

Patrington Parish Council

WhatsApp Use Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Patrington Parish Council will use WhatsApp as a tool to support internal communication between councillors and staff.

2. Scope

- Applies to all councillors and staff who are members of a council WhatsApp group.
- Covers both individual and group messaging related to council business.

3. Principles of Use

- WhatsApp is for informal communication only (e.g. reminders, updates, urgent notices).
- Decisions must not be made via WhatsApp – all decisions must be taken at duly convened meetings.
- WhatsApp is not a substitute for the Clerk's formal communications, agendas or papers.

4. Administration

- The Clerk (or nominated officer) will be the group administrator and one other Councillor.
- Membership is limited to councillors and staff.
- Members may leave the group at any time.

5. Conduct

- Posts must be respectful, relevant, and concise.
- No gossip, campaigning, or party-political material.
- Confidential or sensitive information must not be shared.
- Posting should be between the hours of 8.00 am and 9.00 pm.

6. Record Keeping & Transparency

- WhatsApp messages are not part of the official record of council business.
- If a message is required for record-keeping (e.g. complaint, decision-related matter, FOI request), it must be forwarded to the Clerk.

7. Data Protection & Security

- Members must use password-protected devices.
- WhatsApp is a third-party platform; sensitive personal data must not be shared.

8. Breach of Policy

- Misuse may result in removal from the group.
- Serious breaches may be investigated under the Code of Conduct. Under LGA guidelines, a policy must clearly define what attributes an offence. If any of the following occurs this will be classified as an offence;
 - Bullying
 - Discriminatory language
 - Bringing the Council into disrepute
 - Breaking confidentiality
 - GDPR
 - Deleting evidence.

9. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required.