

Heytesbury, Imber & Knook Parish Council

WhatsApp Use Policy

Policy for Informal Communication Among Councillors

1. Purpose

This policy governs the use of WhatsApp for informal communication among councillors. It is designed to uphold transparency, professionalism, and ensure compliance with all legal obligations, including the Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection legislation.

2. Scope

- This policy applies to all councillors of Heytesbury, Imber & Knook Parish Council.
- It covers any WhatsApp group or message used for council-related communication.
- It does not replace formal communication channels such as email, meetings, or official documentation.

3. Acceptable Use

WhatsApp may be used for:

- Reminders (e.g. meeting times, agenda circulation)
- Urgent updates (e.g. site visits, weather alerts)
- Coordination of practical tasks (e.g. noticeboard updates)

WhatsApp must not be used for:

- Decision-making or voting
- Discussions on confidential HR, legal, or financial matters
- Debates on council policy or strategy
- Sharing personal or sensitive data

4. Information Governance

- Messages sent via WhatsApp may be subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.
- Councillors must avoid sharing personal data or confidential information on WhatsApp.
- Important communications should be copied to council email or recorded in meeting minutes when appropriate.

5. Group Management

- Membership is strictly limited to current councillors.
- Former members must be removed from the group promptly upon leaving the council.
- Chair shall serve as the group administrator.
- The group name should clearly identify it as an official council group.

6. Conduct

- All messages must adhere to the standards outlined in the Council's Code of Conduct.

- Communications must be respectful, professional, and free from discriminatory or offensive language.
- Councillors must not use WhatsApp to express personal opinions on matters pending council decision.

7. Data Retention & Security

- Councillors are responsible for archiving relevant messages and transferring them to council systems if required.
- Any data breach involving WhatsApp must be reported immediately.

8. Policy Enforcement

- Breaches of this policy may lead to removal from the group and referral to the Monitoring Officer or other disciplinary procedures.
- Councillors are expected to report any misuse or Chair.

9. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually at the Annual Council Meeting, or sooner if necessary.

Date: July 2025