



## **ALCESTER TOWN COUNCIL**

### **Proper Use of Email Policy**

1. Use of email is encouraged as it provides an efficient system of communication.
2. Email should be regarded as written paper documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Personal information should be kept in accordance with the principles established in the General Data Protection Regulations and other relevant legislation.
3. All Council email accounts used by staff (@alcester-tc.gov.uk) have a private password that should be kept confidential by the user of that account and not shared. The Council has administrative control over email accounts and can reset passwords and give access to email accounts, where needed.
4. The Council reserves the right to open any email file stored on the Council's computer system or the Council's email accounts.
5. All Town Councillors have a Council gmail account (councillor [name.atc@gmail.com](mailto:name.atc@gmail.com)) which should be used to conduct Council business. Personal email accounts should not be used for Council business due to potential data breaches, issues surrounding Freedom of Information or Subject Access Requests and general recommended good practice for local councils.
6. Councillors should avoid replying to residents via social media or text message particularly if the issue raised is a request for information or might be a complaint. Whenever possible, Councillors should respond to messages received via their Council gmail account or refer the correspondent to the Town Clerk.

7. Care needs to be taken when registering Council email addresses on websites such as discussion forums, news groups, mailing lists, blogs etc to prevent the email address being used for other purposes.
8. External networks, such as the internet, are not guaranteed to be secure and confidentiality cannot be assured when using these networks. Some emails may not be received or read, and they may be intercepted or disclosed by other people. Users must decide whether email is the best way to exchange confidential or sensitive information.
9. Care must be taken when addressing emails, particularly those including sensitive, confidential or restricted information, to avoid accidentally sending them to the wrong people. Particular care must be taken when software auto-completes an email address.
10. Emails should not be auto-forwarded to another account as this may result in confidential information being disclosed to unauthorised people.
11. Email accounts must have an appropriate email signature and the relevant email disclaimer at the bottom of all emails written. Appropriate disclaimers will be provided by the Town Clerk.
12. All Council business emails and documents sent by users are the property of the Council and not of any individual user.
13. Email distribution lists should only be created on individual email accounts with caution; this is to ensure contact details are not out of date, prevent accidental sharing of contact details and to comply with data protection legislation. It should be remembered that data subjects have a right to 'be forgotten'; email addresses stored on individual email accounts will easily allow contact details to be inadvertently stored.
14. Council email address must not be used for:
  - a. Any political activities;
  - b. Commercial or personal profit-making purposes or other form of financial gain (e.g. in connection with any employment other than that associated with the Council);
  - c. Activities that lead to unauthorised expenditure for the Council (e.g. excessive printing or photocopying that is not Council business);
  - d. Activities that are contrary to Council policies or standards;
  - e. Personal interest group activity outside of a user's role;

- f. Activities that may cause damage, disruption, fines, penalties or negative media attention for the Council;
  - g. Excessive email conversations that may be interpreted as misuse.
15. The following guidelines for email use should be observed by all staff members and councillors:
- a. Use appropriate language to avoid unintentional misunderstandings;
  - b. Respect the confidentiality of information contained within emails, even if encountered inadvertently;
  - c. Check with the sender if there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of a message;
  - d. Do not open any attachment unless certain of the authenticity of the sender;
  - e. Only copy emails to others where appropriate and necessary;
  - f. Emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the Council must be sent by officers only, not councillors or other individuals;
  - g. Emails must comply with common codes of courtesy, decency and privacy.

Approved by Finance & General Purposes Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Adopted by Full Council on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Review December 2025