WOODHAM FERRERS & BICKNACRE PARISH COUNCIL

White Elm Garden Centre, White Elm Road, Bicknacre, Chelmsford, CM3 4LR
Tel: 07931 558125
Email: clerk@woodhamferrersandbicknacre-pc.gov.uk
Website: www.woodhamferrersandbicknacre-pc.gov.uk

IT AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

Adopted 5th December 2023
Updated October 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Parish Council recognises that digital and electronic communication improves interaction both within the Council and between the Council and the public, businesses, and partner agencies.

The Parish Council operates a website, a Facebook page, and email as primary channels of communication and will continue to adopt additional channels as necessary. This policy will be updated to reflect any new communication methods.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL – BUSINESS USE

Communications from the Parish Council must:

- Be civil, tasteful, and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually explicit, or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere without copyright permission;
- Only contain personal information if necessary for basic contact purposes;
- Be moderated by the Clerk if it relates to official Council business.

Parish Council Website

The website may be used to provide information in the public domain:
Woodham Ferrers & Bicknacre Parish Council

Approved local groups may maintain a presence on the website to present their activities. Content remains the responsibility of the group, though the Council reserves the right to remove content that does not meet its standards. Any group-maintained content should clearly state that it is not directly the responsibility of the Council.

Parish Council Email

- The Council maintains a dedicated email address: **clerk@woodhamferrersandbicknacre-pc.gov.uk**, monitored during office hours (Monday–Wednesday).
- The Clerk manages all correspondence and forwards relevant information to members or external agencies.
- Emails become official records and are subject to the **Freedom of Information Act**.
- Emails will be deleted once they are no longer required.
- Councillors must only use their Council-provided email for official correspondence and should remove personal accounts from devices where Council emails are accessed.

SMS and Instant Messaging (WhatsApp)

- SMS may be used as a convenient communication tool, with messages deleted within one week.
- The Parish Council operates a WhatsApp group for **quick notifications and coordination**, but **decisions cannot be made via WhatsApp**. It is strictly for informal communication and alerts.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct in all Council work.
- Councillors are provided with dedicated '.gov.uk' email addresses accessed via webmail to prevent security breaches on personal devices: https://www.stackmail.com.
- Electronic communication of agendas and meeting papers is authorised under the Electronic Communications Act 2000, consistent with Standing Orders.

Confidentiality:

- Sensitive information must be handled securely and confidentially.
- Sharing confidential information without authorisation may constitute a Code of Conduct breach or criminal offence.
- Only essential recipients should be included in email correspondence; avoid "Reply All" unless necessary.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION AWARENESS

Councillors must protect personal data (for living individuals only) including:

- Names, addresses, and phone numbers
- Email addresses

- IP addresses

Councillors are required to:

- Only use Council email accounts for official correspondence.
- Include the Council footer or Privacy Statement in correspondence.
- Password-protect all devices (computers, laptops, phones).
- Avoid forwarding emails with personal data, or redact data if forwarding.
- Delete emails no longer required.
- Direct correspondence to the Clerk wherever possible to obtain consent.
- Store any personal data securely in locked rooms/cabinets or encrypted folders if on PCs.
- Ensure antivirus software and operating systems are up-to-date.
- Ensure firewalls are enabled.
- Notify the Parish Office of any data breaches within 48 hours.
- **Only use supported operating systems**; Microsoft Windows 11 or later is required if using Microsoft OS. Windows 10 or earlier must not be used.