

Waltham Parish Council – WhatsApp Communication Policy

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the appropriate use of WhatsApp by councillors and staff to support communication within parish council working groups, while ensuring compliance with legal, governance, and transparency requirements.

2. Legal and Governance Context

The use of WhatsApp must comply with:

- The Local Government Act 1972
 - The Council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct
 - The Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - The UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
 - The Nolan Principles of Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership)
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3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All parish councillors
 - The Clerk and all council staff
 - Any WhatsApp groups created for parish council purposes
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4. Permitted Use

WhatsApp may be used for:

- Circulating working group agendas, meeting reminders, and logistics
 - Sharing publicly available information
 - Informal discussion to progress work between meetings
 - Operational updates (e.g. events, maintenance issues)
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5. Prohibited Use

WhatsApp must not be used for:

- Making decisions or reaching formal agreement on council business
 - Any discussion that could be seen as predetermining decisions ahead of a meeting
 - Sharing confidential, exempt, or personal information
 - Conducting business that should properly be recorded and minuted
 - Any inappropriate, offensive, or disrespectful communication
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6. Decision-Making

- The council is a corporate body and can only make decisions at properly convened meetings
 - WhatsApp must not be used to conduct or avoid formal decision-making
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7. Role of the Proper Officer (Clerk)

- The Clerk remains the Proper Officer for communication and record-keeping
 - Key information or decisions arising from WhatsApp discussions must be formally reported via the Clerk
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8. Conduct and Behaviour

Users must:

- Maintain professional and respectful communication at all times
 - Act in accordance with the council's Code of Conduct
 - Be mindful that messages may be subject to Freedom of Information requests
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9. Data Protection and Confidentiality

- Do not share personal data unless lawful and necessary
- Do not store or forward sensitive information via WhatsApp
- Any data breach must be reported immediately to the Clerk

- Members should ensure their devices are secure
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10. Transparency and Record Keeping

- WhatsApp messages relating to council business may be subject to FOI requests.
 - Important matters discussed must be transferred into formal records where appropriate
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11. Group Management

- Groups must be approved by the Clerk or Council
 - Membership must be restricted to relevant participants
 - Each group will have at least one administrator responsible for oversight
 - Groups should be periodically reviewed and closed when no longer required
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12. Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated as required.

Adopted on: _____