

E-mail Policy for Charvil Parish Council

Introduction

Charvil Parish Council relies heavily on e-mail communications to facilitate Council business, and the following policy should ensure best practice. E-mail is now a recognised means of communication, but it needs to be reasonable, controlled and in a manner which does not cause offence either to staff, other Parish Councillors or members of the public. Nothing confidential should be sent by e-mail if possible, nor should the content of e-mails bring the good name of the Parish Council or councillors into disrepute. It should be remembered that as an e-mail is a valid form of communication, it will be treated the same as a letter or other official document.

Policy

1. All councillors and staff will be offered a “Charvil” e-mail address, and this should be used for all council business. Please note that using personal e-mail addresses for council business would mean that it is possible your personal e-mail could be scrutinised from a FOI request.
2. In sending e-mails staff and councillors should ensure that the content is relevant for an e-mail exchange and is sent either by e-mail or paper copy to all relevant councillors or parishioners.
3. E-mail exchanges should not be designed to agree work or policies that should be debated and agreed at full council.
4. In using e-mail, councillors need to have regard to the fact that some replies from councillors who are employed away from their computer, or who have restricted access, may not be replied to FOR SEVERAL DAYS. Further e-mail exchange should not take place until sufficient time has been allowed for a reply.
5. **THERE IS NO LEGAL OR OTHER OBLIGATION REQUIRING STAFF OR COUNCILLORS TO REPLY TO EMAILS FROM OTHER STAFF/COUNCILLOR(S).**
6. It is not appropriate to run e-mail exchange between staff/councillors which excludes some staff/councillors who are entitled to see the information or the e-mails content.
7. Any staff/councillor sending e-mail correspondence must have regard to ensure that the contents: -
 - i). are factually correct and the sender has the authority to send the information and that it is only sent to those people who are entitled to receive the information,
 - ii). are not of a confidential nature, or contain information that could be seen as bringing the Parish Council, Councillors, or employees of the council into disrepute,
 - iii). do not breach the Data Protection Act, a non-disclosure agreement or information that might provide an external person or organisation with an unfair advantage.
 - iv). of the e-mail are written in a courteous manner and not in a manner that may cause distress to another staff member, councillor or member of the public.
PARTICULAR CARE NEEDS TO BE TAKEN WHEN SENDING 'REPLY ALL' EMAILS.
 - v). No message should be sent, either internally or externally, which contains illegal, offensive, obscene, racist or abusive material (for example, pornography) or libellous, defamatory or discriminatory material, or material which may bring the

Council into disrepute. You are responsible for emails you send. Emails could be used as evidence in a tribunal or other court proceedings.

8. Respect the rights of others when sending emails. Email should not be used to harass or discriminate against others. If you receive such an email bring it to the attention of the Chairman.
9. Use the same level of professional language, spelling and grammar for emails that you would use for letters and other business correspondence.
10. Be aware that agreements made by email may have the same status as letters or formal contracts. Seek Council guidance before making any agreement by email.
11. If you receive emails from unknown sources and they contain attachments, they should not be opened as they may contain viruses.
12. It is important to keep virus software up-to-date and doing this is the responsibility of the user(s). Any downloaded or copied files must be virus checked first.
13. You may subscribe to newsgroups and mailing lists for essential business purposes only, after obtaining permission from your line manager or Chairman.
14. Ensure that you delete messages that are no longer needed.
15. Ensure that the computers are password protected and that you do not disclose your password to others.
16. Do not use email to transmit material that may infringe copyright or licensing laws.
17. The Council reserves the right to view all emails stored on Parish Council equipment.
18. The Council also reserves the right to investigate all emails in connection with Disciplinary or audit investigations, including where we suspect that the email system is being misused. Full co-operation will be given if law enforcement or regulatory agencies request information about email or Internet use by an employee if the council is satisfied that the request is for an appropriate purpose and proportionate, and that disclosure is legal. Information will not normally be disclosed other than in connection with a criminal investigation or pursuant to a court order.

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