## PROTOCOL ON THE USE OF COUNCIL RESOURCES BY MEMBERS

**1.**     **Introduction**

1.1     The Herefordshire Council Member Code of Conduct provides that, when using Council resources, a member must observe the Council's requirements and ensure that such resources are not used for political purposes unless that use could reasonably be regarded as likely to facilitate the functions of the Council or of any office which you have been elected or appointed to.

1.2     A breach of this Protocol is a breach of the Code and so carries penalties up to and including disqualification from office.

1.3     Any illegal activity will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

1.4     If you are in any doubt about the application of this Protocol, it is your responsibility to seek clarification from the County Secretary and Solicitor. Written authorisation for the use of resources may be necessary in some circumstances.

1.5     You must sign a copy of this Protocol in order to be given access to the Council's internet and e-mail facilities.

1.6     Additional guidelines will be issued to cover elections.

**2.**     **Council Resources**

2.1     These include:

- Use of Council premises
- Information technology such as computers and software, including home use
- Telephone and fax
- Photocopiers
- Stationery
- Postage
- Council transport
- Secretarial and clerical support
- Access to Council documents and information
- Allowances and expenses

**3.**     **Permitted use**

3.1     You may use Council resources only on Council business.  If you represent the Council on outside bodies you may use Council resources to assist you in this role.

**4.**     **Prohibited use**

4.1     You may not use Council resources:

- For the publication of material which, in whole or in part, appears designed to affect public support for a political party

- For mass mailings, even if these are related to Council business. If you feel the circumstances are exceptional, you should consult the County Secretary and Solicitor.

**5.        Internet and e-mail policy**

5.1        You are responsible for any breach of security or confidentiality resulting from your use of the Council's internet connection.

5.2        You must remember that the internet is not secure, and you must therefore protect information confidential to the Council.

5.3        You may use a Council-installed computer in your home for personal purposes such as creating personal documents.   Subject to paragraph 7, you may use your council installed computer for surfing the net and personal e-mail correspondence.

5.4        You may not share your Council user name or Council password without the written agreement of the County Secretary and Solicitor.  You may not use the Council's internet facilities to disable or overload any computer system or network, or to circumvent any system designed to protect the privacy or security of another user.

5.5        You must log off from the Council system and internet if you leave your Council computer unattended, and you must not allow it to be used by an unauthorised person.  Your family members may be authorised by you to use the Council's computer but you must make sure they follow the standards set out in this protocol.

5.6        You must not download a programme or script from the internet, or use non-standard software in any circumstances, without the approval of IT Services. Any licence conditions must be observed

5.7        You must not transfer files or programmes from unauthorised external sources via attachments

5.8        You must not knowingly send, or attempt to receive, e-mail known to contain a virus.  Do not open e-mail attachments unless you are confident of their origin.

5.9        You must not send, receive or copy copyright, sensitive or personal material about living individuals via the internet unless it is encrypted to ensure no breach of the Data Protection Act.

5.10      You must not attach a scanned signature to an e-mail; there is a risk that such signatures can be accessed by others and attached to documents purportedly in the name of the Council.

5.11      You must not use the Council's facilities to post or send on the internet confidential information about the Council, or any of its partner agencies or associates; to engage in on-line gambling; to participate in chain letters; or to post or send defamatory or false information.

5.12 PCs must not be connected to the internet via any other route unless by agreement with the Head of ICT. If you install an ISP on your Council-provided PC you must follow the requirements of this Protocol.

5.13 If you want to send an e-mail to "all users", you must contact Members' Services who will seek the agreement of the County Secretary and Solicitor.

**6. The internet and e-mail: legal issues**

6.1 Illegal use, including the posting or sending of information that may tend to disparage or harass others on the basis of gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation or national origin; or accessing, displaying or disseminating pornography or obscene material, is self-evidently unacceptable and will be referred to the police.

**7. Use of the herefordshire.gov.uk address**

7.1 The Council is statutorily prohibited from publishing material designed to affect public support for a political party. You may therefore not use your Council e-mail address (name@herefordshire.gov.uk) for this purpose nor, on a matter of controversy, to promote a point of view which is associated with a political party. E-mail correspondence on party political matters may be likely to facilitate the function of the Council or any Council office or responsibility to which you have been elected or appointed. If in doubt, seek the advice of the County Secretary and Solicitor or her nominee.

7.2 E-mails from your official address will be perceived as being associated with the Council and may get preferential treatment, or may be thought by the public to be seeking such treatment. You should not therefore use the address for placing orders and similar activity as a private individual.

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE**

**1.      Internet access**

1.1     This is through:

    • Council computers at Brockington
    • A dial-up connection from a Council-installed computer at home
    • Via an internet service provider (ISP) on a Council-installed computer at home

1.2     You will be given a unique user ID and password to access the internet via the Council link.

1.3     You should read and observe guidelines for the use of the internet (so-called "netiquette") which can be found on the internet at www.fau.edu/netiquette/net/.

1.4     Remember that the immediacy of e-mail can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.  Say nothing via e-mail that you would not be prepared to say in a letter; remember that e-mails are admissible in legal proceedings and could also form the basis of a complaint under the Code of Conduct.  Be especially careful in forwarding e-mails; they may contain material which the sender would not wish to share with others. Return wrongly delivered messages to the sender.

1.5     You should delete messages from your in-box and "sent messages" at least weekly (or store them in a separate folder) to avoid overloading your mailbox.

1.6     It is helpful if you use the "out of office" function if you are not going to pick up messages for more than a day.

1.7     If you are sending complex graphics or large Power Point presentations via e-mail, you should compress them before sending.  Advice is available from IT Services.

**2.      Virus Controls**

2.1     Council computers are installed with anti-virus and security software. Guidance on anti-virus software is available from the IT Support Unit.

2.2     You must not attempt to disable virus software.

2.3     If you are concerned about any incoming e-mail, consult the IT Services Helpdesk immediately on extension 0160.

**3.      External connections**

3.1     Any individual external connection must be authorised by IT Services, who will assess risks and specify limitations on use.

3.2     The "firewall" between the Council internal network and the internet provides primary security. If you have an individual external connection, the machine used for external access must never be connected to the internal Council network.

**4.** **Monitoring**

4.1     The Council's system records internet activity, including user name, date, time and site visited.  The Council also reserves the right to inspect all files stored on their network and personal computers at any time, without notice.

4.2     If you accidentally connect to a site containing sexually explicit or offensive material, disconnect immediately.  Inform the IT Services Helpdesk on extension 0160; they will arrange to block the site, and will record details of the incident for your protection.