

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
- ☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314
- 💻 **Website:** <https://colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk>
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2024-25 Item 53f

Email, WhatsApp, and Text Policy

This Policy is part of Colney Heath Parish Council's (CHPC) Code of Conduct and applies to all Councillors and the Parish Clerk when using email, WhatsApp, or text for council-related communication.

1. Scope and Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that email, WhatsApp, and text messaging are used responsibly and in accordance with data protection and governance regulations. All forms of communication should remain transparent, professional, and compliant with legal obligations, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.

2. Risks to Consider

When using email, WhatsApp, or text messages, the following risks must be kept in mind:

- Breach of data protection and GDPR 2018
- Summons for legal proceedings, including tribunals and courts
- Possible disclosure under a Freedom of Information (FOI) request
- Infringement of democratic processes by conducting business outside of public view
- Creating legal or financial liabilities for the Council

3. Guidelines for Use

a. Email Correspondence

When corresponding via email with Councillors, the Clerk, residents, or external bodies such as the District and County Councils, the following guidelines apply:

- **Confidentiality:** Do not disclose confidential information, especially matters that have been designated as private.
- **Representation:** Do not enter into any formal agreements or make representations on behalf of the Council unless authorised.
- **Language:** Ensure that the language used in emails is respectful and non-discriminatory. Avoid offensive or inappropriate language.
- **Third-party Access:** Only send emails you would be comfortable with being viewed by a third party, such as in an FOI request.
- **Liability:** Avoid making statements that could create legal or reputational liability for the Council.

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When sending emails, ensure the following etiquette is observed:

- Do not write in capital letters.
- Ensure proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Be polite, respectful, and courteous at all times.
- Copy the Clerk (clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk) into all email correspondence relating to Council business.

b. WhatsApp Use

WhatsApp is used primarily for informal, operational communication. Key uses of WhatsApp include:

- Monitoring and reporting on grounds maintenance, street furniture, and other public amenities.
- Sharing images or updates that can assist in delivering Council services more efficiently.

Important Notes on WhatsApp:

- Any decisions or discussions that require formal Council approval must be followed up by email and included in the agenda of a Council meeting.
- All WhatsApp groups established by the Parish Council must comply with GDPR 2018.
- Formal decisions cannot be made via WhatsApp and must be ratified through the proper channels.

To ensure proper use, the following etiquette should be maintained:

- Do not use offensive or inappropriate language.
- Avoid any behaviour that could be considered harassment or bullying.
- Respect confidentiality when discussing Council matters.

c. Text Messaging

Text messages are to be used sparingly and only when other methods of communication are unavailable. Guidelines include:

- Texts should not be used to discuss confidential matters or make decisions that require formal Council approval.
- Any decisions or Council-related matters discussed via text should be followed up through email or formal meetings.

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d. Use of Social Media (WhatsApp Administration)

For those managing and administering WhatsApp groups for the Parish Council, the following criteria apply:

- Admins must have a strong understanding of how the app works and ensure compliance with the Council's social media policy.
- No Councillors may be blocked within WhatsApp groups, ensuring full transparency in communications.
- At least three administrators, including the Chair, must be assigned to manage WhatsApp groups at all times.

4. Summary of Key Points:

- All forms of communication (email, WhatsApp, text) should adhere to GDPR and the democratic process.
- Sensitive or confidential matters should not be discussed via text or WhatsApp.
- Formal Council decisions must be documented through official channels such as meetings and emails.
- Courtesy, respect, and professionalism must be maintained at all times.

This policy ensures that Colney Heath Parish Council maintains high standards of communication, transparency, and compliance with legal requirements in all forms of digital communication.

5. Review

This policy was presented to Full Council in November 2024 and if adopted will be reviewed in November 2026 or as required if until legislation changes.