

Parish Council WhatsApp Policy

1. Purpose

The Parish Council WhatsApp groups are used for operational and administrative communication between councillors and the Clerk. It is not a decision-making forum. All decisions must be made at properly convened council meetings.

2. Membership

- Members include elected councillors and the Parish Clerk.
- No external individuals may be added (without specific agreement and purpose)
- The Clerk is the Group Administrator.

3. Appropriate Use

WhatsApp may be used for:

- Meeting reminders and logistical updates
- Sharing non-confidential documents
- Reporting urgent issues (e.g., damage, hazards)
- Coordinating attendance at events or site visits

WhatsApp must not be used for:

- Debating agenda items
- Making decisions or forming consensus
- Discussing confidential matters
- Political content or personal opinions
- Complaints about staff, councillors, or residents

4. Conduct

- Messages must be respectful, concise, and relevant.
- No inappropriate language or personal criticism.
- Councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct.
- Avoid excessive messaging outside reasonable hours unless urgent.

5. Data Protection and Confidentiality

- WhatsApp messages may be subject to Freedom of Information requests.
- Personal data or confidential information must not be shared.
- Devices used for council communication should be secured with a screen lock and kept updated.
- Group Admin or group members to ensure they have disappearing messages switched on to ensure information is not retained beyond necessity.

6. Decision-Making

- No decisions may be made via WhatsApp.
- Views expressed in the group do not represent formal council positions.
- Matters requiring decisions must be placed on a published agenda and resolved at a meeting.

7. Record-Keeping

- Important information (e.g., photos of damage) should be forwarded to the Clerk's official email for proper recording.
- WhatsApp is not an official archive.

8. Removal of Members

- When a councillor leaves office, the Clerk will remove them from the group immediately.
- Members may request to leave the group at any time.

9. Breaches of the Policy

- Minor breaches may result in a reminder from the Clerk.
- Serious or repeated breaches may be referred to the Monitoring Officer under the Code of Conduct.

10. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or when legislation or best practice changes.