

# Use of Instant Messaging Applications (WhatsApp)

## 1. Introduction and Scope

1.1 Ditton Priors Parish Council recognizes that instant messaging, specifically WhatsApp, can be an effective tool for the timely dissemination of information and logistical coordination.

1.2 This policy applies to all Members of the Council and the Parish Clerk.

1.3 The use of WhatsApp is a supplement to, not a replacement for, formal communication via official Council email addresses and the Council website.

## 2. Status of Communications

2.1 **Official Records:** All messages sent within the group that relate to Council business are subject to the **Freedom of Information Act 2000**. Members should have no expectation of privacy regarding business-related messages.

2.2 **Code of Conduct:** The Council's **Code of Conduct** applies to all interactions within the group. Members must remain professional, respectful, and objective at all times.

## 3. Permitted and Prohibited Content

### 3.1 Permitted Use:

- Circulating links to published agendas or minutes.
- Checking availability for meetings (Quorum checks).
- Alerting members to urgent health and safety issues (e.g., fallen trees, flooded roads).
- Logistical updates (e.g., "The hall is open," "I am running 5 minutes late").

### 3.2 Prohibited Use:

- **Decision-Making:** No formal decisions or "straw polls" shall be conducted. All decisions must be made in a lawfully convened meeting.
- **Debate:** Members shall not engage in debate regarding the merits of planning applications, budget items, or any matter currently on a meeting agenda.
- **Confidentiality:** No sensitive personal data (GDPR protected) or "Part II" (confidential) council business shall be shared.

- **Political Lobbying:** The group shall not be used for political campaigning or biased commentary.

#### **4. Administration and Management**

4.1 The **Parish Clerk** shall be the primary Group Admin.

4.2 Upon a Councillor's resignation or the end of their term, the Clerk shall remove that individual from the group immediately.

4.3 Members are encouraged to use a "Two-Step Verification" on their WhatsApp account to ensure the security of the group.

#### **5. Working Hours and Wellbeing**

5.1 To respect the "Right to Disconnect," messages should ideally be sent during standard office hours (e.g., 09:00–17:00), unless an emergency occurs.

5.2 The Clerk is not expected to respond to messages outside of their contracted hours.

#### **6. Document Retention**

6.1 If a message contains information that should be part of the public record (e.g., a report of a defect), the Clerk shall transcribe that information into a formal email or minute and the WhatsApp message should then be deleted according to the Council's Retention Policy.

This policy will be incorporated into a communications policy for the council to be considered at a future meeting.

Approved July 2026