

BEARSTED PARISH COUNCIL

EMAIL ETIQUETTE POLICY

Document Purpose

This document describes Bearsted Parish Council's policy for email etiquette. It is based on industry best practice and guidance and must be followed by all Bearsted Parish Council Staff and Councillors.

Email etiquette and guidance

1. When to use email

- 1.1. Email tends to be used for a variety of reasons and can be as informal as arranging refreshments for a meeting to communicating a formal business decision.
- 1.2. Email is not always the best way to communicate information as email messages can often be misunderstood and the volume of email messages people receive can be prohibitive to receiving a meaningful reply as a result of email overload.
- 1.3. All staff that use email have the responsibility of deciding whether email is the most appropriate form of communication. Staff should consider the following factors before sending an email:
 - 1.3.1. the subject:
some subjects are too sensitive to be sent via email, e.g. employee information. Careful consideration needs to be given as it is the responsibility of the sender to decide whether or not email is the most appropriate vehicle for communication in these circumstances
 - 1.3.2. speed of transmission:
where information is needed to be communicated urgently and the recipient is expecting it then this is fine, however, if an urgent message need to be sent and the recipient(s) is/are not expecting anything, then it is probably better to use the phone
 - 1.3.3. speed of response:
there is no guarantee that an email will be read as soon as it is sent; if the email requires immediate action then this is probably not the best way to communicate
 - 1.3.4. number of recipients:
do not necessarily use reply all as not everyone in the previous communication necessarily needs to receive the email

2. Writing emails

- 2.1. When writing an email, it is important to compose the message with the same care and clarity applied to drafting letters and memos, particularly as emails form part of the corporate record under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.
- 2.2. Always ensure that when sending an email the following disclaimer is included:
~Disclaimer~ This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender. This message contains confidential information and is intended only for the individuals named. If you are not the named addressee you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately by e-mail if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. If you are not the intended recipient you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited.
- 2.3. Always ensure that your Recipient List is appropriate to avoid causing a nuisance to other colleagues.
- 2.4. Always complete the Subject Line with a clear description of what the email is about as recipients cannot always distinguish between what they need to look at immediately and what can wait. For example, *full council minutes February 2016 for approval*
- 2.5. Don't be a novelist when composing an email. Ensure language is simple, unambiguous and to the point.
- 2.6. Avoid using abbreviations and emoticons - don't trade clarity for confusion. Be aware that other colleagues may not know the meaning of informal expressions, such as FWIW (for what it's worth).
- 2.7. Be polite. Terseness can be misinterpreted. Please and thank you go a long way.
- 2.8. Be patient. Not everyone can respond immediately or necessarily have the confidence to communicate using email.
- 2.9. Be careful when replying to an email message with many recipients. Do you really want everyone to see your reply?
- 2.10. Never reply in anger. Take a break or sleep on it before responding.
- 2.11. Never write your email in CAPITAL LETTERS. This implies shouting.
- 2.12. Don't conduct an argument on email - it is unprofessional.
- 2.13. Never 'flame' anyone. A flame is an electronic verbal attack. If a flame is received, then please do not respond in anger as this may be regretted later. Users should not engage in exchanging flames and create a 'flame-war'.
- 2.14. Always, always read email before sending it and consider the resultant reaction. Ensuring clarity in the message is time well spent.

3. Out of office replies

- 3.1. Users are required to use this facility within the email system to inform senders of email of absence and expected return to work date. Including an alternative contact is helpful.
- 3.2. Office staff to be contacted out of hours in an emergency situation only.

4. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

- 4.1 All information exchanged within emails should adhere to GDPR.

5. Assigned Email Account

- 5.1 Councillors should only initiate and respond to council business using their assigned @bearstedparishcouncil.gov.uk domain email address. Passwords to this account should not be shared.