



Garstang Town Council

Email protocol for Councillor/Officer

Version Number	Purpose/Change	Author	Date
0.1 Draft	Draft protocol to be approved by Full Council	E Parry, Town Clerk	21/1/19
1.0 Final Version	Final version, incorporating email guidance note relating to compliance of the Information Commissioner's Office Approved by GTC; 135 (2018-19)	E Parry, Town Clerk	21/1/19

Garstang Town Council

Email Protocol for Clerk and Councillors.

Document Purpose

This document describes Garstang Town Council's policy for email etiquette. It is based on best practice and guidance and must be followed by all Garstang Town Councillors and the Clerk. Clerk and Councillors must always use the info@garstangtowncouncil.org email address when sending emails to the Town Clerk/RFO.

Email etiquette and guidance

1. When to use email

1.1. 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.

1.2. 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.

1.3. 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:

1.3.1. 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

1.3.2. 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

1.3.3. 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. As per the Town Council's approved Communication policy, the Town Council will initially acknowledge emails (which require a response) within 3 working days of receipt. Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk; reasons for urgency should be stated. The Town will give a full response or a progress update within 10 working days of receipt.

1.3.4. number of recipients:

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

2. Writing emails

2.1. 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.

2.2 Information and documents sent to your @garstangtowncouncil.org in box if distributed further must be sent from the same email address.

2.3 Always ensure that when sending an email from your Town Council email address the following Information and disclaimer is included:

Your Name including the title Cllr.

Town Council website Address

And the following disclaimer:

This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and may be legally privileged and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom that they are addressed. If you are not the intended recipient, any use, disclosure, copying or forwarding of this email and/or its attachments is unauthorised.

So, for example Cllr Allan's emails will end

Cllr Alec Allan

Garstang Town Council

www.garstangtowncouncil.org

This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and may be legally privileged and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom that they are addressed. If you are not the intended recipient, any use, disclosure, copying or forwarding of this email and/or its attachments is unauthorised.

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

2.5. 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 2018 for approval

2.6. Ensure language is simple, unambiguous and to the point.

2.7. 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).

2.8. Be polite. Terseness can be misinterpreted. Please and thank you go a long way.

2.9. Be patient. Not everyone can respond immediately or necessarily have the confidence to communicate using email.

2.10. Be careful when replying to an email message with many recipients. Do you really want everyone to see your reply?

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

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

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

2.14. 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'.

2.15. Always, always read email before sending it and consider the resultant reaction. Ensuring clarity in the message is time well spent.

3. Out of office replies

3.1. 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.

Garstang Town Council email addresses – Guidance note

Parish and Town Councils are Local Authorities and need to abide with GDPR and Freedom of Information requests. The office of the Town 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 https://ico.org.uk/media/fororganisations/documents/1147/official_information_held_in_private_email_accounts.pdf)

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.

Garstang Town Council should maintain GTC email addresses for its Councillors and make clear in a guidance document that all Council correspondence should be conducted using GTC email addresses.

All emails received and sent concerning the Town Council are formal council records. All emails used to conduct or support official Garstang Town Council business must be sent using a “@garstangtowncouncil.org” address and not a private email address. Non “@garstangtowncouncil.org” email accounts must not be used to conduct or support official Garstang Town Council business.