

SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

MEMBERS CORRESPONDENCE POLICY



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance on how Members (councillors) of Southwater Parish Council should communicate with Officers, the public, and external stakeholders in a professional and transparent manner. .
- 1.2. This policy ensures that all correspondence aligns with the Council's Communication Strategy and legal obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

2. When the Policy Applies

- 2.1. This policy applies to all Parish Council Members and Co-Opted Members and regulates all written correspondence, including email, letters and digital communications.
- 2.2. This policy applies to all official correspondence conducted by Members in their role as representatives of Southwater Parish Council.
- 2.3. Personal correspondence that is not related to Council business is not covered by this policy. However, Members are advised to ensure that their personal communications do not bring the Council into disrepute.

3. Principles of the Policy

- 3.1. The Parish Council wishes to regulate any communications received and sent by Members or Co-Opted Members of the Parish Council in the usage of email, other digital communications, or hard copy correspondence to maintain professionalism, transparency, and security.
- 3.2. All official correspondence must be conducted using the Council-provided email address: [member's first name.surname]@cllr.southwater-pc.gov.uk. Members must not use personal email accounts for Council business.
- 3.3. Members must ensure all correspondence adheres to data protection regulations and respects confidentiality requirements.

4. Procedure

- 4.1. Correspondence between an individual Member and an Officer, particularly when the Member has initiated it, should not normally be copied to any other Member particularly by the recipient without the prior approval of the originator of the correspondence. Where it is necessary to copy the correspondence, this should always be made explicit. Members and Officers are required to comply with the following with regard to correspondence by e-mail.

- 4.2 All emails must be sent from the Member's official Council-provided email address. Any correspondence sent from a personal email account will not be considered as official communication of the Parish Council.

5. Members Should:

- Ensure all Council-related emails and letters are professional, factual and respectful.
- If offended by the content or tone of an incoming message, email and/or digital communication get a second opinion to check out their interpretation and made sure the response is objective before responding.
- Comply with the Code of Conduct, Civility & Respect Pledge, common courtesy and the Law when using email.
- Always use appropriate language, remembering that misunderstandings frequently arise through the use of email, which offend others without intending to.
- Always respect the privacy of others, remembering that email can be just as intrusive as unsolicited telephone calls or letters.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of all communications and adhere to the Council's Data Protection Policy and Confidentiality Policy.
- Verify the authenticity of incoming communications before taking action.

6. Members Should Not:

- Send Council-related correspondence from personal email accounts.
- Forward confidential Council correspondence to third parties without authorisation.
- Engage in excessive or unnecessary email exchanges that do not add value to Council discussions.
- Include anything in an email that would not be appropriate in a formal letter or public statement.
- Use email to send inappropriate, offensive, or defamatory content.
- Engage in "junk emails," chain messages, or excessive use of 'Reply All'.
- Use email to impersonate or give the impression of representing the Parish Council without proper authorisation.

7. Official Disclaimer for Emails

All outgoing emails from Members must include the following disclaimer:

This email may contain privileged and/or confidential information. If you have received this in error, please notify the sender and delete the email immediately. You may not use or pass it to a third party. Whilst every care has been taken to check outgoing emails or viruses etc., it is your responsibility to carry out checks upon

receipt of the email. Southwater Parish Council does not accept liability for any damage caused. Email transmission cannot guarantee to be secure or error free. This email does not create any legal relations, contractual or otherwise and any view or opinions expressed are personal to the author and do not necessarily those of Southwater Parish Council. The Council does not accept liability for any unauthorised/unlawful/statement by an employee or group. Information in this email may be subject to public disclosure in accordance with the Law. Southwater Parish Council cannot guarantee that it will not provide this email to a third party. The Council reserves the right to monitor all emails in accordance with the law. If this email, message and or any attachment is incomplete or unreadable, please contact the Parish office on 01403 733202. Any reference to email in this disclaimer includes any attachment or otherwise.

8. Letters, Written and Digital Correspondence

- 8.1 Official letters sent on behalf of the Parish Council should normally be issued under the name of the appropriate Officer, the Chairman of the Council, or the relevant Committee Chairman subject to the matter being within their remit and approval from the Executive Officer.
- 8.2 **Most letters should be in the name of an Officer**, as Officers provide advice, implement decisions, and handle operational matters.
- 8.3 It may be appropriate in certain circumstances (e.g., representations to a Government Minister, or condolences to a sovereign) for letters to be issued under the name of the Council Chairman.
- 8.4 **Members must not send letters that create obligations, financial or otherwise, or give instructions on behalf of the Parish Council.** Any such unauthorised correspondence will not be considered a valid communication of the Council.

9. Social Media and Digital Messaging

- 9.1 Members must be cautious when using social media, WhatsApp, or other messaging platforms for Council-related.
- 9.2 Official decisions and policy matters should only be discussed through formal Council channels such as Council meetings, emails, or official letters.
- 9.3 Any posts on social media representing the Council must align with the Communication Strategy, the Social Media Policy and must not misrepresent Council views or breach confidentiality.

10. Monitoring and Enforcement

- 10.1 The Executive Officer (and/or relevant Officer under the Executive Officer's direction) will monitor compliance with this policy and report any breaches to the Council where necessary.
- 10.2 Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action, including referral to the Monitoring Officer for investigation.
- 10.3 Any Member found to be using personal email accounts for official business or engaging in unauthorised correspondence may be subject to further review and corrective action by the Council