

EMAIL POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR WICKHAM BISHOPS PARISH COUNCIL

You have been provided with an email account `yourname@wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org` specifically for your work as a parish councillor. The council believes this is the most efficient and effective way of working together and keeping in touch with the community but before you can make use of this facility, there are some things you need to know.

- First, and most important: 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.
- Next, the law does not allow councillors to act independently and 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. As an individual, you can think, say and write what you like, but as a councillor your view can only be the view of the whole council.
When you use the parish 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 Parish Council so you must remember to put the Disclaimer at the bottom whenever possible.
- Third, your parish emails are not confidential; every email is stored in the archive and is available to the public through a freedom of information request. Although the emails will be cleared of any personal data before they are released, it is better to avoid disclosing anything personal or confidential in the first place; email is not a secure medium.
- Fourth, no disclaimer will help if you send an email that contains illegal, offensive, obscene, racist, abusive material or libelous, defamatory or discriminative material which may bring the council into disrepute.
- Finally, the only person who can author an official email is the Clerk who writes on your behalf to give the Council's views. Sometimes there will be good practical reasons why these official emails should be sent or forwarded from a Councillor's account. Normally it will be because you have been asked to do so, but if there is any doubt about your authority to write or send such an email, please check with the Clerk first.

On the second page of this policy are the terms and conditions for the `wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org` domain. By using the Parish Council's email address, you are agreeing to abide by them so please make sure you understand the rules.

On the final page is the Disclaimer wording and a list of Good Practices for the use of email. These are designed to help keep the email system healthy and avoid potential misunderstandings.

Terms and conditions of use

- Whereas Wickham Bishops Parish Council (the Council) is the licensee of the domain *wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org* (the Domain) it authorises its members, officers and employees to hold and use email accounts within the Domain. The account holders agree that the Council is a legal entity in its own right and separate from any of its members.
- Account holders within the Domain consent to receive Summons and Notices of Meetings by electronic means.
- The number of email accounts may be amended from time to time as the Council sees fit.
- The names of any email accounts including any aliases shall have no meaning or context beyond that of being a device to identify and differentiate the account holders within the Council's Domain.
- The council shall be held harmless from any claims made or views expressed or any other content within an email distributed from the domain by its members through the inclusion of a footnote Disclaimer, the wording of which shall be determined by the Clerk and included here. The Disclaimer should be appended to all outgoing emails (if email clients allow).
- A member should not include the words "Wickham Bishops Parish Council" in their signature without their Parish Councillor title as this may imply to the reader that the email has been authored by the Council itself.
- A member may not use the words "on behalf of" or "for" in front of the words "Wickham Bishops Parish Council" or otherwise give any impression that they are representing the Council as part of their email signature without the express permission of the Clerk.
- An email may be signed by the Council itself by using only the words "Wickham Bishops Parish Council". Any such email must be both sent from the Clerk's account *info@wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org* and authored by the Clerk or by a member acting under the Clerk's instruction.
- An email may be signed by the Clerk by using his/her name, title and the words "Wickham Bishops Parish Council". An email authored by the Clerk shall be the same as if it had been authored by the Council itself.
- All outgoing emails from the domain regardless of the author shall observe relevant data protection legislation and, where there are multiple private addressees who have no association, such emails shall be distributed by blind copy only.
- Members may use the Council's email accounts for council business only.
- Members may not delete emails from their Council email accounts except where allowed by Wickham Bishops Parish Council's Document Retention Policy.

Disclaimer wording

Disclaimer: This email may contain privileged and/or confidential information. If you receive this in error, please notify the sender immediately and do not use, or disclose its content to any other party. Any views or opinions expressed are those of the author and do not represent those of Wickham Bishops Parish Council.

Good practices

- Before sending an email message, consider if it may be more effective to communicate face to face or by telephone. It is easy to misconstrue the contents of an email which can lead to confusion and poor communication, whilst a quick telephone conversation can prevent extensive email “ping-pong” conversations clarifying an email’s meaning.
- Users should not send or forward any chain emails (e.g. jokes and virus warnings) from their Council email account as both of these can contain malware. In addition, almost all virus warnings and police warnings circulating via email are actually hoaxes designed to clog up email systems by scaring people into forwarding them across the internet.
- 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). In particular, users should always avoid opening any attachments to emails that are unexpected.
- When sending an email users should only “cc” and “bcc” people who really need to be informed. Users should take care when using the “Reply to All” function as this may be inappropriate, especially when you have been the blind recipient.
- Email etiquette construes capitalisation as SHOUTING, so it’s best to avoid inappropriate use of upper case in messages.