

EMAIL PROTOCOLS FOR THE MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS

Introduction

Under the Elected Members Code of Conduct, the Mayor and Councillors are to conduct their dealings with each other, the Chief Executive, Council staff and the public in ways that, among other things:

- maintain public confidence in the office to which they have been elected
- are open and honest
- focus on issues rather than personalities
- avoid aggressive, offensive or abusive conduct
- avoid publicly criticising any employee in any way, but especially in ways that reflect on the competence and integrity of the employee
- do not seek to improperly influence staff in the normal undertaking of their duties
- accord citizens respect in their dealings with the council.

These standards apply to email use as well as interpersonal contact, so breaching them through email may result in a complaint under the Code of Conduct.

Email messaging is not always an ideal form of communication. It may be ambiguous and, as a general rule, emails should not be used to transmit sensitive information.

Access to email is provided to elected members as a business tool. Emails are deemed official information covered by the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 and the Privacy Act 1993, so every email sent may be recoverable as public information.

Elected members should also remember that emails are likely to be discoverable in court proceedings, so careful judgement should be exercised in what is written.

Protocols

Elected members should:

- use best efforts to resolve any disagreements with colleagues in person, rather than via email
- respect and uphold the confidentiality of non-public information and not disclose in emails information that may be harmful to elected members or the Council as a whole
- only copy to those who need a copy (this is particularly important when deciding either to reply to author or reply to all).

APPENDIX 3

Elected members should not:

- distribute misleading, harassing, intimidating, defamatory, or distasteful comments or material by email or attachments
- indulge in email messaging that demands or insists on outcomes and which is abusive or bullying
- indulge in email messaging that threatens an action or consequence if demands or outcomes are not met
- indulge in repetitive, rhetorical, discourteous or vexatious email messaging
- distribute or store emails or attachments that contain objectionable, pornographic, offensive or copyright information, or which disclose personal information about others without their permission
- send chain emails
- send or copy messages to third parties, such as media, with the express aim of seeking to embarrass or coerce the Council or colleagues into the decisions or outcomes demanded (noting that elected members are free to express a personal view to the media at any time in line with the Code of Conduct)
- access (including reading, sending and deleting messages) email accounts that members are not authorised to use
- over-use capital letters or bold for emphasis – it is tantamount to shouting
- demand responses within unrealistic timeframes. The Council standard is that emails are to be acknowledged within 24 hours and replied to in full within 15 working days
- blindcopy to other parties – this is discourteous and causes mistrust. Email traffic should be an open and reasonable forum. It is only fair that all who answer have knowledge of who will be reading their replies.