



Catterall Parish Council

Email Protocol for Councillors & Officers

Purpose

This document describes Catterall Parish Council's policy for email etiquette. It is based on best practice and guidance and must be followed by all Catterall Parish Councillors, the Clerk and the Lengthsman. Clerk and Councillors must always use the clerk@catterallparish.org.uk email address when sending emails to the Parish Clerk/RFO.

Email etiquette and guidance

1. When to use email

- 1.1. Councillors and council staff should only ever use their council email address for council business.
- 1.2. Email tends to be used for a variety of reasons and can be as informal as arranging refreshments for a meeting to communicating a formal business decision.
- 1.3. 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.
- 1.4. The Clerk and Councillors have the responsibility of deciding whether email is the most appropriate form of communication and should consider the following factors before sending an email:

1.4.1. The Subject

Some subjects are too sensitive to be sent via email, e.g. employee information. Careful consideration needs to be given as it is the responsibility of the sender to decide whether or not email is the most appropriate vehicle for communication in these circumstances.

1.4.2. Speed of Transmission

Where information is needed to be communicated urgently and the recipient is expecting it then this is fine, however, if an urgent message needs to be sent and the recipient(s) is/are not expecting anything, then it is probably better to use the phone.



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1.4.3. 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. A read receipt may be used to help people who need a quick response, to note that the mail has been read.; reasons for urgency should be stated.

1.4.4. Number of Recipients

Do not necessarily use reply all as not everyone in the previous communication necessarily needs to receive the email.

Councillors should always identify in the body text of an email when they are copying in external email addresses, as this may not always be clear when large numbers of emails are included.

2. Writing emails

- 2.1. Councillors must use their council email address (@catterallparish.org.uk) when conducting council business.
- 2.2. A Councillor may express a personal opinion on a particular matter in an email but must avoid giving the recipient the idea that the opinion is either the opinion, policy or decision of the council.
- 2.3. The Parish Clerk will only ever use Councillors council email addresses.
- 2.4. Councillors should only send emails to fellow councillors to their council email addresses and from their own council email address.
- 2.5. When Councillors receive emails to their personal email addresses which relate to council business, they should transfer it (either by forwarding it or moving it across inboxes) to their council email address and reply from their council email address.
- 2.6. 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.



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- 2.7. Information and documents sent to your @catterallparish.org.uk inbox if distributed further must be sent from the same email address.
- 2.8. Always ensure that when sending an email from your Parish Council email address the following Information and disclaimer is included:

Your Name including the title Cllr.

Parish Council Website Address

And the following disclaimer:

“This e-mail and any attached files are confidential and may also be legally privileged. They are intended solely for the intended addressee. If you are not the addressee please e-mail it back to the sender and then immediately, permanently delete it. Do not read, print, re-transmit, store or act in reliance on it. The original sender cannot guarantee against a computer virus.

DATA PROTECTION (GDPR 2018): In sending this email I give you consent to contact me using the above email address, I do not consent to my phone number, email or postal address being used for marketing purposes.”

So, for example Cllr Brayshaw’s emails will end;

Cllr Ian Brayshaw

Catterall Parish Council

www.catterallparish.org.uk

This e-mail and any attached files are confidential and may also be legally privileged. They are intended solely for the intended addressee. If you are not the addressee please e-mail it back to the sender and then immediately, permanently delete it. Do not read, print, re-transmit, store or act in reliance on it. The original sender cannot guarantee against a computer virus.

DATA PROTECTION (GDPR 2018): In sending this email I give you consent to contact me using the above email address, I do not consent to my phone number, email or postal address being used for marketing purposes.

- 2.9. Always ensure that your Recipient List is appropriate to avoid causing a nuisance to other colleagues.



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- 2.10. 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, Agenda - CPC - 11th October 2022
- 2.11. Ensure language is simple, unambiguous and to the point.
- 2.12. 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).
- 2.13. Be polite. Terseness can be misinterpreted. Please and thank you go a long way.
- 2.14. Be patient. Not everyone can respond immediately or necessarily have the confidence to communicate using email.
- 2.15. Be careful when replying to an email message with many recipients. Do you really want everyone to see your reply?
- 2.16. Never reply in anger. Take a break or sleep on it before responding.
- 2.17. Never write your email in CAPITAL LETTERS. This implies shouting.
- 2.18. Don't conduct an argument on email - it is unprofessional.
- 2.19. Never 'flame' anyone. A flame is an electronic verbal attack. If a flame is received, then please do not respond in anger as this may be regretted later. Users should not engage in exchanging flames and create a 'flame- war'.
- 2.20. Always, always read email before sending it and consider the resultant reaction. Ensuring clarity in the message is time well spent.
- 2.21. Emails which include confidential information should have the corresponding sensitivity label applied. Where content is outlined as confidential (either with a sensitivity label or in the email content) by the sender, content and attachments should not be shared, forwarded or saved outside of the council's server. You must not disclose confidential information unless: you have the consent of a person authorised to give it; you are required by law to do so; the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional advice, provided that the



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third part agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or, there is a clear and overriding public interest in doing so and the disclosure is made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the council and that you have consulted the Clerk prior to its release.

3. Out of Office Replies

Users are required to use this facility within the email system to inform senders of email of absence and expected return to work date. Including an alternative contact is helpful. Applying an out of office reply to your council email address will also display an out of office reply on your team's account.

Where a Councillor or Officer is incapacitated an out of office reply may be applied remotely to inform external users that the Councillor or Officer may not be attending to emails.

4. Leaving Office

- 4.1 Upon a Councillor leaving office as a Parish Councillor information held in their council email address account will be retained in accordance with the councils Data Retention and Disposal Policy, for Freedom of Information request purposes (See guidance note).
- 4.2 The Parish Clerk will save message trace records periodically, only to be used for Freedom of Information purposes.



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Catterall Parish Council Email Addresses – Guidance note

Town and Parish Councils are Local Authorities and need to abide with GDPR and Freedom of Information requests. The office of the Parish Council needs to comply with a Freedom of Information request that requires the publication of email correspondence.

In 2017 the Information Commissioner's Office published a guidance document on the implications of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on official information held in private email accounts (Freedom of Information Act, The Information Commissioner's Office, updated March 2017.

[official information held in private email accounts.pdf](#) (ico.org.uk)

The document makes clear that “information is held by a public authority if—

(a) it is held by the authority, otherwise than on behalf of another person, or (b) it is held by another person on behalf of the authority.”

The document goes on to confirm that where information is held by another person on behalf of the public authority, the information is considered to be held by the authority for the purposes of FOIA, and that this applies to official business recorded in personal email accounts

Where records are to be recovered from private email addresses it can be difficult to confirm that all records have been searched for relevant data.

Furthermore, deleting or concealing information with the intention of preventing its disclosure following receipt of a FOI request is a criminal offence under section 77 of FOIA.

Demonstrating compliance when data is held in personal email accounts could be difficult. It is recognised that recovering email correspondence from personal email accounts following a FOI request is unlikely. However, such a request is only likely to arise in circumstances where a member of the public has grounds to suspect something suspicious has occurred. It is precisely in these circumstances that the Council would wish to be demonstrably compliant in its response.

Catterall Parish Council should maintain “@catterallparish.org.uk” email addresses for its Councillors and make clear in a guidance document that all Council correspondence should be conducted using “@catterallparish.org.uk” email addresses.

All emails received and sent concerning the Parish Council are formal council records. All emails used to conduct or support official Catterall Parish Council business must be sent using a “@catterallparish.org.uk” address and not a private



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email address. Non “@catterallparish.org.uk” email accounts must not be used to conduct or support official Catterall Parish Council business.

Version Number	Purpose/Change	Author	Date
V0.1	Draft protocol to be approved by council	E. Millington, Clerk	25/10/2022
V1.0	Policy adopted – minute 3650	E Millington, Clerk	01/11/2022