



Communication Tools Policy

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Introduction

The use of e-mail, internet, instant messaging and social media platforms facilitates effective internal and external communications. However, with this also comes the potential for misuse.

This policy sets out the standards expected of Spire View Housing Association's employees and workers when using communication tools whether that be in connection with Spire View Housing Association's business or in the case of social media platforms the expression of views that contradict, oppose or infringe on the purpose, ethos or principles of the organisation.

Definitions

- Social media - any online platform or app that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes social forums and apps such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. Social media also covers blogs and video and image-sharing websites such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Employees should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.
- Communication tools - will be used throughout this policy to refer to email, internet, instant messaging and social media platforms.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is defined by the ICO as an umbrella term for a range of algorithm based technologies that solve complex tasks by carrying out functions previously requiring human thinking. It can be used to assist or make decisions about individuals, and the decisions made using AI can be fully automated or involve a human in the loop.

Principles

- All communications, via any of the tools referred to in this policy, must be respectful and in line with the values and behaviours set out in the organisations code of conduct.
- This policy sets out guidelines on the acceptable use of communication tools.
- Training will be provided for all employees on acceptable use of communication tools and the contents of this policy.
- Bullying, discrimination or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated via any of the communication tools within the scope of this policy. Any such breaches will be managed in line with the disciplinary policy.
- Any breaches of this policy will be discussed with individual employees and if appropriate managed in line with the disciplinary policy.

Access

It is Spire View Housing Association's intent to provide basic, network-connected communication tools for the use of employees and workers where it is necessary for their roles.

The primary purpose of such access is to encourage greater business efficiency and to enhance knowledge, learning and communication opportunities for the organisation as a whole and its people as individuals.

Occasional and incidental social communications using any communication tools are not disallowed by this policy and are permitted so long as this does not interfere with employees' performance of their expected duties.

Acceptable use

Communication tools are very informal mediums. They are closer to speech than more formal written communications, yet there is a permanent written record. It typically lacks the care given to written communication, and can often be stilted, abbreviated, conversational language, with heavy use of emoticons. In addition, it is often the case that people "say" things in e-mail and on-line (via social media platforms) that they might not otherwise feel comfortable communicating to others face to face.

A combination of such informalities has the potential to create dangerous situations such as:

- sending e-mails or posting comments on social media platforms containing negligent misstatements or binding the organisation in other ways
- harassment of colleagues or others

The following is a guide on Spire View Housing Association's standards and is not exhaustive:

- Transmission and retention of personal data via email will be carried out in line with the data protection policy.
- External e-mail messages should have appropriate signature files and disclaimers attached.
- Employees must use appropriate etiquette when writing using communication tools.
- Inappropriate messages are prohibited including those which contradict, oppose or infringe on the purpose, ethos or principles of Spire View Housing Association. Harassment of any type, including sexual harassment, is expressly prohibited by this policy and any communications of this type will be managed in line with the disciplinary policy.
- If an employee is in receipt of inappropriate messages or is aware of inappropriate communications on social media, they should raise concerns with their line manager immediately.
- Employees have the right to raise a grievance should they receive offensive communication messages from a fellow employee.
- Employees should not send potentially defamatory communication messages which criticise other individuals or organisations.
- Employees should not access or download inappropriate material, such as pornography, from communication tools.
- Employees should take care not to infringe copyright when downloading material or forwarding it to others.

Social Media Platforms

Spire View Housing Association respects the right of their employees to a private life

and that includes joining any social media platforms they wish. However, while this communication is primarily a personal matter employees must be aware that any information posted on social media is in the public domain and is not private.

Employees are therefore not allowed to disclose confidential information relating to Spire View Housing Association, its customers, partners, suppliers, governing body members, employees, or stakeholders on any social media platforms. It is also prohibited to post any comments on people and events connected to Spire View Housing Association or make any remarks which could potentially bring the organisation into disrepute. Any such actions could result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal

If using social media platforms employees are expected to adhere to the following;

- We advise that profiles set to private, while this does not take the information out of the public domain it does limit the reach of it.
- Ensure all passwords are secure and kept private.
- While it is not prohibited for employees to list Spire View Housing Association as their employer we do advise against it.
- Employees should be aware of the language and content of their posts – in particular where employees have an association with their employer or are linked with colleagues.

Business use of social media

If duties require an individual to speak on behalf of the organisation in a social media environment (for example by writing a blog or posting in the company Facebook account), individuals will be identified as authorised users and be provided with appropriate training. The principles of this policy will apply to business use as well as personal use of social media.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Spire View Housing Association recognises that the use of AI has many benefits and that the use of this technology will develop over time.

AI is readily available, systems such as Microsoft Co-pilot or Chat GPT can assist employees, however employees should be cognisant of the following guidance:

- Results produced by AI may not be accurate and should not be relied upon without other corroboration to assess their credibility.
- If AI notetakers are being used, all those at meetings should be informed of this and their agreement sought. If anyone doesn't agree the notetaker should not be used.
- Any information generated by AI which contains personal data such as notes of meetings must be retained in line with the data protection policy.
- Employees should be conscious of copyright laws when using AI and if in doubt seek guidance on whether to use information / graphics generated from AI.
- Employees should not share confidential business information with any AI platform.

Policy Breaches

Use of communication tools which interferes with Spire View Housing Association's activities and functions or does not respect the image and reputation of Spire View Housing Association will be regarded as breaching this policy.

Any line manager concerned about an employee's breach of this policy, e.g. excessive use of emails for personal use or spending large quantities of time on social media, should not unilaterally seek to gain access to an employee's electronic communications. Instead, the manager should:

- Review whether or not expectations and standards in this area have been well communicated and made clear to the employee.
- Pursue direct communication with the employee regarding the issue.
- Follow the disciplinary procedure if appropriate.
- The following are some examples of breaches of this policy; this list is not exhaustive:
 - concealment or misrepresentation of names or affiliations in e-mail messages.
 - alteration of source or destination addresses of e-mail.
 - use of communication tools for commercial or private business purposes.
 - use of communication tools, in a way that unreasonably interferes with or threatens other individuals.
 - use of communication tools that degrades or demeans other individuals.
 - the purchase or sale of personal items through advertising on the internet.
 - the use of communication tools to harass employees, customers and others, including sexual harassment.
 - the use of communication tools for political purposes.
 - the release of untrue, distorted, or confidential information regarding Spire View Housing Association business via communication tools.
 - viewing/downloading purely entertainment sites or material where there is no benefit to Spire View Housing Association in terms of its learning, communication or service aims described earlier.

Some generic terms for much of the above are as follows and are expressly prohibited under this policy:

Spamming

Spam is broadly defined as unsolicited, e-mail sent to a large number of recipients, and its content is not related to the business activities of Spire View Housing Association.

Phishing

Phishing is when individuals are deceived into revealing sensitive information or installing software which may include viruses.

Chain letters and Pyramid Schemes

These e-mail messages are sent to a specific number of people, The recipients are then asked to forward the message on to the same number of people. These types of messages are illegal and not allowed in Spire View Housing Association's Accounts found associated with chain letters or pyramid schemes may be turned off without warning.

Spoofing

Spoofing refers to someone sending any mail that "appears" to be from someone else. This is the same as forging someone else's identity.

Privacy

Authors or parties to communication messages should be the primary sources of authorisation in granting access to their information or files. Third party access to email ordinarily may only be accomplished through either the sender or the recipient(s) of that mail.

Certain employees due to the specific responsibilities of their role require access to individuals' hardware and software within Spire View Housing Association and personal files or resources contained within them.

It is important that all users are aware that there is the possibility that security levels can and do vary when a message is sent. This can result in messages being visible to others other than the intended recipient.

Spire View Housing Association will inform all users of the backup system in use and how this affects the retrieval of any data on Spire View Housing Association's systems.

Spire View Housing Association will not monitor the contents of messages as a routine procedure. However, the organisation does reserve the right to inspect, copy, store, and disclose the contents of any communication tools at any time. However, it will do so only when it believes it is appropriate to prevent or correct improper use, satisfy a legal obligation, or ensure proper operation of the communication tool facilities.

If it is necessary to obtain access the appropriate approval will be sought first from the CEO Fiona Murphy.

Security

Staff should ensure that all devices are password protected, screens should be locked when moving away from your desk and all USB storage devices password protected.

General Data Protection Regulations

The organisation will treat your personal data in line with our obligations under the current data protection regulations and our own [insert name of policy or procedure]. Information regarding how your data will be used and the basis for processing your data is provided in Spire View Housing Association's employee privacy notice.

This policy does not form part of your contract of employment, therefore may be updated or withdrawn at any time. If this happens it will be communicated to you accordingly.