Email and internet acceptable usage code of practice

All the representations submitted to the Submission Draft consultation document can be viewed on the interactive consultation webpage.

To all users

"Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) continues to place increasing reliance on its computer systems and networks.

Everyone within NCC has a responsibility to control risk and to report errors in judgement or procedure where they see them. Doing so reduces our exposures and helps to maintain our client image.

This code of practice document has been approved by the County Council. It outlines your responsibilities in respect of the computer systems you use. Adherence to it is each person's individual responsibility."

Wilful or negligent disregard for this code of practice will be investigated and may be treated as a disciplinary matter.

Anthony May
Chief Executive

1. Introduction

1.1 Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) provides access to electronic mail (email) and the internet to help staff and others do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. E-mail is an effective tool for sharing information with others, both inside and outside NCC for legitimate business reasons. However, because e-mail often appears less formal than other forms of written communication, there is a tendency to forget that e-mail messages are no less a part of "official NCC business" than any other hard-copy NCC correspondence.

1.2 In order to maximise the benefits of the e-mail and internet service, this code of practice explains how you should use the e-mail and internet service in order to protect both yourself and NCC from breaches of security and other hazards.

1.3 NCC recognises that users may wish, from time to time, to use the internet and e-mail for personal or social activities. Such use, whilst not forbidden, must comply

with internet and e-mail policy and the use must be kept to a minimum level which does not interfere either with the user's role in NCC or with official NCC business.

1.4 It is very important that you read this code of practice carefully. If there is anything you do not understand it is your responsibility to ask your Group Manager (or their nominee) to explain.

2. Good Practice

2.1 E-mail

2.1.1 The cost of an e-mail message to NCC is a fraction of the cost of an internal memo on paper or any other form of communication, particularly when sent to multiple recipients.

2.1.2 NCC therefore recommends use of the e-mail system wherever possible for any written communication.

2.1.3 The e-mail system must not be used to send personal, sensitive or restricted data outside of NCC unless it is encrypted and the user is authorised to do so by their Group Manager (or their nominee).

2.1.4 The informal nature of e-mail means that it is easy to cause offence. **Users should:**

- take care that the tone of the message is clear - irony and humour for example may not be clear to the recipient unless it is someone who is known well
- ensure that the tone of a message is respectful to recipients, regardless of their role and status
- ensure particular care is taken with remarks that are, or might appear to be, critical of the recipient or another person - these can come across as much stronger than intended and might, in some instances, be considered defamatory. If in doubt, users should consult their Group Manager (or their nominee)
- ensure that a message can be forwarded unless specifically requested that it be kept private
- ensure that a message to a recipient is polite and does not contain abusive, racist, sexist, ageist or other objectionable language, and do not give rise to circumstances where a complaint could reasonably be made about the content of the message
- ensure that messages are only sent from their own e-mail account and that users are not pretending to be someone else when sending the e-mail, or use someone else's account to send a message
- ensure that messages are not anonymous or forwarding chain letters.

2.1.5 Every e-mail message uses system resources and whilst the drain on the system of an unnecessary mail message might be slight, the cumulative effect of such behaviour by several thousand users can seriously degrade system performance and inconvenience others.

2.1.6 Users can contribute to effective performance of the e-mail system by:

- deleting messages no longer need to be saved from the 'sent mail' and 'trash' folders on a regular basis
- suspending receipt of messages from mailing lists if they will not be read, for example during holidays. If this facility is not available users should not think they must unsubscribe to mailing lists each time they go on leave;
- replying only to the original sender of a message, irrespective of the number of initial recipients, unless everyone needs to receive the reply. Messages sent unnecessarily degrade system and user performance;
- not using the e-mail system for personal adverts and similar purposes (the bulletin boards on NCC's Intranet provide a more appropriate mechanism for such messages)
- not forwarding virus warnings unless these are received from ICT Services - these are likely to be hoaxes
- not subscribing to distribution lists that are not directly related to your duties. Such lists tend to overload and affect the performance of NCC e-mail system.

2.1.7 Users should check their e-mail account on a daily basis or arrange for a duly authorised person to do so on their behalf. Where this is not possible, the system should be configured to send an automatic warning message "Out of Office Reply" to advise the original message sender when the message will be attended to. The automatic warning message should also mention an alternative point of contact for the sender i.e. the telephone number of a colleague, so that the sender knows who to contact in the event of an emergency. The automatic warning message should notcontain internal acronyms which would not be meaningful externally and any information that might suggest the whereabouts of the user during the period.

2.1.8 Users creating e-mail messages containing confidential, restricted or secret information must clearly label them by putting the word "[Confidential, Restricted or Secret]" in the subject header. Users should note that labelling an e-mail message with the word "[Confidential, Restricted or Secret]" will not prevent it from being sent to the wrong address or multiple addresses in error, or unintentionally forwarded on. Users must therefore make sure they use the correct address for the intended recipients before sending the e-mail.

2.1.9 Users should be wary of e-mails from unknown external senders. These and any attachments will have been checked for known viruses but, if in doubt, seek advice from the ICT Service Desk before opening them.

2.1.10 E-mail attachments accommodate a lot of space and users should download attachments to a network server. After downloading the attachment(s) the email with the attachment should be deleted.

2.1.11 Users should be aware of the possibility of unsolicited email, commonly referred to as "Spam" or Junk email,being perpetrated via e-mail, e.g. unsolicited requests for money. Users can reduce the number of unsolicited e-mail by **observing the following rules**:

- never "forward" or "reply" to an external email address even if the sender promises to take your name off a list. Responding only confirms to the sender your e-mail address is "live" and you may start receiving more Spam messages
- keep your private details private. Do not give out your e-mail address unless you are absolutely sure you can trust the recipient to keep those details private
- never "Unsubscribe" to Spam e-mail. Every time you do this you are adding yourself to even more Spam lists. Always remember unsolicited e-mail users use tricks to send you their email
- delete the unsolicited e-mail without reading it or forward it to spam@nottscc.gov.uk for further investigation
- use the "Opt-out" - When filling in on-line forms always look for and complete any "data protection opt-out" boxes if you do not wish to be contacted regarding advertisements and promotions of any products and services

2.2 Internet

2.2.1 The internet is a source of useful information and users should:

- print or download information necessary for their work
- not enter 'chatrooms' unless there is a legitimate reason to enter it, such as to monitor offensive material (eg Child Protection, Trading Standards etc)
- if a user is presented with an unsuitable site, they should report it to the ICT Service Desk.

2.2.2 Users are expressly forbidden from using the internet for commercial purposes, including the carrying of advertising, unless it is for the authorised commercial activities of NCC.

2.2.3 Users must not download or install software from the internet unless they have specific authorisation from ICT Services. Downloaded software is a major source of virus infection.

2.2.4 Users must not use the internet to place or disseminate materials which discriminate or encourage discrimination on grounds of sex, gender, race, colour, ethnic or national origins or disability, or which are or might be considered to be harassment of one or more individuals.

2.2.5 Users must not use the internet to access, store, or transfer objectionable material, or material which NCC has deemed inappropriate.

2.2.6 Users must not transfer material that could reasonably be deemed to cause offence to potential recipients.

2.2.7 Users must not place links to sites which facilitate illegal or improper use.