

MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Email, Text and WhatsApp Policy

This Policy forms part of Mistley Parish Council's (MPC) Code of Conduct and applies to Councillors and the Clerk when using email, text or WhatsApp. (Text and WhatsApp are primarily between Councillors, the Parish Clerk). There is a separate WhatsApp group for the Council and its grounds maintenance contractors. Another group has also been set for the Charity where the Council is sole trustee. The Clerk uses WhatsApp at times to communicate with the Council's Warden.

When using e-mail to correspond with other Councillors, the Parish Clerk, residents, the District and County Councils, this should have regard to the following:

Risks:

- Breach of data protection and GDPR 2018
- Summons for presentation to tribunals/courts
- Disclosure under Freedom of Information request
- Disenfranchise the public by conducting business remotely
- Non-compliance with democratic process

Do not:

- use language that could offend, discriminate or cause embarrassment
- discuss business that should be seen/heard by the public
- write about matters declared to be confidential
- infringe copyright
- enter into contractual commitment or make representations by e-mail unless appropriate authority has been obtained
- send e-mails which you would not want a third party to read
- make statement(s) which is/are likely to create any liability for you or the Council

Etiquette:

- do not write in capitals
- use proper spelling, grammar & punctuation
- use appropriate terminology at start and end of text
- be polite and respectful
- use basic courtesy
- do not 'bully' or 'harass'
- cc all emails to mistleyparishclerk@gmail.com

Use of the mobile phone application WhatsApp has become more and more relevant, largely replacing texting as one of the most popular forms of communication and with the ease of sending photographs and images, this is a much more instant way of assisting to deliver the Council's services and facilities, albeit in a more informal way. All WhatsApp messages that require a formal decision or resolution are always backed up by emails and at Parish Council Committees (delegated powers) and Meetings.

WhatsApp also differs from other forms of social media such as Facebook or Twitter in that comments cannot be seen publicly. Instead, they can only be viewed by individuals who are part of a particular WhatsApp focus group. It can assist with checking on grounds maintenance work and street furniture and means a more speedy and efficient service delivery to our residents because this form of communication is shared more instantly. All WhatsApp groups set up by the Parish Council comply with the GDPR 2018.

Criteria for running our social media. Must have a good understanding of how the accounts work, must follow the media/social media policy, have approval from the chair for publication and comment. Use the application to actively promote the work of MPC.

To be eligible to be an admin you must have a very good working knowledge of the app, have no other councillors blocked as this restricts transparency and act promptly to questions from parishioners. A minimum of three councillor admins at all times' including the Chair.

Review Body: Full Parish Council. Review period – annually each May. Adopted 20/05/2019. Last Reviewed 01.07.2024. Next Review Date May 2025.