

Walton Parish Council Email Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy outlines the appropriate use of email for official Walton Parish Council business. It applies to all councillors, the clerk, and any staff or volunteers who use email in the course of their council duties.

Walton Parish Council, as a public authority, has a legal duty under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) to ensure that all personal data it processes is handled lawfully, fairly, and securely. This includes communication via email, where the risk of mishandling personal data is heightened.

Walton Parish Council seeks to apply best practice in accordance with GDPR and for this reason, Councillors are provided with secure .gov email accounts

2. Aims

- To promote clear, respectful, and effective communication
- To safeguard personal data in accordance with UK GDPR
- To comply with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance, especially in relation to public authority communications
- To ensure transparency, accountability, and consistency in council correspondence
- To support good governance, freedom of information, and public engagement
- To ensure that all councillors are trained in the use of the allocated .gov email accounts and are provided with support in email set up and management
- To promote best practice regarding email usage

3. Context

Email is a vital communication tool for the effective administration and governance of Walton Parish Council. However, as email may contain personal and sensitive data, its use must be compliant with relevant legislation, particularly:

- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Guidance published by the ICO on personal data and electronic communication

4. Policy Guidelines

4.1 Use of Email Accounts

- Councillors and staff are expected to use designated Walton Parish Council email addresses for all council-related correspondence.
- All councillors are expected to use their allocated .gov.uk email accounts when corresponding internally with fellow councillors and externally with members of the public, contractors, or other organisations in relation to council business.
- Use of personal email accounts for council matters is strongly discouraged, as it increases the risk of non-compliance with data protection obligations.
- Walton Parish Council email accounts should be accessed securely and protected with strong passwords.

4.2 Data Protection and Confidentiality

- Email communications should contain only the minimum personal data necessary for the purpose.
- When contacting multiple individuals not known to each other, the Bcc (blind carbon copy) field must be used to protect recipient privacy.
- Attachments containing personal or confidential data should be encrypted or password-protected and shared using secure methods.
- Emails should not be used for confidential discussions where a more secure or face-to-face option is available.

4.3 Retention and Archiving

- Emails relating to council business must be retained in accordance with Walton Parish Council's Records Retention Policy.
- The clerk is responsible for ensuring that relevant correspondence is archived or deleted appropriately and in line with statutory obligations.
- Email accounts may be monitored to ensure compliance with retention and data protection policies.

4.4 Councillor Responsibilities

- Councillors act as data controllers in some cases and are expected to understand their responsibilities under UK GDPR.
- All councillors must familiarise themselves with Walton Parish Council's Data Protection Policy and the ICO's "Advice for elected and prospective members of local authorities."
- Councillors should avoid forwarding or replying to emails containing personal or sensitive data unless strictly necessary.

4.5 Training and Awareness

- All council members and staff will receive periodic training on data protection and email best practices.
- The clerk will ensure up-to-date guidance is available and shared when relevant legislative or policy changes occur.

5. Breaches and Complaints

- Any suspected breach of this policy, especially one involving personal data, must be reported immediately to the Clerk or the council's Data Protection Officer (DPO).
- In the case of a serious breach, Walton Parish Council will consider whether to report the matter to the ICO within the statutory 72-hour period.
- Complaints about misuse of email will be handled in line with Walton Parish Council's Complaints Policy.

Date adopted: 3rd July

To be reviewed: July 2026