



# **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **HOW TO GUIDE – EMAIL ETIQUETTE**

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## Introduction

Electronic mail (email) remains a primary method of communication in the modern workplace. With the continued growth of digital working practices, transactions, discussions, and decisions that were once recorded on paper (such as letters and memos) are now routinely documented through email. The volume of emails sent and received each day continues to increase, making effective email management and etiquette more important than ever.

All emails, whether internal communications between officers or with external partners, service users, customers, or clients, constitute important Council records. As with all records, these emails are potentially disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations, or the Data Protection Act if they contain personal information about an individual.

It is important that staff remain polite and use appropriate language when sending emails, just as they would with any other form of communication, such as telephone calls or letters.

This good practice guide is intended to promote consistent and professional email etiquette across the Council. It should be followed when creating, writing, and responding to all email messages.

## How to Guide – Email Etiquette

### 1. When to use email

Before using email, consider whether it is the most appropriate or timely method of communication for the situation. In some circumstances, other communication methods such as a phone call, instant message, or a short meeting may be more effective, particularly for urgent matters, sensitive topics, or complex discussions that require immediate clarification.

A decision on whether or not to use email should be based on factors such as the subject matter, the availability of the recipient, and the speed of response required. If a quick response is needed, or if the message could be easily misunderstood in writing, consider speaking directly instead.

When addressing email messages, it is important to send information only to those who genuinely need to know. Recipients included in the 'To' field should be those expected to act on or participate in decisions based on the message content.

### 2. Selecting Recipients

Use the 'Cc' and 'Bcc' fields sparingly, limiting copies to individuals who are directly involved and truly need to be informed.

### 3. Blind Carbon Copy (BCC)

An email address is personal information, just like a telephone number or home address. When sending an email to two or more recipients, you must ensure that you have permission to disclose recipients' email addresses to others. If you do not, you could be breaching confidentiality, especially when emailing customers or clients.

To protect privacy, use the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) field when sending emails to multiple recipients who do not know each other or when you do not have explicit consent to share their email addresses. This prevents recipients from seeing each other's email addresses and helps reduce the risk of accidental data breaches.

### 4. Subject

When composing an email, **always include a subject line** and never leave it blank. A clear and meaningful subject helps recipients quickly identify the purpose of the message and makes it easier for both you and the recipient to locate the email in the future if needed.

As far as possible, limit each email to **one subject** per message to avoid confusion and ensure clarity. Use the subject field to indicate the content and purpose of your email, keeping it concise and relevant.

Where appropriate, specify whether any action is required or if the message is for information only, as this helps the recipient prioritise their response. If necessary, you can also indicate the priority level using Outlook flags, such as high or low importance.

## 5. Confidential Information

If your message contains personal or confidential information that you do not want further disclosed, make this clear at the very start of the email. Clearly state to the recipient that the content of the email must not be forwarded, discussed, or divulged to any other person without your explicit permission. Where appropriate, consider marking the email as “Confidential” in the subject line or using any available sensitivity labels.

## 6. Structure & Grammar

You should take the same care with structure, spelling, grammar, and punctuation when writing an email as you would with a formal letter. Professionalism extends to all forms of communication.

To comply with accessibility standards (such as those under the Disability Discrimination Act and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), always use a clear, readable format. Use Arial font, size 14pt or larger for emails, with black text on a plain, light background. Avoid background styling or images, as these can make emails harder to read for people using assistive technology.

Keep your message brief and focused by addressing the who, what, why, when, where, and how. Long emails are often skimmed or ignored. Organise the content into clear paragraphs, placing the most important information at the beginning and using bullet points to highlight key details.

Write in plain English and limit jargon and acronyms, especially if you are emailing members of the public such as service users, citizens, or customers. Always consider your audience and whether they will understand any specialist terms.

Avoid writing in ALL CAPITALS (which can be perceived as aggressive) or all lowercase (which may seem lazy). Be cautious with emphasis tools such as bold text, underlining, or asterisks. Refrain from using slang, overly informal abbreviations like “OMG” or “LOL,” or emojis in business emails.

Always run a final check for spelling, grammar, coherence, and context before sending to avoid embarrassing mistakes. And while a quote in your signature may be inspiring, save personal quotes for private messages, not business communications.

## 7. Content & Tone

When writing emails, it is important to maintain a professional and respectful tone. Consider the following guidance:

- Use neutral, professional language at all times.
- Assume that anything you write could be published under the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations, or, if it contains personal information, disclosed under the Data Protection Act.
- Use terms that are consistent with other forms of business communication.
- Ensure your message is inoffensive and cannot be construed as harassment, discrimination, abuse, or offensive in any way.
- Be informal if appropriate, but not sloppy, use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Be cautious with humour and sarcasm, as tone and intent can be easily misunderstood in writing.
- Avoid negative words where possible, and only use absolutes (such as “never,” “always,” “everyone,” “worst”) when they are truly accurate.
- Where possible, avoid discussing sensitive issues by email; handle these in person or by phone, especially if the message involves critique or could be interpreted as criticism.
- Do not overreact to emails that could be interpreted in different ways. Avoid responding hastily with strong emotion or opinion, as this is unprofessional and counterproductive.

## 8. Attachments

### Internal Emails

When circulating information internally, avoid using attachments wherever possible, as this can lead to duplication of documents across mail folders and create unnecessary management challenges. Instead, try to include the relevant information directly in the body of your email whenever practical. Alternatively, you can place a copy of the document in an accessible location on a shared network drive and include a link to it in your email. If the document contains personal or commercially sensitive information, ensure the shared area is secure or apply password protection to restrict access to only those who are entitled to view it.

## External Emails

When sending attachments to external recipients, always let them know in advance if you will be sending a large file, as this could fill their mailbox and prevent them from receiving further emails until space is cleared.

Consider the type of file you are attaching and check whether the recipient can receive and open it. Some file types may be blocked by the recipient's email system due to security concerns, as attachments are a common way for viruses to spread. Generally, file types such as .doc, .xls, .mdb, and .pdf are acceptable, as these are commonly used and less likely to be rejected.

## 9. Identify Yourself

When sending emails, you should include a signature with your contact information where appropriate. This typically includes your name, job title, organisation, address, contact and telephone number.

To support accessibility and inclusivity, your email signature should be bilingual, reflecting both official languages used by the Council. You may also choose to include your pronouns in your signature, although this is not mandatory.

Write in plain English and limit jargon and acronyms, especially if you are emailing members of the public such as service users, citizens, or customers. Always consider your audience and whether they will understand any specialist terms.

Avoid writing in ALL CAPITALS (which can be perceived as aggressive) or all lowercase (which may seem lazy). Be cautious with emphasis tools such as bold text, underlining, or asterisks. Refrain from using slang, overly informal abbreviations like "OMG" or "LOL," or emojis in business emails.

Always run a final check for spelling, grammar, coherence, and context before sending to avoid embarrassing mistakes. And while a quote in your signature may be inspiring, save personal quotes for private messages, not business communications.

## 10. Avoiding Common Errors When Sending Emails

Before sending any email, especially those containing personal or confidential information, take a moment to carefully check the recipient list, attachments, and the content of your message. Simple mistakes such as sending information to the wrong person, attaching the wrong file, or including unintended recipients can lead to data breaches and compromise confidentiality.

## **11. Reply to All**

Take particular care when using the 'Reply to All' function, considering whether your response is appropriate for everyone included and avoiding unnecessary information overload. Only use this function when there is a genuine need for all original recipients to see your reply.

## **12. Forwarding a Message**

When forwarding an email, remember you are sharing information with someone new. Consider whether the original sender would be comfortable with this, especially if the message contains personal information. Only forward what is necessary, not the entire email chain, and never forward spam or junk emails.

## **13. Global Emails**

Sending global emails, which are messages sent to all Council users, is not permitted from an individual user account. If you require the ability to send a message to all users, please contact the ICT Service Desk to discuss your requirements further.

## Version Control

Version No.	Valid From	Valid To	Changes Made
1	17.09.2013	06.10.2016	Bulletin 12 issued with 'How to Guide'
2	07.10.2016	30.11.2025	Former 'How to Guide' reformatted.
3	01.12.2025		General review and update to reflect current use of emails. Reformatted in logical order.