



EMAIL POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Council recognises that email is an important communication system for use during the course of Council business. This policy provides guidelines and procedures to protect users and the Council.

1.2 This policy applies to all employees emailing via Council computers and to all councillors in their correspondence with employees and/or other councillors, members of the public and external organisations.

1.3 The Council owns the email facility, and emails that employees or councillors produce, send, or receive are the property of the Council.

1.4 The Council's email facility should be used for sending STC related communications and associated attachments.

1.5 Council email addresses should not be used to register for non-STC-related online services and/or forums.

2.0 SENDING AND RECEIVING EMAILS

2.1 All internal emails (and other internal communications) are confidential unless the contrary is clearly expressed. This means that they should never be disclosed to third parties unless with the consent of the author and any parties identifiable. If in doubt, councillors and employees should check with the Clerk and the author. Breach of this principle will likely mean a breach of the confidentiality provision in the Code of Conduct in the case of a councillor and may lead to disciplinary action in the case of an employee.

2.2 Emails should be regarded as written documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations, the Data Protection Act and similar legislation. Personal information should be kept and processed in accordance with the principles established in the Data Protection Act 2018.

2.3 Councillors and employees should be aware that the Council as a body always has the right to open any email file stored on the Council's computer system and, while that is delegated to the Clerk on a day to day basis, there may be circumstances in which, after an appropriate resolution of Full Council or court order, other councillors, employees or third parties may be entitled to open and view same, subject to the fair processing provisions of the Data Protection Act (GDPR).

2.4 Councillors and employees should always have in mind whether when sending an email, it is:

- In fulfilment of a process delegated to the councillor or employee by the Council and accordingly is being written on STC's behalf,
- As an individual councillor or employee representing his or her own views as a councillor or employee which may not reflect the views of their colleagues or STC; or
- As a private individual.

In all cases councillors and employees should make this clear to the recipient and should always use their official SPC email address for the first two, and never for the third.

If a councillor wants to raise an issue as an individual with any external body, group or individual, then they should do so as an individual and without giving the impression that they have the backing of council or fellow councillors, and that their concerns or thoughts are nothing more than their own personal opinions. Therefore, they should not sign off as a councillor in this instance.

2.5 Councillors and employees should always have in mind the principles of the Data Protection Act so, for example, generally they should use the BCC field when writing to several recipients who have not consented to their email details being shared and should have in mind that whatever is written is potentially disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act and similar legislation.

2.6 Councillors and employees should have in mind that what is written may be defamatory.

2.7 If in doubt, councillors and employees should consult the Clerk, and always copy him in when writing on behalf of SPC. All communications on behalf of the Council will come from the Clerk, unless delegated otherwise.

3 EMAIL GUIDANCE

NB This Guidance should be used as that – it is not a set of rules and while some principles should never be breached (such as never to threaten), others such as the two emails per day limit are subject to common-sense departures.

All emails and attachments:

- 3.1.1** Should comply with common codes of courtesy, decency and privacy
- 3.1.2** Should use appropriate language to avoid unintentional misunderstandings
- 3.1.3** Should respect the confidentiality of information contained within emails, even if encountered inadvertently
- 3.1.4** Should not pass off personal views as those representing the Council
- 3.1.5** Should never be used to criticise, threaten, tell off, be rude to, bully, harass, intimidate or blame any person. If an individual has a problem with someone else's actions, behaviour or performance, they should pick up the telephone and/or arrange to meet in person.
- 3.1.6** Should meet the criteria of being dignified and respectful, so should be kept in draft format and re-read and then modified if required, before sending
- 3.1.7** Should not be cc'd to other people, unless agreement is secured from the original sender.
- 3.1.8** Should only be copied to the Clerk where the email contains important Council related information that the Clerk needs to be aware of
- 3.1.9** Should not be sent to multiple persons, unless there is a genuine (non-controversial) piece of information to share that is official 'need to know'
- 3.1.10** Should be limited so that the time it takes to write and read them, should be no longer than half a page of A4, and preferably much shorter and use concise language and bullet points. If the intended communication requires more space than this to set out, a telephone call or one to one meeting should be arranged instead.
- 3.1.11** Should only be sent during normal business hours and up to 7pm on weekdays and up to 1.00pm on Fridays and not to be sent during weekends and holiday periods.

- 3.1.12** Should be no more than two per day sent by one individual to another
- 3.1.13** As per set out in the NALC legal topic note 1, councillors do not have a 'need to know' {See guidance below} on all aspects of council business and cannot claim an automatic right to see all council documentation and information. In other words, councillors are not permitted a fishing expedition in respect of council documentation and information simply because they are councillors.
- 3.1.14** Councillors and staff should be minded to change the subject line of emails if responding or forwarding that email, if derogatory words or phrases have been used by the originator
- 3.2** Any person who receives an email from an employee or another councillor that is clearly in breach of any of the above points has the right to ignore the email.
- 3.3** The Council should ensure that its email policy is properly enforced, and the Clerk is empowered to draw a line under correspondence which breaches the policy. The Clerk can reply to say that the email will not be responded to as it falls outside the policy.

4 SECURITY:

- 4.1** Check with the sender if there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of a message
- 4.2** Avoid introducing computer viruses by not opening any attachment unless certain of the authenticity of the sender and if there are concerns the email should be deleted immediately

5 REPORTING AND SANCTIONS:

- 5.1** If a councillor receives an email from an employee which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, it should be reported to the Clerk who will consider use of the Council's formal disciplinary procedure
- 5.2** If an employee receives an email from another employee which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, it should be reported to the Clerk who will consider use of the Council's formal disciplinary procedure
- 5.3** If an employee receives an email from a councillor which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, the employee is entitled to consider use of the Council's grievance policy and/or reporting the issue through the procedures outlined in the councillors' Code of Conduct.
- 5.4** Serious or persistent breaches of this protocol could amount to breach of the Council's Dignity at Work Policy or the Code of Conduct and will be reported to the HDC monitoring office.

Guidance Note – 'Need to Know' explained

- *If a councillor is a member of a committee, he or she has the right to inspect documents or to obtain information relating to the business of that committee;*
- *If a councillor is not a member of a particular committee, he or she has to demonstrate why sight of the document(s)/or receipt of the information in question is necessary to enable him or her to perform his or her duties as a councillor;*
- *If the councillor's motive for seeing the documents/obtaining information is indirect, improper or ulterior, then the documentation or information should be withheld.*

Adopted by Full Council on the 18th May 2026