



MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL

IT, EMAIL and COMMUNICATION POLICY & PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

Marden Parish Council (MPC) recognises the importance of effective and secure information technology (IT) and email usage in supporting its business, operations and communications.

MPC 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.

This Policy applies to all individuals who use MPC's IT resources, including computers, networks, software, devices, data and email accounts.

This Policy is intended to help employees and Cllrs of Marden Parish Council to 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:

- Introduce various forms of social media
- Set down rules governing the basic use of social media
- Provide guidance in relation to the use of social media and to highlight some of the pitfalls to avoid
- Guidance on the personal use of MPC computers
- Email usage for staff and councillors

All Cllrs and employees are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of MPC and anyone, or company, MPC 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.

Office Opening Times:

Mondays, Tuesdays & Fridays 10am - 12 noon

Email: clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk

Website: www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk

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Examples of social media:

- 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
- Twitter (X): for telling people what one is doing or thinking
- WhatsApp: for MPC groups for providing reminders of meetings, bank authorisations etc.
- Instagram: for showing people pictures
- YouTube: for showing people videos
- LinkedIn: for work networking

Currently MPC uses:

- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/MardenParishCouncil/>)
- Website (www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk)
- Twitter (X) (@mardenkentpc)
- Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/mardenparishcouncil/>)

ACCEPTABLE USE OF IT RESOURCES AND EMAIL

MPC's IT resources and email accounts are to be used for official council-related activities and tasks. Limited personal use is permitted, provided it does not interfere with work responsibilities or violate any part of this policy. All users must adhere to ethical standards, respect copyright and intellectual property rights, and avoid accessing inappropriate or offensive content.

Cllrs and staff's own private email accounts cannot be monitored in any way. All Cllrs and office staff have a mardenkent-pc.gov.uk email account and this email account **MUST** be used at all times for Council business. Personal emails should **NOT** be used for Council work nor linked to Council email accounts.

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Email accounts provided by MPC are for official communication only. Emails should be professional and respectful in tone. Confidential or sensitive information must **NOT** be sent via email unless it is encrypted.

Be cautious with attachments and links to avoid phishing and malware. Verify the source before opening any attachments or clicking on links.

In the interests of good practice Cllrs 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.

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

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EMAIL MONITORING

MPC reserves the right to monitor email communications to ensure compliance with this policy and relevant laws. Monitoring will be conducted in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR.

RETENTION AND ARCHIVING

Emails should be retained and archived in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Regularly review and delete unnecessary emails to maintain an organised inbox.

DEVICE AND SOFTWARE USAGE

Where possible, authorised devices, software and applications will be provided by MPC for work-related tasks.

Unauthorised installation of software on authorised devices, including personal software, is strictly prohibited due to security concerns.

NETWORK AND INTERNET USAGE

MPC's network and internet connections should be used responsibly and efficiently for official purposes. Downloading and sharing copyrighted material without proper authorisation is prohibited.

PASSWORD AND ACCOUNT SECURITY

MPC users are responsible for maintaining the security of their accounts and passwords. Passwords should be strong and not shared with others. Regular password changes are encouraged to enhance security.

Computer screens should be password protected and not be left open for others to view work when user is away from the desk.

MOBILE DEVICES AND REMOTE WORKING

Mobile devices provided by MPC should be secured with passcodes and/or biometric authentication. When working remotely, users should follow the same security practices as if they were in the office.

SOCIAL MEDIA (Facebook, Twitter (X) and Instagram)

Engaging with MPC on social media:

MPC encourages members of the public, local organisations and community groups, members of the press, local councillors and others in our wider community to follow the Council through social media accounts.

MPC also encourages everyone in our community to share content from our corporate social media accounts with their own social media networks. This is

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especially important for example, during emergency situations or where sharing timely information is essential.

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 MPC social media platform are productive, respectful, energised and consistent with the Council's mission and goals, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- MPC 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
- MPC asks that Council employees and Cllrs are treated courteously. Council employees and Cllrs should never be subjected to bullying or other forms of abuse or harassment
- Council employees and Cllrs 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 Cllrs or Council employees to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or threatened, is unacceptable
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due
- Stay on topic
- Refrain from using any Social Media page for commercial purposes or to market products

Social Media sites are not monitored 24/7. However, MPC 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 MPC for official purposes and MPC 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. Any issues you wish raised with MPC please contact the office via email (clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk or deputyclerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk)

Reporting a civility and respect-related issues:

- Council employees and others operating MPC's social media accounts will, at all times, be mindful of MPC's relevant policies, procedures and processes, including the Code of Conduct

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- MPC will record and report abuse directed at the Council. MPC may, for example, create screenshots of comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications, any may take further action as appropriate
- Council employees and Cllrs 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
- MPC 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
- MPC reserves the right to report criminal matters it notices on social media to the Police. For instance, hate crime/speech or threats of violence
- Please get in touch with MPC if you feel that a Cllr, a Council employee or a user of our social media has failed to act in a civil and respectful way on our social media

You can contact the Parish Clerk, Alison Hooker, 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.

MPC retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material, any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam

Any publisher can hide a comment and should email the Communication Sub-Group (deputyclerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk) 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 this policy. If further comments that contravene this policy the social media user will be blocked from the MPC’s social media page for one month.

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

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All comments, once posted, become the property of MPC and MPC reserves 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.

MPC 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 MPC's social media platforms and any linked websites are at the users own risk.

MPC 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 MPC accepts no responsibility for this lack of service.

Only public events will be published/shared on MPC's social media pages.

No profit-making activities will be published/shared on MPC'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 MPC 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 MPC social media sites, users are deemed to agree to this policy.

This Policy may be revised at any time.

Use of Social Media by Employees and Cllrs (on personal and work accounts)

When using social media Cllrs and employees should not represent their personal views as being either the views or the policies of MPC, nor should they represent their views as being those of other Cllrs or employees unless with those Cllrs or employees' express permission.

Cllrs and employees should refrain from personal criticism in social media of other Cllrs/employees and individuals or organisations with whom MPC has dealings (in accordance with the Nolan principles of conduct in public life (*The 7 Principles of*

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Public Life: Selflessness; Integrity; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty and Leadership (www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life)).

USE OF WHATSAPP

Introduction

MPC has agreed that it would be advantageous for Cllrs and employees 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 MPC's scheme of delegation.

These groups will only be for Cllrs and employees 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 employees will be visible to everyone in the group.

Purpose

Marden Parish Councillors and employees 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 employees 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 the relevant Clerk via email.

Employees

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

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

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

Cllrs and employees 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 employee, leaves MPC their details will be deleted from any WhatsApp group.

Data Security

Cllrs and employees 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 employees acknowledge that they have read and understood MPC'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.

MPC employees, who use social media/MPC IT equipment, 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 MPC. This information will not be passed on to third parties without the employee's permission.

WEBSITE

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.

MPC 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.

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The office staff will maintain the website content to ensure it is up to date. All correspondence to the council via the website will be acknowledged within five 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 office staff. Photographs of children can be used on the website without consent only where individuals cannot be identified (eg from a distance). MPC 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:

MPC'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, MPC cannot be held responsible for the content or accuracy of external websites.

PERSONAL USE OF COMPUTERS

Computers are provided to MPC employees 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 MPC.

Acceptable Use

MPC 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

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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 COMPLIANT (see also GDPR Policy)

Only Cllrs and employees 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.

PRESS AND MEDIA CONTACT

Cllrs 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 MPC's Press and Media Policy. Cllrs should bear in mind at all times that decisions of MPC are binding on all Cllrs and that comments should be confined to matters on which MPC has reached agreement. More details concerning this will be found in the MPC's policy document relating to contact with the press and other media.

One aspect to be borne in mind is that Cllrs 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.

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

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

NOTICEBOARD POLICY

See separate Noticeboard Policy for details.

REPORTING SECURITY INCIDENTS

All suspected security breaches or incidents should be reported immediately to the designated IT point of contact for investigation and resolution. Report any email-related security incidents or breaches to the IT administrator immediately.

TRAINING AND AWARENESS

MPC will provide regular training and resources to educate users about IT security best practices, privacy concerns, and technology updates. All employees and Cllrs will receive regular training/updates on email security and best practices.

COMPLIANCE AND CONSEQUENCES

Breach of this IT, Email and Communications Policy may result in the suspension of IT privileges and further consequences as deemed appropriate and/or considered a breach of the Cllrs Code of Conduct.

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

One aspect to be borne in mind is that Cllrs and staff should always consider who 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.

POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Updates may be made to address emerging technology trends and security measures.

CONTACTS

For IT-related enquiries or assistance, users can contact the Parish Clerk (01622 832305 / clerk@mardenkent-pc.gov.uk) in the first instance. Referral may be made by the Clerk to Cloudy IT (MPC's IT Support) if issue cannot be resolved.

AGREEMENT

All staff and Cllrs are responsible for the safety and security of MPC's IT and email systems. By adhering to this policy MPC aims to create a secure and efficient IT environment that supports its mission and goals.

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

Officers, and any other MPC employees, by signing below, agree with the contact 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: (Alison Hooker)
Date:

Signed: (Rachel Weeks)
Date:

Signed: (Lisa Stevens)
Date:

Signed: (Chris Prince)
Date:

Signed: (Neil Watkins)
Date:

Employees are provided with copies of the document within their HR Employees Handbook. As at 14th October 2025 grounds staff (CP and NW) only use MPC WhatsApp and cannot gain access to the administration of the website.

Adopted by Marden Parish Council on: 10th May 2022
Reviewed on: 9th September 2023 / 12th March 2024 / 14th January 2025
Renamed: 14th October 2025 (new IT Policy combined with Communications and Social Media policy)
Review date: March 2026

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