E-mail Policy: Quick Guide and Best Practice

Introduction
This is a bite size guide to e-mail policy and best practice at East Herts. The full Policy is available on the intranet.

The Policy
E-mail is a fundamental communication tool and the policy exists to protect the Council and its staff from legal and human resource issues whilst using the Council's facilities. These facilities are provided to help staff and others do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.

The provision of e-mail represents a considerable commitment of Council resources. There is however, a significant risk to the Council if e-mail is not used correctly. The policy is written to help understand how our e-mail system is regulated, how it affects you and what we expect from you so we all know where we stand.

Who Does The Policy Apply To?
This policy applies to all employees, members and other users of the Council's e-mail facilities. Other users include home workers, apprentices, students, voluntary workers, contractors, third party suppliers and any other persons who have been granted legitimate access. The policy and guide are seen as 'best practice' failure to follow them may lead to corrective or in some circumstances, disciplinary action.

Security
Security is a key concern and it is essential all users are fully aware of their responsibilities and the restrictions in place to protect them and the Council. The Council reserves the right to access messages sent over the e-mail system to protect its computer systems, or where there is an indication of a threat to the Council or its employees. Employees must not assume that e-mail content is confidential!

Continued vigilance is required surrounding viruses, especially when receiving unsolicited messages and attachments. If you are in any doubt as to what the message contains do not open it, delete it. If you receive an e-mail that you did not request or you suspect a virus please contact the IT Help Desk immediately (ext. 2249) for guidance.

Do not share your passwords with anyone, including your work colleagues, or engineers working on your PC (they do not need to know it!). If you think a password has been compromised contact the Help Desk immediately (ext. 2249) to report the facts as a 'security breach'.

Never use the auto-forward option within Microsoft Outlook to forward your e-mails to a non-East Herts Council e-mail address without express permission of your Head of Service and IT, this is a potential breach of the Data Protection Act.

Storage

All e-mails sent and received by the Council's are copied to a secure electronic Archive Manager, irrespective of content. The e-mail messages held within the Archive Manager will be treated as business records by the Council and will be stored (and ultimately destroyed) in line with the Council's archiving policies.

Accessing an Individuals Archived Emails held in Archive Manager

Access to Archive Manager can only be initiated under controlled circumstances. The contents of the Archive Manager may not be disclosed without the permission of either, the Head of People and Organisational Services or the Council's Head of Paid Service provided certain criteria is meet. (See full policy).

Accessing Another's Active Mailbox

This facility is for exceptional circumstances and not for holidays or planned absence. If it necessary to access another's mailbox to ensure work has been, or is carried out, the Head of Service can request access by contacting the Help Desk ext 2249. Access will only be granted to a Line Manager as identified by the Head of Service.

Duty of Care

Users should never put in an e-mail what they would not be prepared to put on headed paper. Equally, users should never put in an e-mail what they would not be prepared to say verbally. Confidential information should not be sent by email. At all times the e-mail system must be used with respect to the dignity and privacy of others in line with all Council policies.

Etiquette

All users should ensure that e-mails follow general etiquette guidelines:

Use
- Respond promptly to all messages requiring a reply as required by the Corporate Customer Service Standards.
- Consider if e-mail is the best way to communicate your message; a phone call or meeting may be more effective, especially if confidential or there may be some debate.
- Check your mailbox regularly, at least once a day; review your inbox and personal folders, tidy up as necessary.
- Do not leave 'Read Receipt' switched on, this creates excessive email traffic, see above.

Content
- Use a subject line that is descriptive of the topic being discussed.
- Do not put names in email subject box (Data Protection compliance).
- Avoid abbreviations and shorthand.
- Exercise caution when using sarcasm or humour.
- Avoid capital letters; they may be interpreted as SHOUTING.
- Avoid 'cc-ing' to excess, only use if a direct contribution is required from the recipient.
- Reference the source of a lengthy document rather than forwarding the information whenever possible (e.g. link to intranet page).
- Cite all quotes, references and sources of information.
- Always include your name at the bottom of the e-mail.
- Only send email to people who need to read it or take some form of action, do not just send out to email groups for quickness, be selective.

Corporate Style

The corporate font for e-mail is Arial 11pt. All replies should be in standard blue font, other colours are not acceptable.

Auto Signature
The Corporate standard for signatures on emails should contain the following:

Name Job Title (bold)	11pt	Neil Sloper **Head of Customer Service and New Media** Direct Dial: 01992 531611 Mobile: 07912 069125
Direct Dial Council Address E-mail Address Website	9pt	East Herts Council Wallfields Pegs Lane Hertford SG13 8EQ neil.sloper@eastherts.gov.uk www.eastherts.gov.uk

Out of Office
If the absence is planned you should utilise the 'out of office' facility to alert senders of your absence, advise when you will return and provide alternative arrangements in your absence. You may arrange for other users to view their mailbox using the delegate facility within Microsoft Outlook. If required, guidance can be provided by the Help Desk ext 2249.

For Example:

I am afraid that I will be out of the office until (date). If you have an urgent enquiry please contact (name) (email address). I will be back in the office on (date).

Thank you, (name) **(job title)**

Remember: <u>Do not </u>state that you are out of the country or on holiday.

Personal Use - Conditions and Limitations
Personal use of Council e-mail facilities is permitted if reasonable and does not interfere with work. A personal e-mail is a message with content wholly or substantially unrelated to the sender's role within the Council. E-mails sent to other employees, employees of other councils or any external recipients are included in the scope of this definition.

Remember:

- The Council provides e-mail as a business tool. E-mail may be stored, intercepted, read or deleted by the Council and should not be seen as personal or confidential.
- If you choose to send/receive personal e-mails, you must understand and accept that messages will be subject to a virus and content scan, as per any other e-mail message sent or received.

You are reminded that all e-mail messages (including personal messages) are subject to Council policy. Any breaches of this or other Council policy will be acted upon and disciplinary action may be taken.