

Council Report

Ward(s) affected: N/A

Report of the Monitoring Officer

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Councillor Email Signature Guidance

Executive Summary

Following a councillor misconduct complaint which had been referred for investigation, the investigator identified an issue that needed to be addressed by the Council. The issue was the apparent confusion around the email signatures used by some councillors who tended to list various non-Council roles in their signature, resulting in confusion in respect of the capacity in which a councillor was communicating with a correspondent. The matter was referred to the Corporate Governance Task Group for consideration.

The Task Group considered the matter initially on 12 April and, more recently, on 16 August 2021 and drafted the guidance for councillors. The Task Group recommended that the guidance be adopted and that all councillors be advised to apply the template, content, and format as set out so as to provide clear communication when conversing with residents and other correspondents. The draft guidance was subsequently considered by the Corporate Management Team (CMT), and then by the Executive at its meeting held on 21 September 2021. The Executive approved the guidance, incorporating a number of amendments, which is set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

The Task Group also recommended, and the Executive agreed, that it should be a requirement in the Councillors' Code of Conduct that councillors comply with this guidance, in the same way that it was agreed last year that the Code of Conduct should include a requirement for councillors to comply with the adopted Social Media Guidance for Councillors.

Any amendments to the Code of Conduct can only be approved by full Council.

Recommendation to Council

That the Council be requested to agree the following amendment to paragraph 9 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct:

"9. In addition to compliance with this Code of Conduct, you are also expected to comply with:

- (i) the relevant requirements of the Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations, the Social Media Guidance for Councillors, [the Councillor Email Signature Guidance](#), and the Probity In Planning – Councillors’ Handbook, and
- (ii) any reasonable request by the Council that you complete a related party transaction disclosure.”

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure clarity for the recipients of emails sent by ward councillors in which capacity they are writing.

Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To ask the Council to agree to include in the Councillors’ Code of Conduct a requirement for councillors to comply with the relevant requirements of the Councillor Email Signature Guidance, which was approved by the Executive on 21 September 2021.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 The Council strives to be efficiently run using innovation, technology and new ways of working to improve value for money and efficiency in Council services.

3. Background

- 3.1 Following a councillor misconduct complaint from a resident about the lack of clarity regarding the capacity in which a member was corresponding there was an investigation. The investigator raised an issue with the Council that ought to be investigated further. This matter was the way in which some councillors used Borough Council email addresses to correspond on matters that were separate from Council business and that the councillors’ Borough Council email signatures listed various appointments and responsibilities that were separate to the business of the Borough Council. The Corporate Governance Task Group¹ was asked to investigate the matter and provide recommendations as a way forward.
- 3.2 The Task Group met on 12 April 2021, and more recently on 16 August 2021, to consider draft guidance prepared by the Monitoring Officer, which contained a number of guiding principles for councillors. In considering the guidance, the Task Group suggested to avoid the risk of confusion, non-Council roles (such as residents’ associations or companies to which they are appointed in their personal capacity) should not be included in email signatures or on paper correspondence.

¹ The Task Group currently comprises Councillors Deborah Seabrook (Chairman), Will Salmon, Nigel Manning, Ramsey Nagaty, and James Walsh, together with Julia Osborn and Murray Litvak (Parish Council Representative and Independent Member respectively on the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee)

- 3.3 It should also be noted that councillors should not use personal email addresses to conduct Council business.
- 3.4 It should be further noted that Council officers have been issued with a style template with which to create an email signature. The current template is set out below and may form a further example of how councillors might design their email signature to be in line with a cohesive corporate style which includes links to the Council's website and social media information points in Calibri 11 font.

Officer name

Job title

Service area

Contact telephone number

Guildford Borough Council

Twitter | Facebook | Instagram

Have you registered for your new MyGuildford account?

Your MyGuildford account gives you personalised access to a range of our services in one place. You can make requests, track progress, view your balance or bills and update your details. For more information or to register go to <https://my.guildford.gov.uk/customers/s/login/SelfRegister>

- 3.5 The Task Group recommended that the guidance be adopted and that all councillors be advised to apply the template, content, and format as set out so as to provide clear communication when conversing with residents and other correspondents. The draft guidance was subsequently considered by the Corporate Management Team (CMT), and then by the Executive at its meeting held on 21 September 2021. The Executive approved the guidance, incorporating a number of amendments, which is set out for information in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.6 The Task Group also recommended, and the Executive agreed, that it should be a requirement in the Councillors' Code of Conduct that councillors comply with this guidance, in the same way that it was agreed last year that the Code of Conduct should include a requirement for councillors to comply with the adopted Social Media Guidance for Councillors.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 No financial implications apply.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 Section 28 (13) of the Localism Act 2011 provides that the function of adopting, *revising*, or replacing a code of conduct may be discharged only by the authority (i.e., by way of a decision of full Council).

6. Human Resource Implications

6.1 No human resource implications apply.

7. Equality and Diversity Implications

7.1 Public authorities are required to have due regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) when making decisions and setting policies. This duty has been considered in the context of this report and it has been concluded that there are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report.

8. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

8.1 No Climate Change or sustainability implications apply.

9. Summary of Options

9.1 The Council may follow the Executive's recommendation to include in the Councillors' Code of Conduct, a requirement that councillors comply with the Email Signature Guidance approved by the Executive or decline to include such requirement.

10. Background Papers

Minutes of the private meetings of the Corporate Governance Task Group held 12 April 2021 and 16 August 2021.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Councillor Email Signature Guidance as agreed by the Executive on 21 September 2021