

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Protocol on Emails sent to all Councillors 20th January 2011

Report of the Monitoring Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek the Committee's views as to whether any action needs to be taken or guidelines set out to limit the sending of emails by councillors to all other councillors.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) **The views of the Committee are sought, which would then be forwarded as recommendations to the Council Business Committee.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Members of the Committee may recall that complaint 1/2010 related to emails sent by a Councillor, which he copied to all other councillors. During the course of the investigation and hearing process, the Councillor continued to copy all councillors into a number of emails, and the Monitoring Officer received a complaint from a Member about the practice.
- 1.2 The complainant stated, "I do feel that flooding every councillor's email box with letters that are not applicable to them in any way, shape or form seems as though it puts unnecessary pressure on other councillors with their email reading. I do understand that LCC employees have restrictions about what can be emailed to full council (ie all employees). Therefore, to see what would need to be done for the same rules applying to councillors in terms of list emails needing to be for announcements, what would be the procedure? I am hearing complaints from other councillors about receiving these inappropriate emails that have nothing to do with them."
- 1.3 There is currently in the Outlook Address List, an address "all councillors" which is available for any internal user to send emails to all members of the Council.
- 1.4 There is also a distribution group "all internal users" which covers all officers, but not members. However, this is not included in the Outlook Address List, so the full address has to be typed in, and in practice this is known to and available to only a limited number of officers in Information Services and

Communications, who may need to pass urgent messages to all officers. There is no written protocol as to the use of the “all internal users” address; but in practice it is rarely used except for matters of great importance or urgency.

- 1.5 In responding to the complaint, the Monitoring Officer advised that it was not appropriate for officers to dictate which members are sent emails by other members, and that officers assumed that members would be reasonable and sensible in the way they used email. However, the matter could be considered by the Standards Committee if there was a feeling among members that a protocol was required.
- 1.6 The complainant responded, “I do entirely agree that it is a reasonable presumption that councillors will be sensible in their usage of email, particularly email lists. However, it unfortunately does not seem as though this is not entirely true anymore, particularly over the past year or so. As I stated in my previous email, I am hearing complaints from other councillors about getting faster-filling email boxes due to 'junk' coming through the full council email lists. I understand that email lists can be extremely convenient if an announcement needs to be made, eg a meeting time/place assembly or change. However, it does not seem as though all councillors are using their best judgement prior to emailing the full council list and therefore it may be something that requires the examination of the Standards Committee. If you feel that it is appropriate, I do wish to submit a formal request for the Standards Committee to consider any possible guidelines or recommendations for the usage of email lists/groups. Perhaps a similar set of guidelines to those imposed on LCC employees for their email usage/habits should be extended to council members.”
- 1.7 The views of the Committee are therefore being sought.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 The “all councillors” email address does make it easy to send and copy emails to all members, and the Committee may feel that it would be appropriate to withdraw the address from the Outlook Address List, and make it only available to officers in Governance who have a routine need to circulate information to all members. This is one approach which the Committee may wish to consider.
- 2.2 However, it would still be possible for emails to be sent to all or a number of members by entering the appropriate email address for each. In particular, members of the public may wish to contact all or a number of councillors by email about a particular issue. Once an email has been sent in this way, it is very easy for a member to “reply to all”, so that the reply is sent to the whole of the original circulation list. This means that removing the “all councillors” email address may not be a complete solution to the problem. Most members will be proficient in emailing, but in any training provided for new members, it would be possible to stress the need to be selective in who a reply is sent to. If the Committee does not consider that this would be sufficient, guidance could be included in future versions of the Members’ Computer Usage and Policy document.
- 2.3 However, Members may consider that the problem is not sufficiently serious to merit any action and that it would be better simply to rely on the

reasonableness and good sense of members in dealing with emails.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 There has been no consultation.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: Remove “all councillors” from Outlook Address list	Option 2: Provide training and or written guidelines on emailing	Option 3: Take no action
Advantages	May reduce number of internal emails	May promote more responsible email usage	Allows members to be reasonable and use their own judgment
Disadvantages	Inconvenient for officers and members who might genuinely need to contact all members	Does not allow members to use their own judgment	
Risks	Other means of emailing all councillors are available	As above, guidelines might be too prescriptive	May not reduce the number of unwelcome emails

If the Committee felt that some action was necessary, this could be either option 1 or option 2, or both.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The Committee’s views are sought, and will be passed on to the Council Business Committee.

<p>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)</p> <p>None directly arising from this report.</p>
<p>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</p> <p>None directly arising from this report.</p>
<p>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</p> <p>There would be minimal resource implications in taking the action set out in options 1 or 2.</p>

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**Human Resources:**

None

Information Services:

None

Property:

None

Open Spaces:

None

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The report has been prepared by the Monitoring Officer in her capacity as the adviser to the Committee

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Contact Officer: Mrs S Taylor

Telephone: 01524 582025

E-mail: STaylor@lancaster.gov.uk

Ref: