

Westham Parish Council IT & AI Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how the Parish Council manages, secures, and uses information technology (IT) systems, including computers, mobile devices, email, cloud services, and artificial intelligence (AI) tools. It ensures that all technology is used lawfully, securely, efficiently, and ethically in the conduct of Council business.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors using Council IT systems or data.
- All devices owned or managed by the Parish Council.
- All software, online services, and AI tools used in the course of Council work.

3. Principles

The Parish Council will:

- Protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of its information.
- Comply with the UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, and Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Promote transparency and accountability in technology use.
- Ensure AI and IT tools are used responsibly, ethically, and in service of the public interest.

4. IT Systems and Security

4.1 Equipment

- All IT equipment must be approved and managed by the Clerk or Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).
- Personal devices used for Council work must have up-to-date security software and password protection.
- Lost or stolen devices must be reported immediately.

4.2 Access Control

- Passwords must be strong (at least 12 characters, mixing letters, numbers, and symbols) and not shared.
- Administrative access is restricted to authorised personnel.
- Two-factor authentication (2FA) should be enabled where available.

4.3 Data Storage and Backup

- Council data should be stored on approved cloud or local storage with appropriate security and UK-based servers.
- Regular backups must be taken and tested.

4.4 Email and Internet Use

- Council email accounts must be used for official business.

- Personal use of Council IT systems should be minimal and reasonable.
- Users must not access or share illegal, offensive, or inappropriate material.

5. Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use

5.1 Definition

AI tools include systems that generate, analyse, or summarise content automatically — for example, chatbots, language models, or image generators (such as ChatGPT, Copilot, or Gemini).

5.2 Permitted Use

AI may be used to:

- Draft or summarise routine documents or correspondence.
- Generate ideas or assist with research.
- Automate simple administrative tasks.

5.3 Prohibited Use

AI must NOT be used to:

- Make decisions about individuals or policies without human oversight.
- Process or upload personal or confidential data into AI systems.
- Generate misleading, discriminatory, or false information.
- Replace formal decision-making processes of the Council.

5.4 Transparency

- If AI-generated content is used in Council reports, minutes, or communications, it should be reviewed and approved by a human before publication.
- AI contributions should be noted if they form a significant part of the document's creation.

5.5 Accountability

Users remain personally responsible for the accuracy and appropriateness of any AI-assisted work. The Council Clerk oversees compliance with this section.

6. Data Protection and Privacy

- All users must follow the Parish Council Data Protection Policy.
- Personal data must be collected and stored only for lawful Council purposes.
- AI tools must not be used to infer or analyse personal data without consent.

7. Software and Licensing

- Only licensed and approved software may be installed on Council devices.
- Free or open-source software must be approved by the Clerk or IT Officer before use.

8. Incident Reporting

- All IT or data security incidents (including suspected breaches or malware infections) must be reported to the Clerk immediately.
- Serious incidents may be reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as required.

9. Training and Awareness

- Councillors and staff will receive regular training on IT security, data protection, and AI awareness.
- New members must confirm they have read and understood this policy.

10. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Clerk or as required by changes in legislation, technology, or Council operations.

11. Approval

Approved by: Full Council

Date: 17 November 2025

Next Review: November 2026