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DRAFT – BRIEFING ON COUNCIL EMAIL ADDRESSES

Councils are facing increasing challenges in managing their email accounts, particularly due to a heightened focus on data security, but also subject access requests. This briefing aims to give good practice on how this should be handled.

Use of personal email addresses

We strongly advise council staff to not use their personal email addresses for council work. This is for several reasons:

- When the clerk changes, it means that their successor won't be able to access any of the historic emails they may need to do their job and comply with the council's legal obligations.
- Using a council email address looks more professional to residents.
- Personal email accounts can sometimes be blocked from sending or receiving mailings to/from large numbers of email addresses and are treated as spam. This is a problem if you send emails to a large group of residents, for example, or are expecting emails from levels of government.
- Public bodies are a key target for phishing attempts and data breaches, and using an email account that is less secure will make them more likely to be hacked. Even smaller public bodies can be a target as they are seen to be softer targets, but the work involved in reporting any breaches, getting online systems back operating again, and any potential legal consequences can be severe and costly.
- If a subject access or freedom of information request is made, then all emails to/from that account, whether personal or related to council business, will need to be searched, and, if necessary, released to the person concerned. More detailed guidance on data protection and freedom of information can be found elsewhere on the NALC website.

.gov.uk domain names

Best practice is for a council to use a gov.uk domain name e.g. nalc.gov.uk or waretowncouncil.gov.uk, for their email account and website. As well as resolving the points made above, this has several benefits:

- It reassures members of the public that the email address and website are legitimate, as only government bodies can apply for a gov.uk domain name.

- It separates a clerk's personal life from their professional life – good for making it clear in what capacity someone is being emailed, as well as for their own work-life balance.
- It means there is an easier route to access an email account if the clerk suddenly becomes ill or leaves, and a colleague needs to pick up their work.
- You will benefit from the high level of security and protection that the government uses to protect these domain names.

A basic gov.uk domain name registration currently costs £100 a year. Information on how to apply is [available here](#). Although you will need to work with a company that supplies domain names, legally the URL is registered with the local council.

The Public Sector Domains Board is currently working on a project to make it easier and cheaper for local councils to switch to gov.uk domain names. Updates will be provided through the NALC bulletin, but this isn't expected to change until the middle of 2024.

We **strongly advise** all local councils to use a gov.uk domain name, however we appreciate there may be very limited circumstances where this is not possible.

If a council is not going to use a gov.uk domain name we would advise that they instead use an alternative domain name e.g. org.uk or .uk, whilst still council-specific e.g. bradfieldparishcouncil.org.uk. These are relatively low-cost but look official and there may be some limited technical support available from the supplier. These should be registered under the name of the parish council and not to the clerk personally.

The last resort, and **this is not recommended**, is to use a generally available email provider such as Gmail or Outlook, but ensure that it is generic e.g. ashfordtownclerk@gmail.com rather than a personal name, and that the chair or other staff know how to access the account, via the provider, in an emergency.

Councillor email addresses

Most councillors will wish to have their own email address for conducting their work as parish councillors. We would make the same recommendations as above as they are also subject to subject access requests when undertaking work as a councillor.

However, councillor email addresses will inevitably be named e.g. cllr.roberta.jones@ashfordtown.gov.uk but by using a gov.uk domain name it

means the councillor will also have the security that comes with a government email address.

Password management and email security

To comply with privacy and data protection rules, an email account is only secure if the password is known only to the person who uses the account and they do not allow other people to have access to their email and computer.

Here is some key advice on keeping your email account secure:

- Do not share your password with anyone else or write it down where other people can find it.
- The best security is to use multi-factor authentication (MFA) which involves you having to provide additional security information on an occasional basis. You can [find more on MFA here](#).
- Make sure your computer is password protected and that it automatically locks if you are away from it for more than 10 minutes. You can also manually lock it by pressing the Windows key and L at the same time.
- Do not automatically redirect council emails from one account to another.
- You can also undertake short online courses via Nimble elearning on basic cyber security, password management and phishing. Register through your county association or [NALC](#).