



EMAIL ETIQUETTE AND GUIDANCE

Emails sent from a parish council account are potentially public documents. Email is not always the best way to communicate information as email messages can often be misunderstood and the volume of email messages people receive can be prohibitive to receiving a meaningful reply as a result of email overload.

Speed of response

There is no guarantee that an email will be read as soon as it is sent. If the email requires immediate action then this is probably not the best way to communicate.

Writing emails

When writing an email, it is important to compose the message with the same care and clarity applied to drafting letters and memos, particularly as emails form part of the corporate record under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

Disclaimer wording

Disclaimer: This email and its contents, together with any attachments, are CONFIDENTIAL to the sender and the intended recipient(s) and must not be copied or shared without the sender's permission. If you are not the intended recipient of this email and its attachments (if any), you must delete this email and any attachments and take no action based upon them, nor must you copy them or show them to anyone. Please contact the sender if you believe you have received this email in error.

Take care if starting an email on a new subject, do not add it to an existing thread.

Think carefully before doing a "reply all", check the recipient list does not contain recipients that should not be included, especially if they are not members of the council.

Do not add recipients to a thread as the others that have contributed to the thread have not given their permission.

Always complete the Subject Line with a clear description of what the email is about as recipients cannot always distinguish between what they need to look at immediately and what can wait. For example, "Full Council minutes February 2016 for approval".

Never reply in anger. Take a break or sleep on it before responding.

Never write your email in CAPITAL LETTERS. This implies shouting.

Don't conduct an argument on email - it is unprofessional.

Avoid using abbreviations and emoticons - don't trade clarity for confusion. Be aware that other colleagues may not know the meaning of informal expressions, such as FWIW (for what it's worth).

When you use your parish account to send an email, the recipient can be excused for thinking it is an 'official' communication sent on behalf of the council. You should be particularly careful if you are agreeing to do something as it may be seen as a commitment by the Parish Council so you must remember to put the Disclaimer at the bottom whenever possible.

Your parish emails are not confidential; all emails sent and received through your provided email account should not be deleted and are available to the public through a freedom of information request. Although the emails will be cleared of any personal data before they are released, it is better to avoid disclosing anything personal or confidential in the first place; email is not a secure medium.

The only person who can author an official email is the Clerk who writes on your behalf to give the Council's views/orders/instructions. Sometimes there will be good practical reasons why these official emails should be sent or forwarded from a Councillor's account. Normally it will be because you have been asked to do so, but if there is any doubt about your authority to write or send such an email, please check with the Clerk first.

First, and most important: do not use email to make decisions or influence decisions that should be made at a meeting of the council. Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct are clear on the rules of debate and you should check them if you are in any doubt.

The law does not allow Councillors to act independently and you should make sure that you do not imply that the content of your email represents the opinion or policy of the council as a whole. As an individual, you can think, say and write what you like, but as a Councillor your view can only be the view of the whole council.

Adopted: September 2023