

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder 24 April 2007
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Democratic Services Officer

CHANGES TO COUNCILLORS' E-MAIL

Purpose

1. To agree necessary changes to the way councillors send and receive e-mail, ensuring compliance with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation and the revised Member / Officer Protocol and Code of Conduct, and addressing potential situations whereby one surname is shared by more than one member.

Background

2. Upon election, members are assigned e-mail addresses in the format `cllr.surname@scams.gov.uk`. This solution had been devised to enable all members to have a single, easy-to-remember, contact e-mail for Council business. Any correspondence mailed to this address is automatically forwarded to the member's personal e-mail account.
3. Two issues arise from this: the first is that the current composition of the Council is such that no two members share the same surname, but each year there is a possibility of changes at election time whereby the Council could have, for instance, two Councillor Joneses. A simple amendment to the e-mail address naming protocol would be to incorporate members' initials, e.g., `cllr.jonesab@scams.gov.uk` and `cllr.jonescd@scams.gov.uk`. This amendment would have an effect on usernames, so members accessing the Council's intranet, webmail or modern.gov system would need to include their initials as well as surname. Since there exists the possibility that, following elections, there could be two members with the same forename and surname, it would be necessary to include at least the first two initials.
4. The second, more serious, issue arising from e-mail is non-compliance with the Council's responsibilities under its Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and the Data Protection Act (DPA) policies. Should the Council receive a FOI Act request, the FOI Monitoring Officer must co-ordinate a search of the Council's e-mail archiving system, Aftermail, for any relevant information. Similarly, a DPA request by an individual to see any personal information held about himself / herself, should include a search of e-mail sent or received on Council addresses, which also would be searched through the Aftermail system. The current system of automatically forwarding members' e-mail circumvents the Aftermail archiving system, as a consequence of which the Council could not guarantee that all official correspondence is logged and searchable.

Considerations

5. All members have network accounts with the Council, which enables them to access the Council's intranet, InSite, and internal modern.gov websites, and also to access Outlook Web Access, the Council's webmail system, via `http://mail.scams.gov.uk/`. Although all members currently can access the webmail with their username and

password, the system is not fully functional for those members whose e-mail is being forwarded automatically to their personal addresses.

6. A small number of members currently are using webmail and have done so since their election.
7. The move to webmail offers a number of advantages:
 - (a) members' e-mails will show as coming from `cllr.surname@scamb.gov.uk` rather than from their personal accounts, keeping their personal account details private and minimising the risk of spam;
 - (b) in the event of a computer crash from their home PC or laptop, members' work-related e-mails will be saved and accessible through webmail from the Members' IT Room or any other computer (including internet cafés);
 - (c) members will not need to keep IT / Democratic Services informed of any changes to their personal e-mail addresses;
 - (d) members can make use of the other network features such as the calendar (diary) to manage their schedules and even to set up meetings with other members and officers, and the network address book; and
 - (e) members will also have access to Aftermail, the Council's archive management software, to recover from the server deleted e-mails, or search within current or older e-mails and more.
8. Most importantly, use of webmail means that members will have to make a conscious decision to access their SCDC webmail, allowing for a clear distinction between e-mails they have sent in their official capacity and personal e-mails. This will also help alleviate concerns about being seen to be using their SCDC e-mail for party political purposes: members can use their personal addresses if they want to campaign, arrange group meetings, etc. (see below text from Member / Officer Relations Protocol at paragraph 10).
9. Furthermore, IT staff will be able to assist members with issues remotely, without having to pay personal visits, as often IT staff are asked to come out when the problems are arising from issues relating to personal (or other non-Council) e-mail or to ISPs, which is not within the Council's remit to address (see below text from Member / Officer Relations Protocol). Also, with all members using the same system, training, manuals and support can be streamlined.
10. The following text is from the proposed revised Member / Officer Relations Protocol regarding acceptable use of IT, which the changes will support through members having to make a conscious choice to conduct council-related correspondence through webmail:

Correspondence

Email relating to the Council must be treated in the same way as formal business correspondence and its distribution considered accordingly. Members should restrict the distribution of email correspondence to the intended recipients and refrain from using multi address distribution lists unless there is good reason so to do. It should be noted that email can be used for documentary evidence in disciplinary proceedings, libel cases etc. even after it has been deleted.

Support Services to Members and Party Groups

The only basis on which the Council can lawfully provide support services (e.g. stationery, typing, printing, photocopying and transport) to Members is to assist them

in discharging their duties as a District Councillor. Such support services must therefore only be used on Council business. They should never be used in connection with any party political activity or self-promotion.

Where the Council provides ICT equipment in the form of a PC or Laptop computer, the equipment can be used for constituency related tasks or other Council related use. The equipment may also be used for personal use, as long as such use complies with the provisions of section 6. General Use as set out in the agreement for Members use of the PC or Laptop computer.

11. The revised Code of Conduct, scheduled for adoption from 3 May 2007, subject to Council agreement on 26 April, requires members to comply with its provisions when “conducting the business of your authority (which, in this Code, includes the business of the office to which you are elected or appointed); or (b) acting, claiming to act or giving the impression you are acting as a representative of your authority”. Using a Council e-mail address through webmail will help recipients identify when a member is acting an official capacity and, equally, members can refer to the use of a Council or personal e-mail address to demonstrate that communication was made either in an official or a personal capacity.
12. All e-mail sent through webmail automatically will receive a copy of the Council’s disclaimer signature file:

Privileged/Confidential Information may be contained in this message. If you should not have received it, tell me and delete it without forwarding, copying or disclosing it to anyone. The Council does not represent or warrant that it or any attached files are free from computer viruses or other defects. It and any attached files are provided, and may be used, only on the basis that the user assumes all responsibility for any loss, damage or consequence resulting directly or indirectly from them or their use. Any views or opinions presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of South Cambridgeshire District Council unless stated otherwise.

All e-mail sent to or from this address will be processed by South Cambridgeshire District Corporate E-mail system/ Email Archiving system and may be subject to scrutiny by someone other than the addressee. This email will also be kept for a set period of time before it is destroyed.

The South Cambridgeshire website can be found at <http://www.scamb.gov.uk>

Options

13. To introduce a combined system through which e-mails are accessible through webmail **and** forwarded to the member’s personal e-mail address.
14. Although this would meet with the FOI and DPA requirements for all e-mail being sent **to** members, it would not address storage e-mails being sent **from** members or any responses made to correspondence, and therefore would only comply partially with legislation. Also, Members’ responses would come directly from their personal accounts, rather than through an SCDC e-mail address, which could lead to questions about whether responses were made in a personal or an official capacity.

Implications

15. The most significant implications are risks to the Council’s legal position and public perception if it is seen to at variance with its own FOI and DPA responsibilities (see

paragraph 4). From a practical point of view, keeping personal and official correspondence separate has substantial advantages, as listed in paragraphs 7-10.

16. Further risks involve members' reluctance to adopt a new system, when the previous system appeared to be satisfactory from a user point of view and a new system could be seen as a retrograde step. These can be minimised with a positive introduction highlighting the necessity for use of webmail and the many advantages it can bring. A substantial number of members already use Hotmail, gmail, Yahoo Mail and other webmail services, and would be familiar with the concept.
17. Those members already using the Council's webmail could be asked to help promote the system and a pilot group of member volunteers could trial the system for a period of time, for instance, one month, and help address issues of member acceptance and training, and identifying potential areas of concern likely to arise from members.
18. There already exist a number of concerns arising from the randomly-generated passwords used to access the Council's network. These issues will be addressed by the introduction of the new VPN system later during the 2007-08 year, but until that time it is essential that members remember the need to have strong passwords to reduce compromising network security (see the Government's Get Safe Online campaign, http://www.getsafeonline.org/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=1127).

19. Financial	None.
Legal	The Council cannot opt out of FOI and DPA requirements. Members would need to make a conscious decision to correspond through their personal or Council addresses, which would support any arguments about whether they were acting in an official or personal capacity should such questions be asked.
Staffing	IT staff are able to provide the necessary support. Training would be conducted internally and a Council-wide webmail training manual has already been prepared and would be added to the forthcoming member development programme.
Risk Management	See above.
Equal Opportunities	None.

Consultations

20. IT staff.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

21. Affordable Homes	None.
Customer Service	Members would be able to answer e-mails from residents, officers and other members from any computer connected to the internet.
Northstowe and other growth areas	None.
Quality, Accessible Services	All members would use the same e-mail interface, streamlining training and support.
Village Life	None.
Sustainability	Enhanced use of IT reduces dependence upon paper resources.
Partnership	None.

Conclusions / Summary

22. Use of a hybrid system, combining e-mail forwarding with webmail, could be introduced in the short-term whilst webmail training was undertaken, but a clear cut-off date must be set after which time webmail only must be used. This does not immediately address the significant FOI and DPA non-compliance, but gives members a definite deadline to help focus their training needs.
23. Adoption of a naming protocol for usernames and e-mail addresses would not have any significant effect on members' work. Adding the initials after the surname allows names to alphabetise correctly in the Global Address List, and a forwarding protocol could be put in place initially ensuring that all e-mail sent to cllr.jones@scams.gov.uk automatically forwarded to cllr.jonesab@scams.gov.uk so the hypothetical Councillor Jones would not need new letterhead and business cards immediately.

Recommendations

24. It is recommended that:
 - (a) a hybrid system, combining e-mail forwarding with webmail, be adopted until 30 June 2007, after which all members be required to use Council webmail for Council ("official") business and their personal e-mail for non-Council (including personal or party political) business;
 - (b) that all newly-elected members be offered webmail access immediately following election;
 - (c) training on the webmail system be included as a priority item within the member development programme;
 - (d) if necessary, a pilot group of no more than six members be asked to trial the webmail system until 25 May 2007 to highlight any areas of particular concern; and
 - (e) from 3 May 2007 all member e-mail addresses conform to the protocol cllr.surnameinitials@scams.gov.uk, with e-mail forwarding enabled for current / returning members for a set period to allow them to finish using existing letterhead and business cards.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

SCDC Constitution
26 April 2007 Council agenda (Member / Officer Relations Protocol and revised Code of Conduct)
ICT Security Policy & Usage Guidelines 2006/07
SCDC Data Protection Guidance (May 2004)
SCDC Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection Act Policy and Procedure (May 2006)
Get Safe Online, <http://www.getsafeonline.org/>

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