



WEST HANNINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

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IT AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY Re-Adopted 11th August 2025

INTRODUCTION:

The Parish Council understands that the use of digital and electronic communication enables it to interact in a manner that improves the communications both within the Parish Council and between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website, a Facebook page, a WhatsApp Group and uses email to communicate with people, businesses and other agencies. The Clerk only also uses WhatsApp to communicate with other agencies. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Should the Parish Council add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL – BUSINESS USE:

Communications from the Parish Council are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Parish Council does not own the copyright or permission;
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- If official council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Parish Council as the Proper Officer.

Parish Council website:

Occasionally, the Parish Council may direct those contacting the Council to its website to see the required information if it is in the public domain. The website can be found at:

www.westhanningfield-pc.gov.uk.

The Parish Council allows and enables approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website to present information about the group's activities. The local group will be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Parish Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site. The Parish Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Parish Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the web site is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Parish Council.

Parish Council email:

The Parish Council has a dedicated email address (clerk@westhanningfield-pc.gov.uk). The email account is monitored by the Clerk and aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as practically possible.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to Members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk.

Please note that both the Clerk works part-time so will respond as soon as he/she can. The Parish Council may not respond to every comment it receives particularly if it is experiencing a heavy workload or the comment is for information purposes only.

Emails to the Parish Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

Emails will be deleted once the correspondence is no longer required.

The Clerk to the Council has his/her own email address: clerk@westhanningfield-pc.gov.uk which is monitored periodically when the Parish Council is not open.

SMS (texting):

Members and the Clerk may use WhatsApp as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages. Messages should remain courteous, relevant to Council business, and respectful of all participants. All messages are deleted within one week of being sent.

Internal communication and access to information within the Parish Council:

The Parish Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement. Parish Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in all their work on behalf of the Parish Council.

All Parish Councillors have a dedicated '.gov.uk' email given to them once elected or co-opted onto the Council and should ensure that they remove any council email addresses from their personal devices. Council members should, wherever possible, access their email via webmail from any browser.

To gain access to Councillors email addresses, members should navigate to <https://www.stackmail.com/> and use their existing username and password which will enable them to log in. Members can easily bookmark this page to enable speedier access. By using webmail, the council has removed the danger of a security breach on a member's own device as the emails viewed on webmail are not downloaded to the device used to access them.

Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 covers meetings and proceedings of local authorities. Previously, paragraph 4(2)(b) requires principal and parish councils to send summonses to attend meetings by post to their members' home addresses, or under 4(4), by post, to an alternative address specified. In practice, this covered all the papers to be considered at meetings, not just the agenda. The Government, under The Order made under Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 amended Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 to allow local authorities to send their members summonses to attend meetings, including agendas and related papers to meetings, electronically. The Parish Council has amended its own Standing Orders to allow the authorising of the use of electronic communication. Occasionally, the electronic communication may include attachments, such as a meeting agenda or papers, or a web-link enabling a parish councillor to view meeting papers.

As more and more information becomes available electronically, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Parish Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Parish

Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails and avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option (whilst ensuring that the people who need to know the information are copied in) and ensure that email trails have been removed.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION AWARENESS:

Whilst parish councils are expected to comply with Data Protection legislation, individual Councillors will also need to ensure that they protect an individual's personal data whether it is stored electronically or as a hard copy. This applies only to living individuals (not the deceased, companies, other authorities and charities).

Personal data includes:

- Names and addresses
- Telephone numbers
- Email addresses
- IP addresses

Councillors are required to implement the following agreed measures to comply with the legislation:

- Only use West Hanningfield Parish Council email account for parish council correspondence.
- Ensure all parish council correspondence includes the West Hanningfield Parish Council footer containing the Privacy Statement or a link to the relevant page on the website (this will be provided by the Clerk).
- Ensure that all devices (computers, laptops, phones) are password protected.
- Not forward on emails or email threads as they may contain personal data or ensure personal data is redacted.
- Delete emails which are no longer required.
- Where possible direct all correspondence to the Clerk who can obtain the necessary consent.
- Where possible avoid holding an individual's information in a Councillor's home or on a Councillor's own PC. If a Councillor has to hold any information containing personal data on behalf of the Parish Council, it needs to be stored securely in a locked room or cabinet or if on a PC, in an encrypted folder.
- Ensure that their antivirus software and operating system is up-to-date.
- Ensure that their computer's firewall is turned on.
- Inform the Parish Office of any breaches within 48 hours.

OPERATING SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS FOR EMAIL AND DATA SECURITY

Devices using Window 10 operating system do not receive security updates and do not meet the standards expected by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) for handling sensitive or personal data, including .gov.uk emails.

Councillors must ensure that any device used to access council emails is running a supported and fully updated operating system. Use of unsupported systems may place the Council at risk of data breaches, non-compliance with data protection legislation, and loss of access to services. Where necessary, Councillors should use Windows 11 or use secure webmail access on a compliant device.

Lucy White – Clerk to the Council