents.

Health & Safety: Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992

If computers are not used correctly, they can present hazards. Where TPC employs its own staff it has a responsibility to ensure they are aware of the Regulations and that individuals are satisfied with their workstation environment.

Under UK legislation computer screens or monitors are called Display Screen Equipment (DSE) or Visual Display Units (VDUs) and the immediate environment where they are used such as desk, chair, work surface, are collectively referred to as a Workstation. The DSE Regulations regulate the use of such devices and environment in which they are employed. The regulations provide specific guidance for DSE users who 'habitually use VDUs' as a significant part of their normal work and regularly work on display screens for two/three hours each day or continuously for more than one hour spells.

TPC will provide guidance to any member of its staff that would like assistance with assessing their workstation environment.

Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018

These regulations came into force for public sector bodies on 23 September 2018. They indicate that government organisations must make their websites and mobile apps more accessible by making them 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'.

The 2018 regulations build on existing obligations to people who have a disability under the Equality Act 2010. These state that all UK web service providers must consider 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled people.

Specific technical guidance on the implementation of these regulations is described in the TPC website reference manual.

TPC is committed to implementing the required standards on its website.

Computer Virus Protection

Computer viruses and Malware are undesirable computer software that can corrupt or destroy the integrity of computer equipment and/or the data they store. They are a serious, increasing threat to computer and telecommunications systems.

All ICT equipment that is used for undertaking Parish Council business must be protected with appropriate Anti-Virus (AV) software to prevent the loading and/or activation of malicious software. When ICT equipment is switched on and functional, AV software must always be active and continually scan the said equipment for malicious activity and have proactive controls to stop infestation.

If an individual has reason to suspect that equipment being used on Council business is infected then the matter should be reported to the Parish Clerk, who will ensure the issue is brought to the attention of the relevant Council member with responsibility for ICT matters.

3. TPC Computer Equipment

TPC makes available computer equipment primarily for use by the Parish Clerk. TPC owns this equipment and accepts responsibility for the asset which will be itemised on the TPC insurance policy.

TPC has set technical standards for the deployment of such equipment, which from time to time will be revised, usually in line with standards employed within the ICT market sector. A key factor in

setting such standards is that it informs TPC members of the systems interoperability requirements for the safe distribution and management of data, which includes the format in which such data are managed and communicated.

As at 2020 these standards are:

- Windows Operating System: MS Windows 10 Professional (64bit)
- Office products: MS Office 2019 – Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, Outlook email client.
- Backup software: MS Win7/10 backup software.
- AV software: MS Security Essentials – inclusive of AV & Firewall protection.
- Data Encryption: Such as Vera Crypt (v1.22 or greater), as appropriate.
- Browser: Google Chrome (v76 or greater). Whilst Chrome is recommended, several others should be compliant such as Firefox, Edge, Safari. All should be compliant with TPC's website.
- PDF viewer: Adobe or equivalent, ideally with support for PDF/A formats (Ref website section).

PDF is the standard format for publishing textual documents on the website, and a secure way of publishing documents to third parties.
- Photos/images: Should be stored and transmitted in JPG format. These are particularly relevant to the TPC website and the website reference manual provides guidance on matrix/pixel dimensions and image quality.

No specific JPG image viewer is recommended – many free products are available including within MS Windows 10. However TPC can provide guidance on the use of specific software where it is necessary to manipulate images.

All commercial software licences purchased for TPC will be licenced specifically for TPC equipment, and will not be transferable for personal use.

Where the Parish Clerk uses computer consumables (eg paper & printer ink) the cost of these will be refunded.

The Parish Clerk will access the Internet using his/her own broadband telecommunications connection which will have relevant firewall protection.

4. Computer User Training

Whilst TPC does not mandate any particular competency standards for the use of ICT equipment it does expect individuals undertaking business on behalf of TPC have adequate skills for undertaking such activities professionally.

If in doubt TPC will use best endeavours to provide assistance and guidance.

5. Computer Security

User access to TPC computer equipment shall be password controlled.

Where information which contains person identifiable data needs to be electronically transmitted such information must be encrypted during transfer.

Passwords should be changed every three months and are required to be 'strong' – at least 8 characters in length, containing a mix of alpha and numeric characters, with at least one digit, one upper case letter and one symbol character (e.g. @ # \$ % & *).

All computer programs, most notably operating system and AV software, shall be updated to the latest standard on a regular basis.

When computers are switched on and booted, AV software must always be active.

Unattended computer equipment shall be password locked at log-on/access level.

Should a computer become infected with a virus (suspected or otherwise) this should be reported immediately to the Parish Councillor who has responsibility for ICT matters.

The Parish Clerk shall be responsible for taking regular backups of TPC computer equipment, at minimum fortnightly. When not in use the backup storage device should be kept in a hidden location away from the immediate vicinity of the Parish Council computer. The Parish Clerk shall log the times and dates when backups are undertaken.

TPC shall employ two backup storage devices; during each two month period one will be used by the Parish Clerk for undertaking regular backups. The other device will be held by a nominated Parish Councillor for his/her safe keeping. At the end of each two month period the two devices will be swapped over so that the alternative device will then be actively used for the following two month period. The cycle therefore repeats every two months.

When there is a requirement to dispose of computer equipment all storage device information must be securely destroyed so that data are no longer accessible. This may be undertaken by physical destruction of computer storage devices, or the use of accredited data sanitisation software².

6. Email & Internet Access

TPC has its own unique Gov.uk email address for use by the Parish Clerk. All other council members may use their own personal email addresses when undertaking TPC business. Precautions must be taken not to pass malicious software, such as viruses, to third parties.

All email and internet users are expected to use technology in a courteous, reasonable and responsible manner. The following activities are not acceptable and anyone found to be involved in them may face disciplinary action. In certain instances the matter will be considered to be gross misconduct:

- Receiving, sending or displaying messages or pictures that are offensive or may be construed to be offensive in nature;
- Using obscene language;
- Damaging computers or telecommunications;
- Violating copyright laws;

² National Cyber Security Centre (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/>)

- Issuing of passwords to third parties unless authorised to do so;
- Trespassing in others computer folders or files.

7. TPC Website

TPC has sponsored the provision of its own website, with a Gov.uk domain registration:

<http://www.thurlaston-pc.gov.uk>

Wherever possible TPC policy is to disseminate as much information as practicable using this website. More details are available in the *TPC Publication Scheme* document.

The Internet Service Provider that hosts the web service is Vision ICT Ltd. TPC has a support agreement with the company. In essence the agreement covers the management and recovery of fault conditions and provides advice with regard any technical difficulties experienced by TPC.

The Vision ICT agreement also includes recurring charges for gov.uk email and domain name.

The Vision ICT agreement does not cover the maintenance of the content of the website, or new content developments. It is the responsibility of the TPC to identify where and how this support will be provided.

A TPC Reference Manual has been developed which has been distributed to all members of Thurlaston Parish Council. This shall be updated as and when technical or design changes are made to the website.

Currently many Thurlaston villagers use a Yahoo Groups email list server known as ThurlastonNet. This has been operational in the village since 2002 and has over 200 subscribers. TPC has no responsibilities relating to ThurlastonNet, its maintenance or administration; it is managed privately by a village resident. TPC does provide a link to ThurlastonNet on the TPC website, but cannot formally recommend, or accept any responsibility for, ThurlastonNet or its use.

8. Mobile ICT Equipment

TPC representatives may need to undertake business away from their normal base. On such occasions it may be necessary to use mobile or portable ICT equipment possibly carried and stored in vehicles. Such equipment should not be left in an unattended vehicle unless there is no other option, in which case it should be secured out of sight in the boot.

Individuals should note there is usually no insurance cover for losses arising from unlocked vehicles, hotel rooms or other unsecured situations. TPC cannot accept responsibility for the loss or damage to individuals' equipment. However any loss or damage to equipment should be reported as soon as possible to the Parish Clerk or Parish Council chairman as appropriate. Criminal damage should be reported to the Police.

Any breach or loss of personal data theft shall be reported to the Parish Council, who may also escalate such an incident to the Information Commissioner's Office.