



SALEHURST & ROBERTSBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

EMAIL, INTERNET AND COMPUTER USAGE GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

Adopted by the Council: 15th July 2024 Minute ref: 24/25-41bii

INTRODUCTION

Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council ("the Council") provides an email facility via a Microsoft 365 licence for use by Councillors who have access to a desktop, laptop or mobile device. This document sets out the Council's guidelines for the use of these services and more general computer use in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE GUIDANCE

These guidelines apply to all Councillors using email facilities provided by the Council. All Councillors are required to sign to indicate their acceptance of this guidance when assigned their email address. Each Councillor is responsible for individually complying with these guidelines.

SECURITY

Access to this email address, and any associated files, is restricted to individual users and **MUST NOT** be shared. Care should be taken not to leave a device that is connected to the Internet/system unattended or unlocked.

Two Factor Authentication is compulsory for .gov accounts.

Users are responsible for keeping virus software up-to-date to mitigate the risk to the Council systems.

Any email received from an unknown source that contains attachments should not be opened as they may contain viruses. In particular, attachments with names ending in "exe" should not be opened. If you receive notification of a virus via chain email do not forward to anyone.

Hoax and/or suspect emails should be reported to the Clerk. They should not be opened or forwarded but "double deleted" i.e. deleted from the users "Inbox" and then "Deleted Items".

Remember that the authenticity of any email received cannot be guaranteed, especially with the prevalence of email "spoofing" (emails pretending to come from a source gathered through dubious means) or "phishing" (emails trying to obtain personal information for the purpose of committing fraud).

Passwords

- The access of each user is controlled by means of their own password.
- Passwords must be kept confidential and not disclosed to others; disclosure could result in internet or email misuse being attributed to the owner of the password.
- A strong password includes a minimum of 12 characters (use at least one capital letter, one number and one special character). They should be as random as possible – a useful hint is to use a memorable sentence, and take the first letter of each word. Ensure you do not use the same password for multiple applications. If you have to make a note of them, then do so on paper and keep in a secure place! Do not save as a plain-text file on your computer.



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EMAIL USAGE

Personal Email Use

The use of Council email for personal purposes is not permitted.

Private and personal email addresses must not be used for Council business.

Forwarding email from your Council email address to a personal address is not permitted (not even your own personal email address).

You must ensure that Council email addresses cannot be accessed by unauthorised users and should be used for Council business only.

Email awareness

Email is not a secure method of transmission. Users of the Council's email system should be aware that once an email is sent to an individual outside of the Council, it is beyond the Council's control and is not guaranteed to be confidential.

Do not use email to make decisions or influence decisions that should be made at a meeting of the Council. Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct are clear on the rules of debate and you should check them if you are in any doubt.

The law does not allow Councillors to act independently - you should make sure that you do not imply that the content of your email represents the opinion or policy of the Council as a whole.

When you use your Council account to send an email, the recipient can be excused for thinking it is an 'official' communication sent on behalf of the Council. You should be particularly careful if you are agreeing to do something as it may be seen as a commitment by the Council. Your 'signature' should also make clear that the email is from you, not 'The Council', for example:

Your Name
Councillor (or Chairman as appropriate)
Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council
Personal Tel no. (optional)

Email Disclaimer

Please ensure your email signature contains the following disclaimer:

The content of this email is confidential and intended for the specified recipient(s) only. It is strictly forbidden to share any part of this message with any third party, without the written consent of the sender. If you received this email by mistake, please reply to this message and follow with its deletion, so that we can ensure such a mistake does not occur in the future.

Although the sender has taken steps to ensure that this e-mail and any attachments are virus free, we can take no responsibility if a virus is actually present and you are advised to ensure that the appropriate checks are made.

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives everyone the right to request any recorded information held by Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council, including Councillors' emails. In the event of a Freedom of Information request, the content of your Council emails may be disclosed.



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Email Conduct

You must not send illegal, offensive, obscene, racist, abusive material or libellous, defamatory or discriminative material which may bring the Council into disrepute; or which is intended to annoy, harass or intimidate others.

Email Monitoring

The Council may monitor email activity, so that compliance with this policy and other relevant policies and regulations can be effectively managed.

Email Best Practice

- Ensure that each email has a specific target audience.
- Be selective, especially when deciding who should be copied in on an email. This ensures that only those who really require the information receive it, and avoids wasted time/resources.
- If you are copying in a recipient(s) who you think have not given permission for their email to be circulated use Bcc to protect their information.
- The circulation of emails **with attachments** to large groups should be avoided.
- When sending emails to a large number of people the recipients' addresses should be entered into the BCC (blind copy) field. Users should contact the Clerk if assistance is required.
- Time should be set aside at least once a month for "housekeeping", in order to delete old or unwanted items from mailboxes, including the 'Inbox', 'Sent Items' and 'Deleted Items'. This is essential in order to ensure the efficient operation of the email system and helps to keep mailboxes organised and GDPR compliant.

Email Etiquette

- Always include a subject line in your message.
- When replying to an email, include enough of the original message to provide a context.
- Consider the tone and language used, and the use of plain English. When sent externally emails represent and reflect upon the Council.
- Avoid using capitals throughout as this is equivalent to shouting.

DATABASE USAGE

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, no personal details/data from any contacts databases e.g. Parish Council Contacts, should be given out to external parties at any time.

No personal data/databases should be kept on any storage facility e.g. CD's, DVD's, USB's, laptops or personal home-based computers, as this could result in legal action from third parties.

Any communication by a councillor that is **not** associated directly with Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council business (i.e it is carried out by a councillor acting on their own by or on behalf of another) is **not** considered as acting as a councillor on 'the business of the council', by the ICO. Therefore you are not covered by the council's data protection registration with the Information Commissioners Office <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-fee/> and as such you will be responsible (as an individual) for complying with ALL the General Data Protection Regulations regarding data security.



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Email, Internet and Computer Usage Guidance

ACCEPTANCE SLIP

I,, have received, read and understood the Council's Email, Internet and Computer Usage Guidance.

I understand that: -

- My use of S&R Parish Council email will be monitored for management and security purposes.
- If I use my own computer/laptop/tablet/mobile phone for council business I confirm I am responsible for ensuring I comply with the Council's IT and Data Protection Policies and Data Protection principles as required under Data Protection laws and regulations.
- Breaches of policy may result in action being taken against me by the Information Commissioners Office.

Signed

Date

CONSENT TO RECEIVE SUMMONS BY EMAIL (Local Government Act 1972 sch 12 para 10(2)(b))

I consent to receive all meeting summons, agendas and supporting documentation via email to my designated council email address.

I also give consent for the council to hold my personal email address, as provided by me, for use in exceptional circumstances, should the council email be unavailable for any reason. It will not be published or passed to any third-party including other Members of the Council.

Signed Date

Personal email address