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BRIEFING ON COUNCIL EMAIL ADDRESSES

More and more council business is being conducted online, and this means that all council staff should be aware of, and follow, best practice email use and management. This describes the importance of using official, council email accounts and offers practical guidance on email security.

The importance of using official email addresses

We strongly advocate for using official email addresses for council work. NALC, SLCC, the Cabinet Office and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) recommend using an official .gov.uk email. In the ICO factsheet for councils, it states that 'councils must process data securely - which may be more difficult to achieve if it is being processed through personal email accounts.' There are some very important reasons for using official, rather than personal, email addresses:

- Official correspondence should reflect the professionalism of the council. An official email address enhances the credibility of the sender and the council itself. Using official government branding creates trust and makes it easier for residents to identify official communications.
- If official communications are always sent through council-sanctioned channels then council staff can be sure that records are kept, and decisions are documented for public scrutiny.
- Council email accounts facilitate the creation and maintenance of official records. This is crucial for the proper functioning of the council, for auditing purposes, transparency, and accountability. It helps track decisions, discussions, and other important communications.
- By separating your personal life from your professional life, you ensure members of the public, partners and suppliers understand you are emailing them in your role as a clerk or councillor. Recipients will be clear about who the email is from and the capacity it is being sent.
- An official email address ensures there is no confusion about the legitimacy of communications. They are less likely to be sent to spam or blocked, and more likely to be read and responded to quickly.
- If a subject access or freedom of information request is made then all emails to and from that account pertaining to that request may need to be reviewed and / or released. If using a personal email account, this can be a complex and invasive process. Using an official account both protects your personal information and makes managing such a request straightforward.

More detailed guidance on data protection and freedom of information can be found in the members' area of the NALC website.

- Changes in council staff are easier to manage with an official email address. Compliance with the council's legal obligations around data control are more straightforward; information can be retained or archived appropriately. The clerk is able to complete administrative tasks, such as accessing historic emails / data, before closure. There will be no confusion for residents and ex-staff members will not accidentally receive council related emails.

Good practice password management and email security

To comply with privacy and data protection rules, council staff must operate their email account in a secure way. Here is some key advice on keeping your email account secure:

- Do not share your password with anyone else or write it down where other people can find it.
- Use the National Cyber Security Centre's guidance to help you choose a secure password.
- Use multi-factor authentication (MFA). This means providing additional information on an occasional basis but provides the best security. You can find more on MFA here.
- Make sure your computer is password protected and that it automatically locks if you are away from it for more than 5-10 minutes. You can also lock it manually: usually this is by pressing CTRL + ALT + DELETE at the same time on Windows devices.
- Do not routinely redirect council emails automatically from one account to another.
- Educate yourself - there are a number of online courses via Nimble eLearning, such as basic cyber security, password management and phishing. Register through your county association or NALC.
- Make sure other staff (where these exist), or the chair, know the process and who to contact in an emergency, such as a sudden absence. This is best achieved through contacting the IT/email provider and arranging for an out-of-office, with alternative contact details to be added to the inaccessible account, or by forwarding emails to someone else for a very limited period. As a precaution, you should not store crucial information that colleagues may need within your email system.

Need help on deciding your email address or website name?

- Website: acmeparish.gov.uk, acmeparishcouncil.gov.uk or acme-pc.gov.uk
- Councillor email addresses: cllr.firstname.lastname@XYZ.gov.uk
- Clerk email addresses: clerk@XYZ.gov.uk