

Agenda item 10

For decision – WhatsApp Policy

Authors: Laura Hales, Marketing and communications Officer and Rachel Griffin, Marketing and Communications Manager

Summary (incl. recommendations)

A policy to cover Frome Town Council’s staff, councillors and volunteers use of WhatsApp groups, broadcasts and communications.

The recommendation is to agree to adopt and implement the Policy

This report presents a draft WhatsApp Policy for Frome Town Council to be read with the Appendix 1 Notes on WhatsApp. [The policy can be read at Appendix 10.1 on the website here.](#) [The notes on WhatsApp can be read at Appendix 10.2 on the website here.](#) The policy has been developed to provide clear guidance on the appropriate use of WhatsApp in both internal and external communication, recognising its growing use as a practical, informal tool across council activity. One of the key outcomes of the “Communicating with Us” survey conducted in July last year was to explore new communication methods, including a WhatsApp broadcast channel, which is why we are taking this forward.

While WhatsApp can support quick and effective communication, it also presents challenges in relation to data protection, transparency and governance. The policy therefore sets out clear boundaries to ensure its use remains appropriate, proportionate and compliant with the council’s legal obligations, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) where possible and the Freedom of Information Act. This includes clear guidance and opt out information.

The policy applies to all councillors, employees and volunteers of Frome Town Council, as well as any third-party stakeholders (such as residents, contractors or community group leaders) who are included in council-managed WhatsApp groups. It covers WhatsApp groups and communities (multi-way communication), broadcast lists or channels (one-way communication), and any council-related communication conducted on either personal or council devices.

The intention of the policy is not to prevent the use of WhatsApp, a broadcast channel that was requested by respondents following our Communication engagement last summer, but to ensure it is used appropriately, supporting operational communication while maintaining clear separation from formal decision-making and record-keeping processes.

Key considerations for the Council

- The increasing use of WhatsApp across council activity and the need to provide clear, consistent guidance
- Ensuring compliance with UK GDPR where possible, Freedom of Information legislation and local government decision-making requirements

- Balancing the practical benefits of WhatsApp with the need for transparency, record-keeping and appropriate governance
- Reputational considerations in how council communications are conducted and perceived

Consultation and feedback

- Internal discussion with officers on current usage and practical needs
- Informal benchmarking against policies from other town and parish councils

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

- Supports the Council Plan commitment to transparent, accountable and effective governance
- Supports improved communication and engagement with residents and community groups
- No direct implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan

Financial and Risk Implications

- No direct financial implications
- Reduces risk relating to data protection breaches, informal decision-making and reputational impact
- Provides a framework to manage and mitigate communication-related risks

Legal / HR Implications

- Supports compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018
- Reinforces requirements under the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Clarifies expectations for staff and councillors, reducing risk of inappropriate use or conduct
- May inform internal HR processes where misuse occurs

Equalities Implications

- Ensures communication practices are inclusive and respectful
- Policy devised to be read with the communication policy
- Recognises that WhatsApp may not be accessible to all residents, reinforcing the need to maintain alternative communication channels

Community Safety Implications

- Supports appropriate and responsible communication in community-facing groups
- Reduces the risk of misinformation, inappropriate content or conflict within council-managed groups

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

- None

Health and Safety Implications

- None

Report sign off

Peter Wheelhouse, Acting Town Clerk 19/3/26

Recommendation

Agree to adopt and implement the Policy