

Email Policy

Version Control Sheet

Title:	Email Policy
Purpose:	Detailing the Council's policy on managing emails.
Owner:	Data Protection Advisor lhenley@thurrock.gov.uk 01375 652500
Approved by:	
Date:	March 2019
Version Number:	1.0
Status:	Draft
Review Frequency:	As and when changes take place to Information Governance Legislation.
Next review date:	As above

Amendment History / Change Record

Date	Version	Key Changes / Sections Amended	Amended By

Contents

	Page No:
Introduction	4
1. Using email (or sending email messages)	5 – 7
2. Managing email messages	7 – 8
3. Management of public and shared mailboxes	8 – 9
4. Identifying and managing email records	9 – 10
Appendix 1: Guidelines for writing business email messages	11-12

Introduction

Email is increasingly becoming the primary business tool for both internal and external communication and as a result should be treated with the same level of attention given to drafting and managing formal letters and memos. Email messages should not be treated as an extension of the spoken word because their written nature means they are treated with greater authority. As well as taking care over how email messages are written it is necessary to manage email messages appropriately after they have been sent or received.

There is a common misconception that email messages constitute a short-lived form of communication. This misconception about how email messages can be used could result in legal action being taken against the Council or individuals. All email messages are subject to Data Protection legislation and Freedom of Information legislation and can also form part of the corporate record. Staff should also be aware that email messages could be used as evidence in legal proceedings.

This email policy sets out the obligations that all members of staff have when dealing with email messages.

There are two main sections within the policy; the first concentrates on sending emails and the second concentrates on managing email messages that have been sent or received. Staff should ensure that they are familiar with the content of the policy and use it as a point of reference when dealing with email messages.

1. Using email (or sending email messages)

1.1 When to use Email

Email is not always the best way to communicate information. 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.

It is the responsibility of the person sending an email message to decide whether an email is the most appropriate method to communicate the information. The decision to send an email should be based on a number of factors, including:

The subject of the message

Email messages can be used for different types of communication and can constitute a formal record of proceedings. The types of communication for which email can be used include general business discussions, disseminating information, agreement to proceed and confirmation of decisions made. Although email can be used for these types of communication, it may be necessary to consider whether the sensitivity of the information would be more appropriately communicated in a different way. Dealing with sensitive subjects in emails is addressed in more detail in section 1.3. It should also be noted that there are certain subjects that should be avoided in email messages as they could be construed as discriminatory; this is covered in more detail in section 1.4.

The Recipient's availability

Email messages are often sent unnecessarily due to the ease and convenience of writing an email message. There are times when email might not be the most appropriate way of communicating with people. For example, if a message needs to be passed onto a person in the same office then speaking to them face to face might be more productive.

Speed of transmission

Email messages can be sent and delivered to the recipient quickly, which makes sending an email message a good way of transmitting information if it is needed quickly and the recipient is expecting the information. Where information needs to be communicated as a matter of urgency it is better to use the telephone.

Speed of response

Although email messages can be sent and delivered quickly there is no guarantee that the message will be read or acted upon immediately. If a message need to be acted upon immediately or requires a quick decision, email is probably not the best way of communicating the information. It is probably better to speak to the person directly and send email confirmation if it is deemed to be necessary.

1.2 Writing Email messages

When writing email messages it is important that consideration is given to the way in which the message is being conveyed. This includes thinking about the title, the text and the addressees. It is essential when sending emails to ensure that only the

subject matter referred to in the heading/title of the email is included within the commentary. As a way of helping staff to draft emails in an appropriate fashion for business use, guidelines to drafting email messages have been developed. These guidelines are intended to be a reference tool. It is up to the sender to decide to what degree to follow the guidelines, depending on the knowledge and level of familiarity with the recipient. These guidelines are appended to the main policy.

1.3 Dealing with sensitive subjects

The privacy and confidentiality of the messages sent via email cannot be guaranteed. It is the responsibility of all members of staff to exercise their judgement about the appropriateness of using email when dealing with sensitive subjects. The following should be complied with when sending emails:

- Internal and External emails containing **OFFICIAL** information can be sent via normal email (irrespective of who these are sent to e.g., police, resident)
- **OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE** emails that are sent internally must be classified as such and can be sent via normal email
- **OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE** emails that are sent externally (irrespective of who these are sent to) must be classified as such and sent via:
 - Your standard email address if the recipient is a public sector body (e.g. council, police, NHS etc.)
 - CitrixFileShare if the recipient is not a public sector body (e.g. resident, supplier).

1.4 Misuse and personal use

Private use of the Council's electronic mail systems **is not permitted**. However all electronic mail originating, arriving, or in transit through any electronic mail system belonging to the Council is the property of the Council.

The Council reserves the right to monitor, access, review and disclose all messages without the additional consent being required from any employee, contractor, vendor or person who uses an electronic mail system belonging to the Council. Surveillance may be undertaken for the purposes of audit, security or where there is reason to believe that a breach of this policy has occurred.

Any member of staff who has the content of their email monitored will not necessarily be informed prior to the monitoring taking place. The monitoring of email can include the monitoring of content (to ensure compliance). If no further action is to be taken as a result of monitoring then all the data collected as a result of the monitoring will be destroyed immediately.

There are types of email use that are expressly prohibited and could result in formal disciplinary proceedings. In addition all members of staff are advised that email message can constitute a formal record and can be used as evidence in legal proceedings. When writing email message the following conditions **MUST** be met:

- Any behaviour or comments that are not permitted in the spoken or paper environment are also not permitted in email messages.

- Care should be taken when composing email messages to ensure they are inoffensive and cannot be construed as harassment. Downloading and forwarding material of a pornographic, sexist, racist or derogatory nature are all prohibited; refer to the Information Security Policy and its supporting policies for further information.
- The impersonal nature of email messages can mean that it is easier to cause offence than when speaking. If you are annoyed or angry about something take time to ensure the message does not inflame the situation, i.e. the use of caps lock can make the recipient feel that you are angry.
- Email messages containing inaccurate information in the form of an opinion or fact about an individual or the Council, may result in legal action being taken against the person sending the email message and anyone forwarding the email message on to others.
- The forwarding of chain mail is not permitted.
- The terms and conditions of the Information Security Policy must be abided by.
- It is not permitted to conduct any business other than that of the Council via email.
- Only authorised personnel should access email accounts.

2. Managing email messages

2.1 Reasons for organising your mailbox

It is the responsibility of all members of staff to manage their email messages appropriately. It is important that email messages are managed in order to comply with the Data Protection legislation and Freedom of Information legislation. Managing email messages appropriately will also mean that work can be conducted more effectively as it will help towards locating all the information relating to specific areas of business.

To manage email messages appropriately members of staff need to identify email messages that are records of their business activities and short-lived messages. It is important that emails messages that are records are moved from personal mailboxes and managed with in the same way as other records. Short-lived email messages should be managed within the mailbox and kept only for as long as required before being deleted.

The personal mailbox includes the inbox, where you receive emails, which are addressed to yourself.

2.2 Making your mailbox manageable

Managing an email box effectively can appear to be a difficult task, especially if the volume of email messages received is a large quantity. Managing an email mailbox

should not be about following rigid classification guidelines; it is about following a methodology that works best for you.

There are number of approaches that might aid the management of email messages. Approaches that might be worth further consideration are:

- Allocating sufficient time each day or week to read through and action email messages.
- Prioritising which email messages need to be dealt with first.
- Looking at the sender and the title to gauge the important of the message.
- Flagging where you have been copied into email messages. These messages are often only for informational purposes and do not require immediate/any action.
- Setting rules for incoming messages so they can automatically be put in folders.
- Using folders to group email messages of a similar nature or subject together so they can be dealt with consecutively.
- Identifying email messages that are records or need to be brought to other people's attention.
- Keeping email messages in personal folders only for short-term personal information – emails that are required for longer should be managed as records.
- Deleting email messages that are kept elsewhere as records.
- Deleting email messages that are no longer required for reference purposes from both the in and out box.

3. Management of public and shared mailboxes

3.1 Overview of managing public and shared mailboxes

In the case of shared mailboxes management is likely to be shared between everyone who has access. The purpose of managing email messages is to identify emails that should be retained as a record of an activity and delete short-lived messages.

When managing shared email mailboxes, this policy should be adhered to. There will also need to be some additional rules relating to when to delete an email message from the mailbox, how to identify an email message as having been answered and the types of email messages that should be treated as records. While it is the responsibility of the owner to ensure that there are specific rules relating to the management of shared mailboxes, it is the responsibility of all staff members with access to shared mailboxes to abide by those rules.

3.2 Levels of Responsibility

Although the purpose of shared mailboxes is different there are similarities in the way in which they should be organised. If a shared mailbox is going to be used the following areas must be addressed so that the email messages contained do not become unmanageable and appropriate records are identified:

Identifying an owner

When a shared mailbox is created one person must be identified who can take ownership of the folder or the mailbox. The owner should be responsible for developing rules governing how email messages are responded to and how this is communicated to other people using the shared mailbox.

It should be noted that the Council has overall responsibility for maintaining shared mailboxes.

The purpose

The creation of a shared mailbox should be done with specific purpose, e.g. to answer queries on a particular subject. It is the responsibility of the owner of the shared mailbox to ensure that the mailbox is used for the specified purpose. If the shared mailbox is not being used for the specified purpose, the owner should take appropriate action. This might be suggesting to the sender a more appropriate place to send their enquiry.

Access

The level of access granted for shared mailboxes is likely to be different. This should only be granted to people who are able to answer the email enquiries that will be received. It might be necessary for the owner to delegate some responsibility to other people who are granted access in terms of managing the emails and ensuring the mailbox is used for its specified purpose. Shared mailbox or generic ones should always be available for more than one individual to cover holidays and sickness etc.

4. Identifying and managing email records

4.1 Essential Principles

Email messages can constitute part of the formal record of a transaction. All members of staff are responsible for identifying and managing email messages that constitute a record of their work. When an email is sent or received a decision needs to be made about whether the email needs to be captured as a record. For example, printed or saved elsewhere.

4.2 Identifying email records

A record is 'information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. When deciding whether an email message constitutes a record, the context and content of the email message needs to be considered.

4.3 Who is responsible

As email messages can be sent to multiple recipients there are specific guidelines to indicate who is responsible for capturing an email as a record:

- For internal email messages, it is the sender of an email message, or initiator of an email dialogue that forms a string of email messages.
- For messages sent externally, the sender of the email message is responsible.
- For external messages received by one person, the recipient is responsible.
- For external messages received by more than one person, the person responsible for the area of work relating to the message. If this is not clear it

may be necessary to clarify who this is with the other people who have received the message.

4.4 Managing email records with attachments

Where an email message has an attachment, a decision needs to be made as to whether the email message, the attachment or both should be kept as a record. The decision on whether an email and/or its attachment constitute a record depends on the context within which they were received. It is likely that in most circumstances the attachment should be captured as a record with the email message – it is the email message that will provide the context within which the attachment was used.

There are instances where the email attachment might require further work, in which case it would be acceptable to capture the email message and the attachment together as a record and keep a copy of the attachment in another location to be worked on. In these circumstances the copy attachment that was used for further work will become a completely separate record.

4.5 When and where to manage email records

When to capture

Email messages that can be considered to be records should be captured as soon as possible. Most email messages will form part of an email conversation string. Where an email string was formed as part of a discussion, it is not necessary to capture each new part of the conversation, i.e. every reply, separately. There is no need to wait until the end of the conversation before capturing the email string as several subjects might have been covered. Email strings should be captured as records at significant points during the conversation, rather than waiting to the end of the conversation because it might not be apparent when the conversation has finished.

Where to capture

Email messages that constitute records must be saved on shared drives. Email messages that are captured as records should be located with other records relating to the same business activity.

4.6 Encryption and managing email records

Encrypted email records – where it is known that an email has been encrypted it is important that it is unencrypted prior to capturing it as a record. If an email record is captured without being unencrypted it is highly likely that there will be problems with accessing the record over a period of time.

Guidelines for writing business email messages

These guidelines are not a definitive list of everything that should be considered when composing an email. It is intended to reflect the major points that should be considered when drafting email messages

Subject Line

- ✓ Ensure the subject line gives a clear indication of the security classification of the content of the email.
- ✓ Ensure the subject line gives a clear indication of the content of the message
- ✓ Indicate if the subject matter is sensitive or confidential
- ✓ Use flags to indicate whether the message is of high or low importance and the speed with which an action is required
- ✓ Ensure the title contains sufficient information to enable any member of the department to identify the relevance of the content to themselves
- ✓ All instances of “FW” and “RE” should be removed from the title as they do not provide any information about the content of the message
- ✓ Do not include nonsense terms, for example, “letter01”
- ✓ Always identify people by their full name rather than by their initials. Initials can easily be forgotten or confused with people with similar initials

Subject and tone

- ✓ Greet people by name at the beginning of an email message
- ✓ Identify yourself at the beginning of the message when contacting someone for the first time
- ✓ Ensure that the purpose and the content of the email message is clearly explained
- ✓ Ensure a signature is not unnecessarily long
- ✓ Ensure that the email is polite and courteous
- ✓ The tone of the email message should match the intended outcome
- ✓ Make a clear distinction between fact and opinion
- ✓ Proofread messages before they are sent to check for errors
- ✓ Limit email messages to one subject per message

- ✓ Include the original email message when sending a reply to provide a context
- ✓ Where the subject of a string of email messages has significantly changed, start a new email message, copying relevant sections from the previous string of email messages
- ✓ Ensure email messages are not unnecessarily long
- ✓ Ensure that attachments are not longer version of emails
- ✓ Summarise the content of attachments in the main body of the email message

Addressing

- ✓ Distribute email message only to the people who need to know the information
- ✓ Using “Reply All” will send the reply to everyone included in the original email. Think carefully before using “Reply all” as it is unlikely that everyone included will need to know your reply
- ✓ Use the “To” field for people who are required to take further action and the “cc” field for people who are included for information only
- ✓ Think carefully about who should be included in the “cc” field
- ✓ Ensure the email message is correctly addressed