

PADDOCK WOOD TOWN COUNCIL

EMAIL USAGE POLICY

Introduction

This document outlines the protocol which Councillors are recommended to follow when using email correspondence in the course of discharging their duties and responsibilities as Town Councillors.

In the interest of good practice Councillors should refrain from creating unnecessary e-mail congestion by sending messages of a trivial nature to the Council's e-mail address or by copying e-mails to persons who do not need to see them.

Councillors should be aware that they must never forward information of a confidential nature to outside parties.

Councillors are reminded that Standing Order 21 states that written statements or written articles (which of course includes e-mail messages) to the press should be in accordance with the Council's Press and Media Policy. Councillors should bear in mind at all times that decisions of the Council are binding on all members and that comments should be confined to matters on which the Council has reached agreement. More details concerning this will be found in the Council's policy document relating to contact with the press and other media.

One aspect to be borne in mind is that Councillors should always consider how they would feel if an email message originating from them were to be read out and used as evidence in a court. Under current law email messages may in certain circumstances have to be disclosed in litigation.

Councillors will be aware that distributing or disseminating e-mail messages which might be considered discriminatory, offensive or abusive would constitute unacceptable behaviour.

Inappropriate use of email could be considered a breach of the Councillors Code of Conduct.

Policy Rules

1. Use of email is encouraged as it provides an efficient system of communication.
2. Email should be regarded as written paper documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Personal information should be kept in accordance with the principles established in the General Data Protection Regulations and other relevant legislation.
3. All Council email accounts have a private password that should be kept confidential by the user/s of that account and not shared. The Council has administrative control over email accounts and can reset passwords and give access to email accounts, where needed.

4. The Council Data Controller reserves the right to open any email file stored on the Council's computer system or the Council's email accounts.
5. Only Council email accounts must be used to conduct Council business. Personal email accounts should not be used for Council business due to potential data breaches, issues surrounding Freedom of Information or Subject Access Requests and general recommended good practice for local councils.
6. Care needs to be taken when registering Council email addresses on websites such as discussion forums, news groups, mailing lists, blogs etc to prevent email address being used for other purposes.
7. External networks, such as the internet, are not guaranteed to be secure and confidentiality cannot be assured when using these networks. Emails are generally open and transparent. Some emails may not be received or read, and they may be intercepted or disclosed by other people. Users must decide whether email is the best way to exchange confidential or sensitive information.
8. Care must be taken when addressing emails, particularly those including sensitive, confidential or restricted information, to avoid accidentally sending them to the wrong people. Particular care must be taken when Outlook auto-completes an email address.
9. Emails should not be auto-forwarded to any other account as this may result in confidential information being disclosed to unauthorised people. If needed, access can be given to email accounts for other users by the relevant Council officers with administrative powers for the Council's email accounts.
10. Email accounts must have an appropriate email signature and the relevant email disclaimer at the bottom of all emails written. Such disclaimers to be provided by the Town Clerk.
11. All Council business emails and documents sent by users are the property of the Council and not of any individual user.
12. Email distribution lists should not be created on individual email accounts; this is to ensure contact details are not out of date, prevent accidental sharing of contact details and to comply with data protection legislation. Data subjects have a right to 'be forgotten'; email addresses stored on individual email accounts will easily allow contact details to be inadvertently stored. Email distribution lists should be stored on the Council's Excel Address Book.
13. Council email address (or indeed internet or computer facilities) must not be used for:
 - any political activities;
 - commercial or personal profit-making purposes or other form of financial gain (e.g. in connection with any employment other than that associated with the Council);
 - activities that lead to unauthorised expenditure for the Council (e.g. excessive printing or photocopying that is not Council business);

- activities that go against Council policies or standards;
- personal interest group activity outside of a user's role;
- activities that may cause damage, disruption, fines, penalties or negative media attention for the Council;
- excessive email conversations that may be interpreted as misuse.

14. The following guidelines for email use should be observed by all staff members and councillors:

- use appropriate language to avoid unintentional misunderstandings
- respect the confidentiality of information contained within emails, even if encountered inadvertently
- check with the sender if there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of a message
- do not open any attachment unless certain of the authenticity of the sender
- only copy emails to others where appropriate and necessary
- emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the Council must be sent by officers only, not councillors or other individuals
- emails must comply with common codes of courtesy, decency and privacy

SIGNED

DATE