



Email Communications and Acceptable Use Policy

1. Policy Statement

Willaston Parish Council encourages the use of email which supports the aims and objectives of the Council. It is essential that when emailing as a Council member or employee, the content complies with current legislation and relevant Council policies and procedures and does not create unnecessary business risk for the Council. The Council's email facility is made available to users for Council business purposes.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Privacy Policy and Information Technology (IT) Policy.

2. Risk Management

The Council recognises that there are risks associated with the use of email and the extensive damage that can be caused by offensive, libellous, defamatory, inappropriate or insecure email communications.

The Council therefore recognises that there are risks associated with:

- sending or forwarding emails, including attachments, containing libellous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks
- unlawfully forwarding confidential information
- unlawfully forwarding or copying messages without permission
- sending or forwarding an attachment that contains a virus or other malicious content
- inadvertently disclosing personal data
- using non-approved email accounts for Council business

This policy aims to ensure the appropriate access to, and use of, the Council's email facility to help mitigate the following risks:

- harm to individuals
 - damage to the Council's reputation
 - potential legal action and or fines against the Council or individual users
 - inappropriate use of Council resources
 - poor governance, poor record keeping or loss of Council information
-

3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees and members, including all elected and co-opted councillors and the Clerk to the Council, who have access to the Council's email facility or use email for Council business.

This policy applies to email communications only. It does not apply to WhatsApp, text messaging, social media messaging or other informal communication platforms.

Serious breaches of this policy by any councillor or employee may be dealt with as appropriate. The Council may take disciplinary or other appropriate action. Any breaches of data or data protection may be reported to the Information Commissioner's Office where required.

4. Email Accounts

- a) All official Council email accounts are hosted on the willastonparishcouncil.gov.uk domain.
- b) The official email account which represents the Council is clerk@willastonparishcouncil.gov.uk.
- c) All members of the Council will be issued with an email address which adheres to the format of firstname.lastname@willastonparishcouncil.gov.uk. Email display names should only appear as Cllr Firstname Lastname.
- d) During the transition period, councillors may continue to use their dedicated Council Gmail account only as an interim arrangement until their GOV.UK email account is fully set up and in use.
- e) Personal email addresses must never be used for Council business.
- f) Once a GOV.UK email account is in active use, it must be used for all outgoing Council email communications.
- g) The interim Council Gmail account may be retained after the move to GOV.UK email so that historical emails remain available, but it must not be used for sending emails once the GOV.UK account is in use.
- h) If an email is received into a retained Council Gmail account after the GOV.UK account is in use, any reply must be sent from the relevant GOV.UK email account.
- i) Official Council email addresses are considered public and can be published on the Council website and within noticeboards.
- j) Access to email is permitted via webmail. Email clients can be used on devices which are used exclusively by the employee or councillor. If a shared device is being used, then webmail should be used and signed out after each session.
- k) Devices used for Council email must be protected with a login password, PIN, or biometric security. Where councillors use a personal device for Council business, they must ensure that Council information is inaccessible to others using that device.
- l) Only the employee or councillor is permitted to view emails sent via their official individual Council email account, unless access is otherwise formally authorised for lawful operational reasons.
- m) Councillors using their own devices for Council email must ensure that their devices are appropriately maintained and updated, including operating systems, antivirus protection and security patches where applicable.
- n) Access to Council email addresses is permitted during a councillor's term of office or during an employee's tenure of employment.
- o) When a member leaves office, access to their official Council email account will be disabled by the Clerk with immediate effect.
- p) Any legacy Council Gmail account should be deleted by the member when they leave office, once any necessary handover has been completed.
- q) Council email accounts should be kept tidy with good inbox management, with received emails deleted and filed as appropriate. Items contained within sent items should not be deleted unless authorised as part of the Council's records management approach.

5. Working Group, Committee and Shared Mailboxes

The Council may create dedicated email addresses for use by formally constituted working groups, committees and delegated roles.

These addresses will be general shared mailboxes rather than individual accounts. Access will be granted to all authorised users of the relevant working group, committee or delegated function so that communications can be managed collectively. This arrangement supports continuity, transparency and efficient handling of correspondence relating to the work of that function. An allotments mailbox is one example of where this may be appropriate.

Where appropriate, these shared addresses may be used as public facing contact points. This allows residents, organisations and stakeholders to communicate directly with the relevant Council function and supports the effective delivery of Council business.

All communications sent from or received into these shared mailboxes remain subject to this Email Communications and Acceptable Use Policy and all associated legal and data protection requirements. All emails sent from a shared email address must clearly identify and be signed by the individual author.

6. Email Third Party Instructions

Any official orders or instructions, agreeing to terms, or entering contractual commitments with third parties should come from the Clerk. Councillors would only be permitted to send such emails to third parties with specific prior authorisation from the Clerk.

Councillors must not present themselves as authorised to commit the Council financially, contractually or operationally unless such authority has been properly granted.

7. Internal Council Emails and Forwarding Restrictions

Consideration should be given to whether any email should be forwarded outside of the Council, as this may share data and information which is privileged or not intended for a wider audience. Confidential Council business should not be shared outside of the Council.

Internal Council emails should never be forwarded to third parties unless there is a clear and lawful reason to do so and the person forwarding the email has the authority to do so.

Where information does need to be shared externally, only the relevant necessary content should be shared and personal data should be redacted where appropriate, unless there is a lawful basis to disclose it.

8. Email Security

- a) Email passwords should be kept secure and not shared with other users.
- b) All email users should be aware of potential email scams, including phishing attempts. Emails may appear to come from a trusted source, but if in doubt as to the validity of the email, the sender should be confirmed by checking the sending email address and not relying on the display name.
- c) Any email received asking for something out of the ordinary or out of character of the sender should be treated with caution and checks completed before any further engagement.
- d) Any email received which the user believes is not genuine should be notified to the Clerk.
- e) Lost or stolen devices used for Council business must be reported immediately to the Clerk and steps taken to revoke access to Council accounts where applicable.

- f) Users must take care when opening attachments or clicking links and should avoid using Council email on insecure or public networks unless appropriate safeguards are in place.
-

9. Legal Requirements

The following rules are required by law and are to be strictly adhered to:

- a) It is strictly prohibited to send or forward emails containing libellous, defamatory, offensive, racist, or obscene remarks. If an email of this nature is received, promptly notify the Clerk.
 - b) Do not send unsolicited email messages whereby you would be invading someone's privacy.
 - c) When sending the same email to multiple external third parties, the email should either be composed as a separate email, or the BCC function should be used. This will ensure that third party email addresses are not shared with other recipients. This also aligns with the Council's Privacy Policy.
 - d) Do not forge or attempt to forge email messages.
 - e) Do not send email messages using another person's email account.
 - f) Do not send a copy of a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator, unless there is a lawful reason and proper authority to do so.
 - g) Do not disguise or attempt to disguise your identity when sending email.
 - h) Do not use Council email accounts for personal business, inappropriate campaigning, commercial advertising, junk mail or any unlawful purpose.
-

10. Freedom of Information, Right of Access and Disclosure

Email messages may be disclosed under the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, or in legal proceedings in the same way as paper documents. Deletion from a user's inbox or archives does not mean that an email cannot be recovered. Email messages should therefore be treated as potentially retrievable. Users should take care with the content of email messages, as incorrect or improper statements can give rise to claims for discrimination, harassment, defamation, breach of confidentiality or breach of contract. Users should assume that email messages may be read by others and should not include anything that would offend or embarrass any reader, or themselves, if it found its way into the public domain.

In the case of a Freedom of Information request, subject access request or other lawful request made in writing to the Clerk pertaining to email communications, the Clerk may access the relevant Council email accounts and shared mailboxes to identify the required information. Councillors will be informed of the request prior to information being retrieved where appropriate.

11. Data Protection

Willaston Parish Council processes personal data in accordance with UK data protection legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. The Council's Privacy Policy states that personal information is to be handled in an open, transparent and lawful manner.

Personal data includes any information about a living identifiable individual, including their name, address, phone number, email address and any other information about that individual. If such information is included in an email or an attachment to an email, a user is deemed to be processing personal data and must abide by the law.

A user must not collect such information without the individual knowing what the user proposes to do with such information. Such information may not be disclosed or amended except in accordance with

the purpose for which the information was collected. The user must ensure the information is accurate and up to date. In addition, the individual has the right to inspect what is held about them on the email system or held in separate archives of emails, request correction of inaccurate information, and request blocking or erasure where appropriate.

The law also imposes rules on the storing of personal data. Such data should be kept only for as long as it is needed for the purpose for which it was collected. Emails should be held in such a way that they can be easily identified, reviewed and, when necessary, destroyed. Emails and attachments containing personal data must not be stored on personal devices indefinitely and should only be retained for as long as necessary for Council business.

As reflected in the Council's Privacy Policy, the Council maintains purpose-specific mailing lists only. Individuals are added only where specific permission has been provided and recorded. The Council does not operate general marketing lists. Care should be taken in communications to avoid the sharing of personal email addresses, for example by using BCC rather than CC.

A practical application of the above points would be that if an email is received from a member of the public and the content of the email needs to be shared within the Council, personal information should be redacted, or permission should be confirmed with the sender that personal information can be shared with the content of the communication. Communications from businesses and other formal organisations, as sent from an official email address, are received on the basis of information intended for Council internal sharing and can be forwarded internally as appropriate.

12. Standards of Conduct in Email Communications

It is each user's responsibility to ensure that use of email is consistent with the Council's Code of Conduct.

In particular, users must ensure that:

- a) personal opinion is not represented as that of the Council
- b) communications remain polite, professional and measured
- c) email is not used to conduct or purport to conduct formal Council decision making outside of properly constituted meetings, except where lawful delegated authority clearly applies
- d) email is not used to apply improper pressure or influence on councillors, staff or third parties. Users to remain mindful that both internal and external emails may later be disclosed, reviewed or scrutinised

13. Email Monitoring and Review

Members should review email at appropriate times and with sufficient frequency so that they can be effective in their roles.

This does not require constant monitoring, but it does require a reasonable and responsible approach so that important Council communications, correspondence and actions are not missed or unduly delayed.

14. Email Disclaimer and Signature Requirements

The Council's Privacy Policy provides that Willaston Parish Council applies a standard email disclaimer to formal correspondence to support confidentiality and data protection compliance. The disclaimer confirms that personal data is processed in accordance with UK data protection legislation, references the Council's Privacy Policy, explains how incorrectly received emails should be handled, and clarifies that views expressed may not necessarily represent the Council.

The standard disclaimer should be used:

- by the Clerk when emailing third parties
- by councillors when emailing externally from an official Council account

The standard wording is:

Willaston Parish Council processes personal data in accordance with UK data protection legislation. Information about how we collect, use and protect personal information, and your rights, is set out in our Privacy Policy available on the Council website or on request from the Clerk.

This email and any files transmitted with it are intended only for the person or organisation to whom they are addressed and may contain confidential information. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately and delete it from your system. You must not copy, distribute, or disclose its contents to any other person.

Any views expressed are those of the sender and do not necessarily reflect the official position of Willaston Parish Council unless explicitly stated.

Users should also use an appropriate professional signature block which clearly identifies the sender and their role.

15. Email User's Responsibility

It is each user's responsibility to:

- a) take time to read and understand this policy before using the Council's email facility
- b) use the Council's email facility strictly in accordance with this policy
- c) use the Council's email facility responsibly and in a way that will not harm the Council's reputation
- d) take care to ensure that emails are sent only to those who should receive them
- e) re-read emails before sending, check for correct addressing, particularly where they include personal or sensitive information, and ensure the content is clear and appropriate
- f) ensure that personal opinion is not represented as that of the Council
- g) not send commercial or advertising material, chain letters, or junk mail of any kind
- h) not subscribe to mailing lists for personal purposes using a Council email address
- i) recognise that the Council's email facility is provided for Council use and is to be used within the scope of being an elected or co-opted councillor or an employee of the Council
- j) report any misuse of the Council's email facility
- k) ensure that the use of email is consistent with the Council's Code of Conduct

16. Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure ongoing compliance with legal requirements, good governance practice, technology changes and Council working arrangements.

This Policy was adopted by Council at the meeting held on 28th April 2026.