



# Communication Policy & Procedures

*(Previously known as Social Media & Website  
Policies)*

Adopted by Marden Parish Council on: 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Reviewed on: 9<sup>th</sup> September 2023 / 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Review date: March 2025

Office Opening Times:

Mondays, Tuesdays & Fridays 10am - 12 noon

[www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](http://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk)

Email: [clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk)

Communication Policy and Procedures

# MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL

## COMMUNICATION POLICY & PROCEDURE

### INTRODUCTION

Marden Parish Council is committed to engaging with all residents on a regular basis through the following channels: social media, website, noticeboards, Marden Parish Council Newsletter (see separate policy) and a weekly e-newsletter.

### SOCIAL MEDIA & WEBSITE POLICY

This Policy is intended to help staff and members of Marden Parish Council make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and use of computers.

This Policy outlines the standards which should be observed when using social media and computers, the circumstances in which use of social media will be monitored and the action which will be taken in respect of breaches of this Policy.

This Policy is intended to:

- (i) Introduce various forms of social media
- (ii) Set down rules governing the basic use of social media
- (iii) Provide guidance in relation to the use of social media and to highlight some of the pitfalls to avoid
- (iv) Guidance on the personal use of Marden Parish Council computers
- (v) Email usage for staff and councillors

All Councillors and employees are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of Marden Parish Council and anyone, or company, Marden Parish Council is dealing with.

Only those persons authorised by the Parish Clerk are permitted to post material, or use the Council's logo, heading or imagery on social media and websites in the Council's name and on its behalf.

#### Examples of social media:

- (i) Facebook: mainly a website which allows users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues
- (ii) Twitter: for telling people what one is doing or thinking
- (iii) WhatsApp: for MPC groups for providing reminders of meetings, bank authorisations etc.
- (iv) Instagram: for showing people pictures
- (v) YouTube: for showing people videos
- (vi) LinkedIn: for work networking

Currently Marden Parish Council uses:

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/MardenParishCouncil/>)

Website ([www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](http://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk))

Twitter (@mardenkentpc)

Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/mardenparishcouncil/>)

## **SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND INSTAGRAM)**

Engaging with the Council on social media:

- (i) The Council encourages members of the public, local organisations and community groups, members of the press, local councillors and others in our wider community to follow and engage with the Council through social media accounts.
- (ii) We also encourage everyone in our community to share content from our corporate social media accounts with their own social media networks. This is especially important for example, during emergency situations or where sharing timely information is essential.
- (iii) Individuals and organisations are responsible for the content that they choose to post to their social media accounts. This includes content created by others that individuals or organisations choose to repost, retweet or share.

In order to ensure that all discussions on any Marden Parish Council social media platform are productive, respectful, energised and consistent with the Council's mission and goals, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- (i) The Council will treat everyone with courtesy and respect on its social media channels, and we therefore ask for the same in return from those who choose to engage with us.
- (ii) We ask that Council staff and Councillors are treated courteously. Council staff and Councillors should never be subjected to bullying or other forms of abuse or harassment.
- (iii) Council staff and Councillors have the right to carry out their civic duties and work without fear from being attacked or abused. Any behaviour whether that be verbal, physical or in writing, which causes either Councillors or Council staff to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or threatened, is unacceptable.
- (iv) Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- (v) Stay on topic.
- (vi) Refrain from using any Social Media page for commercial purposes or to market products.

Social Media sites are not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people.

Sending a message/post via Social Media will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through any Social Media channel. Please do not include personal/private information in any Social Media posts or messages.

Reporting a civility and respect-related issues:

- (i) Council staff and others operating the Council's social media accounts will at all times be mindful of the Council's relevant policies, procedures and processes, including the Code of Conduct.
- (ii) The Council will record and report abuse directed at the Council. The Council may, for example, create screenshots of comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications, any may take further action as appropriate.
- (iii) Council staff and Councillors should not have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour. When subjected to such behaviour, the Council reserves the right to enact its relevant social media policies and may, for example, delete content, block individuals or report individuals to social media platforms when appropriate to do so.
- (iv) The Council may need to report issues of poor conduct directly to social media platforms. For instance, if someone has created a "fake account" or if someone is persistently abusive to the Council.

- (v) The Council reserves the right to report criminal matters it notices on social media to the Police. For instance, hate crime/speech or threats of violence.
- (vi) Please get in touch with the Council if you feel that a Councillor, members of staff or a user of our social media has failed to act in a civil and respectful way on our social media.
- (vii) You can contact Alison Hooker, the Clerk in the following ways: Parish Office, Marden Memorial Hall, Goudhurst Road, Marden, Kent, TN12 9JX, telephone 01622 832305 or email [clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk).

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- (i) Obscene or racist content
- (ii) Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- (iii) Potentially libellous statements
- (iv) Plagiarised material, any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- (v) Private, personal information published without consent
- (vi) Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- (vii) Commercial promotions or spam.

Any publisher can hide a comment and should email the Communication Sub-Group to advise them. If a social media user persistently contravenes the policy, the Clerk/Deputy Clerk will contact the Communication Sub-Group members to agree if further action writing should be taken. Following this, the Clerk/Deputy Clerk may contact the users either by email or by private message to tell them their comment is inappropriate and does not comply with our Communication policy. If further comments that contravene our Communication policy, the social media user will be blocked from the Marden Parish Council social media page for one month.

Marden Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber to any forum; opinions expressed in comments on Marden Parish Council's social media forums do not necessary represent those of Marden Parish Council.

All comments, once posted, become the property of Marden Parish Council and we reserve the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display or edit. Derivative work can also be created from such postings or content, and used for any purpose, in any form and on any other media.

Marden Parish Council is not responsible, liable for and does not endorse the privacy practices of any Social Media platform or any other linked websites. The use of Marden Parish Council social media platforms and any linked websites are at the users own risk.

Marden Parish Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from any websites.

Social Media platforms may occasionally be unavailable and Marden Parish Council accepts no responsibility for this lack of service.

Only public events will be published/shared on Marden Parish Council's social media pages.

No profit making activities will be published/shared on Marden Parish Council's social media pages.

The presence of any advertisement on these Social Media platforms is not an endorsement of the authenticity or quality of the goods, services or website and Marden Parish Council will not be held responsible for any claims arising in that respect.

MPC will not engage in/with, and we discourage posts or comments on, issues of a political nature.

Comments should not advertise commercial products or services.

By choosing to comment and/or utilise any Marden Parish Council Social Media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

This Policy may be revised at any time.

## **USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY STAFF AND COUNCILLORS (on personal and work accounts)**

When using social media Councillors and Staff should not represent their personal views as being either the views or the policies of the Parish Council, nor should they represent their views as being those of other Councillors or staff unless with those Councillors' or staff's express permission.

Councillors and staff should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other Councillors/staff and individuals or organisations with whom the Parish Council has dealings (in accordance with the Nolan principles of conduct in public life (*The 7 Principles of Public Life: Selflessness; Integrity; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty and Leadership* ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life)))).

## **USE OF WHATSAPP**

### Introduction

Marden Parish Council has agreed that it would be advantageous for Cllrs and officers of the Council to have access to WhatsApp messaging groups for the sharing of information outside of formal Council meetings.

Membership of these groups is discretionary and does not replace the decision-making framework of properly convened meetings and the Council's scheme of delegation.

These groups will only be for Cllrs and Officers of MPC. Any members of the public who are on any of the Sub-Committees/Sub-Groups will be contacted separately via text/email from an Officer to provide the information given in the WhatsApp conversation.

Mobile phone numbers of Cllrs and Officers will be visible to everyone in the group.

### Purpose

Marden Parish Councillors and Officers who have given their consent for their data to be processed in this way will be added to WhatsApp groups as appropriate.

A general group will be set up and all Parish Councillors, who have given their consent, and Officers will be members of this group. Additional groups can be set up for individual Sub-Committees/Sub-Groups if appropriate.

It is for the sharing of information only, for example issuing reminders about meetings, reminders to authorise bank payments, to arrange a meeting date of a Sub-Group. **Decisions relating to Parish Council business will NOT be taken via this medium.**

This is not a platform for Cllrs to give apologies to meetings. These should be sent by Cllrs to an Officer via email.

### Employees

The Parish Clerk, or Deputy Clerk, will be the sole administrators of all groups created on behalf of Marden Parish Council.

Other employees may also be members of the groups as appropriate.

Employees will usually respond within their normal working hours but may, at their own discretion, respond at other times.

#### Access and Erasure Requests

Cllrs and Officers have the right to request modification of the information kept on record (eg mobile phone numbers) by Marden Parish Council and for their removal from any of the WhatsApp groups at any time.

Cllrs and Officers phone numbers must not be passed on via the WhatsApp group, or any other medium, (eg messages must not be forwarded to phone numbers not already in the group or via any other method).

When a Cllr, or Officer, leaves MPC their details will be deleted from any WhatsApp group.

#### Data Security

Cllrs and Officers must ensure that any devices used for WhatsApp communication are secure, with up-to-date software and strong passwords.

#### Agreement to Process Data

Cllrs and Officers acknowledge that they have read and understood Marden Parish Council's Privacy Notice [Policies & Procedures - Marden Parish Council - Marden Parish Council, Marden, Tonbridge \(mardenkent-pc.gov.uk\)](https://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/policies-procedures).

Cllrs will inform the Clerk by email to confirm whether they wish their mobile number to be used for a WhatsApp group or not.

Officers, and any other MPC employee, are requested to sign the agreement at the end of this document to agree that the Council may process and share personal information, including mobile phone number, for statutory purposes, in relation to the activities of Marden Parish Council. This information will not be passed on to third parties without the Officers permission.

### **USE OF MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE**

This part of the policy reflects the Council's intentions on how the website will be managed, and how the content and links to external sites will be determined.

Marden Parish Council is committed to providing and promoting access to news, history and information relevant to the Parish of Marden for public access and one of the ways is to maintain a website.

The Parish Clerk and the Deputy Clerk will maintain the website content to ensure it is up to date. All correspondence to the council via the website will be acknowledged within two working days of receipt by the Clerk or the Deputy Clerk.

#### Content:

The Clerk and Deputy Clerk will evaluate all potential content requests from outside bodies to ensure it is appropriate for the Parish Council website.

#### Photographs:

The photo gallery is used to store and display photographs of interest appropriate to Marden and is editable by the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk. Photographs of children can be used on the website without consent only where individuals cannot be identified (eg from a distance). Marden Parish Council will obtain consent of parent/carer of children if identifiable photos are used. Personal details of children will never be shown in photographs or included in any accompanying text. Photographs

showing adults in group situations or where individuals are unidentifiable are used without seeking consent from those individuals involved. They will be removed however upon request by an individual involved.

#### Website Links:

Marden Parish Council's website contains hyperlinks to other public and private organisation websites. External links are identified in the link text or an accompanying description. To be included websites must meet the following criteria:

- (i) The primary intent of the website is to educate or inform;
- (ii) The site's owner or sponsor is easily identifiable, and contact information is provided;
- (iii) The site does not charge for access;
- (iv) The site does not promote a specific political or social agenda;
- (v) The site provides useful information on local services for the community;
- (vi) Only Marden, surrounding parishes and local & central government website links will be published.

Since website content may change or disappear entirely without notice, the council cannot be held responsible for the content or accuracy of external websites.

### **PERSONAL USE OF COMPUTERS**

Computers are provided to members of staff to carry out authorised business functions. The equipment should not be used by anyone other than a staff member or someone authorised to act on behalf of the Parish Council.

### **ACCEPTABLE USE**

Marden Parish Council accepts that some personal use, including use of the internet emails will occur. This should only occur when computers are not needed for office work and within user's own time. Nevertheless, as a generality, personal use should not be frequent or excessive. It is sensible advice to point out that when the office computer equipment is used for personal purposes it should only be used for those things the user would not mind their employer knowing about.

The office computers or services must not be used for outside business interests.

Personal usage should be within the bounds of law and decency. Appropriate courtesy and respect should be given to others.

No sexually explicit or racist material, indecent images of children or any material likely to cause offence or embarrassment to others should be created, downloaded or accessed. Only chat rooms or social networking sites directly related to work purposes, such as Data Protection and Freedom of Information should be visited

Failure to abide by the terms of this Policy may result in disciplinary action for staff.

### **ACCESS FOR INFORMATION REQUEST COMPLIANCE (*see also GDPR Policy*)**

Only staff and members who have agreed to this Policy may use Council owned computers. Copies of non-work related emails or other documents on any work computers, would possibly be made available if the office receives a request under the General Data Protection Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act.

## **EMAIL USAGE**

The following is basically an Advice Note for Councillors and staff setting down what is good practice in the use of the emailing facility as far as Marden Parish Council matters are concerned.

In drawing up this advice, it is acknowledged that Councillors' own private email accounts cannot be monitored in any way. There are, however, certain protocols which should be observed such as, for example, contact with the press.

It should be noted also that despite extensive enquiries no precedent has been found amongst Town and Parish Councils for a defined email usage policy for Councillors. Council staff who have access to council-owned computers can however be subject to a strictly defined email policy.

The Councillors are recommended to follow this protocol when using email correspondence in the course of discharging their duties and responsibilities as Parish Councillors.

In the interests of good practice Councillors should refrain from creating unnecessary email congestion by sending messages of a trivial nature to the Council's email address or by copying emails to persons who do not need to see them.

Councillors should be aware that they must never forward information of a confidential nature to outside parties.

Councillors are reminded that Standing Order 22 states that written statements or written articles (which of course includes email messages) to the press should be in accordance with the Council's Press and Media Policy. Councillors should bear in mind at all times that decisions of the Council are binding on all members and that comments should be confined to matters on which the Council has reached agreement. More details concerning this will be found in the Council's policy document relating to contact with the press and other media.

One aspect to be borne in mind is that Councillors should always consider how they would feel if an email message originating from them were to be read out and used as evidence in court. Under current law email messages may in certain circumstances have to be disclosed in litigation.

Councillors will be aware that distributing or disseminating email messages which might be considered discriminatory, offensive or abusive would constitute unacceptable behaviour.

Inappropriate use of email could be considered a breach of the Councillors Code of Conduct.

## **NOTICEBOARD POLICY**

See separate Noticeboard Policy for details.

## **AGREEMENT**

A copy of is made available to all staff and Cllrs of Marden Parish Councillors. Cllrs adoption of this policy at an annual Full Council meeting (as dated on front of document) gives acknowledgement that all abide by the contents.

Officers, and any other MPC employees, by signing below, agree with the content of this policy and that the Council may process and share their personal information, including mobile phone number, for statutory purposes, providing information and corresponding with them in relation to the activities of Marden Parish Council. These details will not be passed to a third party without their prior agreement.

Signed:

Date:

Alison Hooker

Signed:

Date:

Rachel Gillis-Coates

Signed:

Date:

Lisa Stevens

Other employees are also provided with copies of the document if use social media. As at 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 no other staff use Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp nor can gain access to the administration of the website.

**Office Opening Times**

Mondays, Tuesdays & Fridays 10am - 12 noon

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