

## Email Policy

### Introduction and Principles

Emails are a fundamental tool of modern communication. This policy aims to guide their positive use to facilitate the ability of the Council to communicate internally and externally in an efficient and accountable manner. It should be read along with the Council's other relevant policies including the Communication Policy, information handling and data protection policies.

1. Upon assuming office, or employment in the case of staff, Members and officers should be allocated an official Bearsted Parish Council email address and be offered the necessary information to be able to access the Council's email system. These email addresses will appear on the Council's website so that members of the public and representatives of other organisations are able to contact members and the relevant officer (usually the Parish clerk, but it may be a Committee Clerk)
2. In general emails should be replied to within 10 days, although in practice many will require a shorter response time as they may relate to a meeting or event that is taking place within that time frame.
3. Members (Councillors) may well receive communications raising issues with them from the public. This is to be expected. Where a response from the Council or a Council Committee is required, these should be raised with the Clerk or Committee Clerk. If a Member chooses to raise an issue with an outside organisation or service directly this can be done but said member should not represent his views on behalf of a resident as the official view of the Parish Council.
4. Unless permission is granted by a member of the public or the data subject, communications from members of the public to a particular Member should not be shared with other members.
5. Emails from the office to Councillors or other staff must not be shared with the public or forwarded to anyone outside of the Council, including those with a link to papers for meetings. Please refer to the Data Handling and IT Policies.
6. Communication should be conducted in a polite and civil manner, even when Members may disagree with how a particular matter is being handled, and with due regard to the Code of Conduct for Members. (note this also applies to Officers) Communications from the public or Members that are anonymous or which contain aggressive or profane language will not be progressed.

7. Where an item is confidential it should be clearly marked as such and circulated only to those who it is addressed too, with no further distribution. In general replies should only be directed to those to which they should be sent and the use of the reply all option on emails should be minimised.
8. When communicating externally Members and Officers should use the official disclaimer.
9. If a Member leaves Office, or an Officer leaves the Council's Employment, the official email address and access to associated facilities shall be terminated. In the case of leaving office as the result of not being re-elected leaving office is defined as 3 working days after the declaration of the result. In the case of a long-term sick, or other absence for a Member or Officer access to the email and associated facilities shall be suspended until the absence comes to an end and any associated equipment belonging to the Parish returned.
10. The Parish Council shall make arrangements to ensure communications addressed to staff and key postholders such as the Chairman of the Council and Committee Chairmen can be accessed and actioned, should the position become vacant or subject to a long term absence.

**This policy will be reviewed annually.**