

1. Introduction

Councillors joining Frodsham Town Council (FTC) come from all walks of life with different experiences of working with email systems. Some are highly proficient having used such systems extensively during their careers, others possibly just for communicating with friends and family and some who have never used email at all. This document is designed to encourage and assist people in making effective use of the FTC email system.

2. Policy brief & purpose

Our FTC email policy helps Councillors and employees use their FTC email addresses appropriately. Email is essential to our roles / responsibilities and functionality of FTC. We want to ensure that our Councillors and employees understand the limitations of using their FTC email accounts. Our goal is to protect our confidential data from breaches and safeguard our reputation and intellectual property.

3. Induction Process

When Councillors join FTC as part of the Induction Process, they will be offered the use of an FTC email account. This is to be encouraged as it means all emails are kept and stored in a safe, controlled and auditable environment which also provides an extra level of security since Councillor's personal email details are not divulged. Some Councillors prefer to use their own emails which although they are not auditable is allowed, but not preferred. Occasionally a Councillor may decline to use FTC email, this should be discouraged since it puts extra burden on Administration staff having to print and hand deliver essential documents. It should also be noted that most of FTC business, formally and informally, is conducted via email so not having an FTC email account may put such a Councillor at considerable disadvantage.

4. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors and employees, vendors and partners who are assigned (or given access to) an FTC email. This email may be assigned to an individual (e.g., employeename@frodsham.gov.uk) or department (e.g. hr@frodsham.gov.uk).

5. Policy elements

Emails are powerful tools that help Councillors and employees in their roles. Councillors and employees should use their FTC email primarily for Council / work-related purposes. However, we want to provide Councillors and employees with some freedom to use their emails for personal reasons.

We will define what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate use.

6. Incoming Emails

Incoming emails can be broadly divided into four categories -

- Information Only - as the name implies, no action is required other than possibly move the email to a named folder to make tracking easier.

- Meeting Request - in this case simply reply to the Meeting Organiser *only*. All too often people use the “Reply All” function when responding to meeting requests. This simply clogs up the email system with unnecessary traffic which everybody then has to delete.
- A query requiring an immediate response - again reply to concerned parties only, usually the originator and possibly other Committee Members related to the query. Do not use “Reply All” unless absolutely necessary.
- A query requiring a more detailed response - in this case it is preferable to let people know how long it may take before they will receive a more detailed response. Generally, anything that cannot be handled within two working days should receive such a response. If the response is detailed further follow up messages should be sent to concerned parties. As before avoid using “Reply All” if not necessary.

7. Outgoing Emails

Councillors will often need to send information such as Working Group Meeting Minutes, Matters of Interest arising, Creative Ideas / Criticisms etc. Please bear in mind normal rules of etiquette (see item 5 below). Careful consideration should be given to the circulation lists for emails. Generally, send to whoever is directly concerned and copy in others e.g. The Town Clerk as necessary. Again, avoid sending to Full Council etc. unless absolutely necessary. It is a good idea to create circulation lists for any Committees or Working Groups on which you serve and use them when relevant.

Be particularly careful when writing to or including in circulation lists people from outside FTC.

8. Inappropriate use of FTC email

Our Councillors and employees represent FTC whenever they use their FTC email address. They must not:

- Sign up for illegal, unreliable, disreputable or suspect websites and services.
- Send unauthorized marketing content or solicitation emails.
- Register for a external services unless authorized.
- Send insulting or discriminatory messages and content.
- Intentionally spam other people’s emails, including their co-workers / other Councillors.

We have the right to monitor and archive FTC emails.

9. Appropriate use of FTC email

Councillors and employees are allowed to use their FTC email for Council / work-related purposes without limitations. For example, Councillors and employees can use their email to:

- Communicate with current or prospective clients and partners. And other Members of the Public
- Log in to purchased software they have legitimate access to.
- Give their email address to people they meet at conferences or other corporate events for business purposes.
- Sign up for newsletters, platforms and other online services that will help them with their work, jobs or professional growth.

10. Email security

Email is often the medium of hacker attacks, confidentiality breaches, viruses and other malware. These issues can compromise our reputation, legality and security of our equipment.

We recommend Councillors and employees should:

- Select strong passwords with at least eight characters (capital and lower-case letters, symbols and numbers) without using personal information (e.g. birthdays.)
- Remember passwords instead of writing them down and keep them secret.
- Change their email password every two months.

Councillors and employees should always be vigilant to catch emails that carry malware or phishing attempts. We instruct Councillors and employees to:

- Avoid opening attachments and clicking on links when content is not adequately explained (eg “Watch this video, it’s amazing.”)
- Be suspicious of clickbait titles.
- Check email and names of unknown senders to ensure they are legitimate.
- Look for inconsistencies or style red flags (e.g. grammar mistakes, capital letters, excessive number of exclamation marks.)

If a Councillor or employee isn’t sure that an email they receive is safe, they can ask our Town Clerk for advice.

We remind our Councillors and employees to keep their anti-malware programs updated.

11. Email signature

We encourage Councillors and employees to create an email signature that exudes professionalism and represents FTC well. Here’s a template of an acceptable email signature:

[Employee Name]
[Employee Title], [Company Name with link]
[Phone number] | [Company Address]

Councillors and employees may also include professional images, company logos and work-related videos and links in email signatures. If they are unsure how to do so, they can ask for help from our Town Clerk.

12. Email Etiquette

Standing Orders apply with regard to Conduct at Meetings and all members are expected to be mindful of the difficulties some people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Behaviour that is contrary to the normal rules of engagement should be reported to The Council Chair and Town Clerk.

13. Disciplinary action

Councillors and employees who don’t adhere to the present policy will face disciplinary action.

Example reasons for disciplinary action are:

- Using a corporate email address to send confidential data without authorization.
- Sending offensive or inappropriate emails to our clients, colleagues or partners.
- Using a corporate email for an illegal activity.

APPENDIX A

NALC BRIEFING ON COUNCIL EMAIL ADDRESSES
UPDATE 9 FEBRUARY 2024

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.

NALC 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.
- 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.
- take 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 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.