

# **DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

## **POLICY COMMITTEE**

**17th NOVEMBER, 2009**

At a Meeting of the Policy Committee held on 17th November, 2009:

**PRESENT** The Mayor (Councillor S.C. Hosford) and Councillors R.M. Biggs, V. Black, T.C.N. Harries, Trevor Jones (Chairman) and L.M. Phillips.

**APOLOGIES** for absence were received from Councillors M.A. Allwood and C.M. Hebditch.

### 26. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22nd September, 2009, adopted by Council on 29th September, 2009, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 27. **MINUTES OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered the under-mentioned Minutes of the Management Committee on 10th November, 2009:

Minute 36 – Publicity For Town Council Events

Minute 41 – Use of the Magistrates Room by Community Organisations

Minute 46 – Municipal Buildings Lift

Following discussion it was

### **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) That Minute 36 be approved but that, in addition to the measures outlined in it, the Town Clerk be requested to endeavour to increase the level of the Council's engagement with local radio stations in an attempt to increase the level of their coverage of events.
- (2) That Minute 41 be approved for the trial period of six months suggested in it, the arrangement to be introduced following the completion of the works to install the lift in the Municipal Buildings.
- (3) That Minute 46 be noted.

### 28. **MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS**

The Committee considered the Council's Management Accounts for the period ended 31st October, 2009.

Following discussion it was

**RESOLVED**

That the Management Accounts be noted and that the Financial Service Provider be requested to prepare a briefing note detailing the level of any anticipated overspend at 31st March, 2010 and on the method adopted to arrive at the profiling used in the report.

29. **PERFORMANCE AND POLICY PLAN – 2009-10**

The Committee considered the draft Performance and Policy Plan for 2009-10 which had been approved, with amendment, by the Management Committee at Minute 42.

It was

**RECOMMENDED**

- (1) That the draft Plan as now submitted be approved so far as this Committee is concerned.
- (2) That consideration be given during the preparation of the 2011-12 Plan to identifying specific action to be taken to meet the Key Objectives highlighted in it.

30. **CHILD PROTECTION AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk on the need for the Council to review its arrangements for ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people using its services. Information from the Independent Safeguarding Authority indicated that none of the Council's services constituted Regulated Activities but that action was required to ensure that all elected members, staff and volunteers involved with the Council were checked against the information held by the Criminal Records Bureau.

The report suggested the adoption of a formal Child Protection and Vulnerable Persons Policy and the implementation of CRB checks for existing members, staff and volunteers with effect from 1st April, 2010, and for new members, staff or volunteers on election, appointment or engagement thereafter, the checks to be repeated following the elections in 2011 and thereafter at four-yearly intervals to coincide with future elections, the only exception being where a member of staff or a volunteer is appointed or engaged within six months before the date of an ordinary election when it was considered unnecessary for that person to be subjected to a further check immediately following the election.

The cost in 2010-11 was estimated to be £2,300.

It was

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the Child Protection and Vulnerable Persons Policy set out at Appendix I be adopted.
- (2) That the arrangements set out above for the introduction and maintenance of CRB checks be approved.
- (3) That appropriate provision be made in the Estimates for 2010-11 and future years.

### 31. **DORCHESTER NEWS – EDITORIAL POLICY**

Following concerns expressed by a Member during the preparation of the most recent edition of Dorchester News that it should only include stories directly concerning the Council's activities the Committee reviewed the editorial policy to be adopted in preparing future editions of it. The three basic alternatives were:

- (a) to continue with the present practice of including items about the Council, other statutory bodies and agencies and of general interest across the wider public sector;
- (b) to include only items about the Council and other statutory bodies and agencies; or
- (c) to include only items about the Council.

Following discussion it was

## **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) That the present practice of including items about the Council, other statutory bodies and agencies and of general interest across the wider public sector be continued.
- (2) That no change be made to the arrangements for the approval of the content by The Mayor and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Management, Planning & Environment and Policy Committees.

### 32. **E-MAIL AND INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE**

The Committee reviewed the Council's E-Mail and Internet Acceptable Use Policy, Information Security Policy and E-Mail Guidelines following the implementation of the changes to the Council's access to e-mail and the internet approved at Minute 13 and in accordance with the approved programme for the review of the Council's corporate governance documents.

It was

**RESOLVED**

That the revised versions of the E-Mail and Internet Acceptable Use Policy, Information Security Policy and E-Mail Guidelines set out at Appendices II – IV be adopted.

33. **HIGHWAY AMENITY MAINTENANCE – AGENCY AGREEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk on the continuing agency agreement under which the Council supervised highway amenity maintenance in Dorchester by the Dorset Works Organisation. Members agreed that the standard of work had improved and the incidence of complaints reduced to such an extent that there was no value in continuing the agreement and it was

**RECOMMENDED**

That the agreement be terminated with effect from 31st March, 2010.

Chairman

## **DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

### **CHILD PROTECTION AND VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this policy is to make clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children and vulnerable adults. The policy will help to maintain a safe and positive environment for children and vulnerable adults.

#### **2. POLICY COVERAGE**

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and Members of Dorchester Town Council.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (The Children Act, 1989).

This policy is to be used in conjunction with the Council's Risk Management Policy and Strategy, Health and Safety Policies, Equal Opportunities Policy, Complaints Policy and Procedure and Grievance Procedure.

#### **3. POLICY PRINCIPLES**

- Dorchester Town Council is a statutory organisation committed to providing a safe environment for all.
- The welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount.
- All children and vulnerable adults have an equal right to protection from abuse.
- Everybody at the Council has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

#### **4. POLICY STATEMENT**

Dorchester Town Council is committed to taking all reasonable precautions to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable persons that use its services and promotes a safeguarding culture and environment.

#### **5. PROCEDURES AND SYSTEMS**

##### **5.1 Definitions of Abuse:**

Abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm.

*Neglect* – where adults fail to meet a child's or vulnerable person's basic physical/psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of their health or development. For example, failure to ensure that a child is protected from unnecessary risk of injury, or exposing them to undue cold.

*Physical Abuse* – where physical pain or injury is caused, e.g. hitting, shaking, biting, etc.

*Sexual Abuse* – where children or vulnerable adults knowingly or unknowingly take part in an activity that meets the sexual needs of the other person or persons involved. This includes inappropriate photography or videoing.

*Emotional Abuse* – where there is persistent emotional ill treatment that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's or vulnerable person's emotional status. Examples of emotional abuse include bullying (including cyber and text bullying), constant criticism and unrealistic pressure to perform.

People with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and may have added difficulties in communicating what is happening to them. Dependency on others for primary needs, e.g. feeding and clothing, may make a person feel powerless to report abusive treatment.

5.2 Responding to a child or vulnerable adult who says either they or another child or vulnerable adult is/are being abused and responding to allegations against an employee/volunteer/Member or another young person:

If a person discloses to you abuse by someone else:

- Allow the person to speak without interruption, accepting what is said, but DO NOT investigate.
- Alleviate feelings of guilt and isolation, while passing no judgement. Reassure them that they did the right thing by talking to you.
- Advise that you will try to offer support, but that you MUST pass the information on.
- Record the facts as you know them.
- Refer the allegation immediately and directly to the appropriate person. If an employee or volunteer is implicated, refer to their Line Manager. If a Line Manager, Member or another young person is implicated, refer directly to the Town Clerk. If the Town Clerk is implicated, refer to the Town Mayor. All allegations must be referred, no matter how insignificant they seem to be, or when they occur.
- Try to ensure that no-one is placed in a position which could cause further compromise.

As soon as possible, and in any event within 24 hours, that person receiving the referral should:

- Write down notes, dates, times, facts, observations, verbatim speech, if possible, as soon as possible after the incident or disclosure has occurred.
- Ensure correct details are available: young person's/vulnerable adult's name and address, and the name and address of their parent or guardian.
- Immediately contact the Dorset County Council Social Care local office. Ask for the children's duty social worker and indicate that you wish to discuss a matter of

child/vulnerable person protection. Ask for the name of the person you are speaking with. Do not filter out or withhold any information. Ask if there is anyone else who should be informed.

- Prepare a confidential file. Record all notes, conversations and advice from Social Care. Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.
- Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection legislation.
- Follow advice from Social Care. Take no other action unless advised to do so by Social Care.

If in doubt about the advice you have received at any stage refer to Social Care for guidance.

### 5.3 Responding to concerns about a child's welfare where there has been no specific disclosure or allegation;

All employees, volunteers and Members are encouraged to share concerns with the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will, if appropriate, make a referral to Social Care.

Recognising abuse is not always easy. The list below provides some indicators of abuse, however, the list is not exhaustive and contains only indicators, not confirmation, of abuse:

- Having unexplained or suspicious injuries, e.g. bites or bruising.
- Having an injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent or which has not been treated adequately.
- Change in behaviour, including becoming withdrawn, or becoming aggressive.
- Displaying inappropriate sexual awareness for their age.
- Refusal to remove clothing for normal activities, e.g. swimming.
- Looking neglected in appearance.
- Losing or putting on weight for no apparent reason.
- Lack of trust in adults.

### 5.4 Contact Details

Social Care Local Office – Dorset County Council:  
Monday to Thursday - 8.40am to 5.00 pm. Friday - 8.40 am to 4 .00 pm.  
Telephone: 01305 251414  
Fax: 251034  
Minicom: 251596  
Out of office hours, weekends or public holidays: 01202 657279.

Dorchester Police:  
Non-emergency telephone: 01305 251212  
Emergency telephone: 999

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline:  
Telephone: 0808 800 5000  
Textphone: 0800 056 0566

## 6. **PREVENTION**

### 6.1 Recruitment and Training

Prospective employees will be interviewed and two references are taken up for the successful candidate.

All existing and new employees and Members will be checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. In line with best practice, these checks will be repeated every four years.

The Council will make the Child Protection and Vulnerable Persons Policy available to all staff, volunteers and Members, and line managers will encourage good practice and identify any training needs required.

### 6.2 Reporting

The Council is committed to maintaining an open culture where employees, Members, volunteers, children, vulnerable persons, parents and guardians feel able to express concerns both about child protection and issues of poor practice.

In addition to the procedures outlined in this policy, the Council's Whistle blowing Policy and Complaints Policy and Procedure are available to all staff, volunteers, Members and the general public.

## 7. **CODES OF PRACTICE AND BEHAVIOUR**

These guidelines have been devised to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, as well as to protect staff, volunteers and elected Members from situations where false allegations may occur.

The guidelines apply to those working with vulnerable persons or children involved in activities organised by or on behalf of Dorchester Town Council or at services provided by Dorchester Town Council.

### **You must:**

- Treat everyone with respect, regardless of their age, ethnicity, social background, ability, sexual orientation, culture or religious beliefs.
- Provide an example of good conduct you wish others to follow.
- Plan activities which involve more than one other person being present, or at least which are within sight or hearing of others.

- Respect a person's right to personal privacy.
- Provide access for young people to talk to others about any concerns they may have.
- Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviours they do not like.
- Remember that someone else might misinterpret your actions, no matter how well-intentioned.
- Recognise that special caution is required when you are discussing sensitive issues, such as bullying, bereavement, abuse or personal development.
- Recognise that some children or vulnerable adults will be more vulnerable to abuse than others, and may face extra barriers in getting help because of their race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, social background or culture.
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour and report all allegations/suspicions of abuse.

**You must not:**

- Engage in physical horseplay, such as wrestling or tickling.
- Have any inappropriate verbal or physical contact with children or vulnerable people, or make suggestive remarks or gestures.
- Permit abusive youth peer activities (e.g. initiation ceremonies, ridiculing, bullying, etc.)
- Play physical contact games with children or vulnerable adults.
- Jump to conclusions about others without checking the facts.
- Ask children or vulnerable adults to do things that are potentially dangerous, illegal or otherwise unreasonable.
- Exaggerate or trivialise abuse issues.
- Show favouritism to any individual.
- Rely on just your good name to protect you.
- Believe it could "never happen to me".
- Take chances when common sense, policy or practice suggest a more prudent approach.
- Allow allegations made to go unchallenged, unrecorded and not acted upon.

## 8. **POLICY MONITORING AND REVISION**

All incidents, allegations of abuse and complaints will be recorded and monitored.

This policy will be reviewed every two years, and will also be revised in the light of changing needs, changes in legislation and guidance, or in the light of experience.

## **DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

### **E-MAIL AND INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY**

#### **Email Acceptable Use**

#### **1. Introduction**

E-mail is widely used to help manage and deliver our services. Users should read this policy alongside the Council's other IT policies, the relevant codes of conduct (including the Code of Conduct for Employees), and the e-mail guidelines which appear in the Annex to this Policy.

#### **2. Scope**

This policy applies to:

- All employees, including those working from home or from other locations, and councillors;
- Other workers (including casual and agency workers, secondees and contractors) using the Council's equipment and networks.

All existing users and new employees having access to the system will be required to sign an agreement stating that they have read and understood these policies prior to being granted access. From time to time staff and councillors will be asked to sign this policy (e.g. when changes have been made to the policy).

#### **3. Policy statement**

The Council encourages users to make effective use of e-mail. Such use should always be lawful. It should not compromise the Council's information and computer systems nor have the potential to damage the Council's reputation. Users must comply with this policy as a condition of access to e-mail facilities.

#### **4. Appropriate use**

The Council expects all users to use e-mail responsibly and according to the following conditions:

##### *4.1 Personal use*

E-mail is an important tool in the management and delivery of Council services and this is its main purpose. Personal use of e-mail is permitted providing that:

- Personal use is made only outside actual working hours and for limited periods.
- Users do not run private businesses using the Council's facilities.
- Users make it clear to the intended recipient that the message is sent by the user in their personal capacity, not in their capacity as a representative of the Council.

- The conditions applying to business use in paragraph 4.2 are followed in respect of all personal use.

This policy also applies to the use of all internet mail providers.

#### 4.2 *Business use*

Use of e-mail is subject to the following conditions:

- Users should read the e-mail guidelines in the Annex to this document before using e-mail and should make sure that their use of it follows this guidance.
- E-mail is never completely confidential or secure. Messages appear to be temporary by nature but they can be widely distributed and easily restored from backup copies. E-mail messages have the same status in law as written correspondence and are open to the same legal challenges. Users must therefore apply the same standards to e-mails as they do to written correspondence. All external emails will have an automatic disclaimer.

When using e-mail the following must be borne in mind:

- Users must not commit the Council to purchasing or acquiring goods or services unless authorised to do so.
- Users should be cautious about any e-mail that asks the reader to send it to others. Where there is any room for doubt, please speak to your line manager.
- Users must not forward e-mail chain letters but should delete them.
- Users must comply with the Data Protection Act when placing personal data in messages or attachments.
- Users must not download software without specific permission.

#### 4.3 *Inappropriate use*

Users must not access, display or circulate any information in the following categories:

- Pornography (including child pornography)
- Gambling
- Promoting discrimination of any kind
- Promoting racial or religious hatred
- Involving threats or promoting violence
- Promoting illegal acts
- Any other information which may be offensive to colleagues

Incidents that appear to involve deliberate sending or receiving of e-mails that contain the following material will be reported to the Police:

- Images of child abuse (images of children, apparently under 16 years old) involved in sexual activity or posed to be sexually provocative

- Adult material that potentially breaches the Obscene Publications Act in the UK
- Criminally racist material in the UK

#### 4.4 *Accidental access to inappropriate material*

If an e-mail containing inappropriate material is opened accidentally it should be sent to the Town Clerk who will discuss the matter with the Council's IT support provider.

### **5.0 Monitoring**

The Council's system filters junk and profane e-mail to improve efficiency and enforce this policy. Users who receive this sort of e-mail should contact their line manager who will investigate whether the filtering can be improved. Managers may inspect any e-mail correspondence to see if users are complying with the policy. Any potential misuse identified from monitoring will be dealt with and may result in dismissal.

## **Internet Acceptable Use**

### **1. Introduction**

The internet is widely used to help manage and deliver our services. Users should read this policy alongside the Council's other IT policies and the relevant codes of conduct (including the Code of Conduct for Employees).

### **2. Scope**

This policy applies to:

- All employees, including those working from home or from other locations, and councillors;
- Other workers (including casual and agency workers, secondees and contractors) using the council's equipment and networks.

All existing users and new employees having access to the system will be required to sign an agreement stating that they have read and understood these policies prior to being granted access. From time to time staff and councillors will be asked to sign this policy (e.g. when changes have been made to the policy).

### **3. Policy statement**

The Council encourages users to make effective use of the internet. Such use should always be lawful. It should not compromise the Council's information and computer systems nor have the potential to damage the Council's reputation.

### **4. Appropriate use**

The Council expects all users to use the internet responsibly and according to the following conditions:

#### 4.1 *Personal use*

The internet is an important tool in the management and delivery of Council services and this is its main purpose. Personal use of the internet is permitted providing that:

- Personal use is made only outside actual working hours and for limited periods.
- Users do not run private businesses using the Council's facilities.
- The conditions applying to business use in paragraph 4.2 are followed in respect of all personal use.
- Regular and extensive personal use of the internet may result in disciplinary action. Whether or not this use has been during work time will be taken into account.

#### 4.2 *Business use*

Use of the internet is subject to the following conditions:

- Users must not commit the Council to purchasing or acquiring goods or services unless authorised to do so.
- Employees may join, and publish to, newsgroups of professional interest or relevant to their work with their line manager's approval.
- Users must comply with the Data Protection Act when placing personal data in newsgroups and on web sites.
- Users must not download software other than static files e.g. Word documents, PDFs, but not applications or activeX controls.
- Users must comply with licence terms and conditions when copying or downloading material covered by copyright law.
- Information on the internet is not always accurate so users must verify information before use.

#### 4.3 *Inappropriate use*

Users must not access, display or circulate any information in the following categories:

- Pornography (including child pornography)
- Gambling
- Promoting discrimination of any kind
- Promoting racial or religious hatred
- Involving threats or promoting violence
- Promoting illegal acts
- Any other information which may be offensive to colleagues

Incidents that appear to involve deliberate access to websites, newsgroups and on-line groups that contain the following material will be reported to the police:

- Images of child abuse (images of children, apparently under 16 years old) involved in sexual activity or posed to be sexually provocative
- Adult material that potentially breaches the Obscene Publications Act in the UK
- Criminally racist material in the UK

4.4 *Accidental access to inappropriate material*

Any user who inadvertently enters a site which could be deemed unsuitable must report it to their line manager.

**5.0 Monitoring**

The Council’s IT systems allow for the use of the internet to be monitored and this may be done to see whether users are complying with the policy. Any potential misuse identified may amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal.

**Declaration**

I have read and understood the e-mail and internet acceptable use policy. I agree to adhere to the conditions of use and understand that a deliberate breach of them may result in disciplinary action.

<b>Name: (please print)</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

Please sign and return to the Council Offices.

## **DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

### **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECURITY POLICY**

The Council relies heavily on the use of computers and computer systems. It is therefore important that these facilities are used in a secure, efficient and legitimate manner. This means that all computer users, including permanent and temporary employees, Council Members and people or organisations acting on behalf of the Council, must observe three key components of computer security:

- Confidentiality
- Integrity
- Availability

**Confidentiality** means that sensitive information must be protected from unauthorised disclosure.

**Integrity** means that the accuracy and completeness of information and computer software must be safeguarded.

**Availability** means that information and vital services are available to users when required.

To help maintain an acceptable level of Information Technology Security the Council –

- retains the services of an experienced external consultant to act as systems administrator;
- requires staff members and other users to sign up to the attached acceptable use policy on internet and e-mail;
- protects its computer systems against viruses and unauthorised hackers via a suitably equipped server through which all external electronic contents are made;
- only installs software legitimately procured on the Council's systems and ensures that it is used in accordance with the user licences;
- where possible restricts access to computer programs and files to those whose duties require access to the applications concerned;
- ensures that its data is regularly backed up in accordance with best practice both on- and off-site and stores the local back-up tapes in a fire-resistant environment;
- is developing a Business Continuity Plan to ensure the continuity of the Council's activities in the event of a disaster (e.g. catastrophic hardware failure, fire, flood etc) as part of its ongoing attention to risk management.

This policy requires that employees comply with the following points –

- confidential and personal information must be kept secure, (whether held electronically or in manual records);

- passwords should only be issued to users who need to use them;
- no software other than that legally procured by or on behalf of the Council should be loaded or used on Council equipment;
- no-one should take computer equipment away from their usual place of work without formal authorisation;
- back-up copies should be made of all important files and the copies should be stored in a safe place in accordance with recommended management practices;
- copying of software is not permitted;
- access to computer facilities with criminal intent is not permitted;
- damage to or unauthorised modification of data is not permitted and may be a criminal offence under the Computer Misuse Act 1990;
- unauthorised disclosure of personal information contrary to the provisions of the Data Protection Act, is not permitted.

### **Secure Access**

To ensure security of access to the IT systems –

- passwords should be used where possible;
- users whose computers are logged into password-protected applications should lock their machines or exit from the applications if leaving their workstation for any period of time;
- access by third parties should be properly authorised and supervised.

### **Password Guidance**

- Whenever possible use passwords to protect systems and only issue the password to people who need to know. Passwords should be kept secure, they should not be written down and staff should ensure that nobody is watching when they are being typed in. Passwords should never be included in an automated login process.
- Passwords should be changed on a regular basis by all users and always on the computer previously used by a member of staff who has left the Council's service.
- Passwords should preferably be over six characters long and contain some upper and lowercase letters and numbers if possible.

## **DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

### **E-MAIL GUIDELINES**

For most of us, sending an e-mail is an everyday event, but there's more to it than rattling out a message and clicking the 'Send' button.

Think carefully about the wording of any e-mails, especially if they are going to a wide audience. For example:

- Make it clear who you are and why you are e-mailing. Do not assume that the recipients will know who you are and why you are contacting them.
- E-mails going to a large audience, especially if it includes outside organisations and councillors, should be formal so avoid sounding chatty and casual.
- Always check that you are sending the e-mail to the correct person before hitting 'Send'. If you use the 'Reply To All' button your e-mail will be sent to everyone who was copied into the original message.

Here are some basic rules for writing and sending an email:

#### ➤ **Stay cool**

Be very careful how you express yourself, especially if you feel heated about a subject. E-mail lacks communication context such as facial gestures and tone of voice and you can easily convey the wrong impression.

#### ➤ **Read before sending**

A minute spent reading through an e-mail before you send it can catch all kinds of silly mistakes. It can also give you a fresh perspective on something you thought was a good idea when you wrote it but perhaps is less clever in hindsight.

#### ➤ **Communication at the speed of light**

Check your e-mail regularly. Ignoring an e-mail message is discourteous and confusing to the sender. Always reply promptly, even if a brief acknowledgment is all you can manage.

#### ➤ **Where to, Guv?**

A misaddressed letter might get to its intended destination if it's handled by a vigilant postman but a misaddressed e-mail will get bounced right back to you. Worse still, it may get sent to someone else entirely and, depending on what you're sending, that can have all manner of repercussions. Always double-check what you type in the address box.

#### ➤ " "

The first anyone sees of an e-mail is an entry in their inbox and, if there's no subject, the only way of knowing what the e-mail is about is to open it. If you get five e-mails a day this isn't a big deal, but if you get 50 it's a real time waster. Worse still, subject-free e-mails make

inbox management a nightmare, since there's no way to quickly distinguish one e-mail from another.

➤ **DON'T SHOUT**

IN ONLINE AFFAIRS, ANYONE WHO ONLY WRITES IN CAPITAL LETTERS IS CONSIDERED TO BE SHOUTING.

Quite apart from the fact that shouting when you should be talking is rude, all-caps e-mails are difficult to read, so keep the Caps Lock key off.

**The same applies to text in Bold and/or italics.** Only use them to highlight a particularly important part of the message that you want to emphasise.

➤ **Please be polite**

E-mails are great for casual communication but that doesn't mean that every communication should be casual. Start your e-mails with a greeting and sign off with a goodbye. Messages that omit either can come across as abrupt and brash.

➤ **Chek yor speling**

E-mails that are riddled with spelling mistakes are e-mails from sloppy, thoughtless people who couldn't care less – or at least that's the impression they convey. A spellchecker can be found in the 'Tools' menu.

➤ **Who are you?**

Always end your e-mails with your name and if it's an e-mail to someone who doesn't already know who you are give your full name and job title.

➤ **Blink and we'll miss it**

Just because your e-mail application can send messages in inch-high, flashing red letters that look like they've been written in crayon on flock wallpaper, it doesn't mean you have to. Messages in simple, plain text work best.

Fancy effects just make e-mails slower to send and receive, and recipients with e-mail applications that can't understand them will just see lots of empty space.

➤ **Have an air of detachment**

E-mailing a file to someone as an attachment is incredibly handy but it pays to think before you click the 'Send' button.

Not everyone has a super fast broadband internet connection and not everyone wants to spend two hours downloading a large file which they may not want in the first place. Always check with the recipient before you send a large attachment.