

# WhatsApp Guidance

(Version:1.5)

WhatsApp is a common communication method which most individuals are already using in their personal lives. This makes it ideal for communicating efficiently.

## Setting up WhatsApp groups

These guidelines are for party organisations and HQ staff, who wish to set up small WhatsApp groups to facilitate convenient and effective communication channels whilst conducting party activities.

Those engaging in WhatsApp groups for party purposes should read these guidelines alongside the [Liberal Democrat Members' Code of Conduct](#)

## Best Practice for managing groups

### Who can be admitted to a WhatsApp group?

In most cases **only Liberal Democrat members or registered supporters** should be allowed into group chats. There might be instances where a non-member is added for a short period, for example, assisting on a local campaign. In these cases, once the activity or campaign is over, they must be removed from the group promptly.

Admins for the groups should be regularly checking that all those who remain in these groups are active party members / supporters.

Make use of WhatsApp features, including their own guidance for managing [groups](#) and [communities](#).

**For safeguarding reasons, any member or supporter under the age of 18 should not be added to groups.**

## Gaining Consent - UK GDPR

Only add people to WhatsApp groups once you have obtained their consent. This can be verbal or in writing (e.g. email). Explain the purpose and for how long the group is needed.

Alternatively, you could send an 'invite' to each individual through WhatsApp or adding the link to an email, therefore giving each person control to 'opt in' to the group.

If an individual does not have access to WhatsApp or does not wish to join the group, you must continue to communicate with them via a different method such as email or text.

## Broadcast messages

Using broadcast lists can be a helpful tool but **party organisations should not use [broadcast messages](#) to try and communicate with the wider membership.**

The use of WhatsApp is for groups who are working together as a team on projects and campaigning activities only.

## Security considerations when using WhatsApp

Although WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption, the sharing of confidential or sensitive personal data via WhatsApp is not permitted. The Party has approved systems to hold this type of data eg: Lighthouse & Connect.

It should not be used for important formal decision making. Email is more appropriate for this task.

Please ensure that all matters relating to electoral law, audit, HR and finance etc are signed off by the relevant staff / member via email.

The NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre) regularly updates their [guidance](#) on the use of messaging apps and highlights basic steps to be taken to reduce risks on your accounts. This includes points already highlighted in our own guidance such as:

- Not sharing sensitive information via messaging apps
- Regularly reviewing group members and removing individuals promptly when necessary
- Using the disappearing messaging function

# Expected behaviours within your groups

## Managing participants

It is sensible to give 'admin' rights for the WhatsApp group to organisers of the activity or appropriate leaders - ideally 2-3 people.

Set out the expected behaviour and remind participants of the community rules including, behaviours that are unacceptable and the consequences of such behaviour.

Keep conversation topics relevant to the purpose of the group chat. Don't allow heated discussions within threads. Be mindful of tone and the possibility of miscommunication. Instead, address behaviour such as accusations and gossip, outside of the thread, privately.

Keep communication manageable by not sending an excessive number of messages. A way to manage this is to condense multiple reminders/points into one message. If you are the 'admin' for the group and this is happening, speak to or message the individual(s) directly, to address the issue.

Archive and/or delete chats when no longer relevant or used. Make use of the disappearing chat function in WhatsApp.

Whilst WhatsApp is a great way to communicate quickly and easily with a group, tone and meaning in a message is not always obvious. Consider how what you write will be interpreted, not just what you mean.

## Removing individuals from groups

If you are a group admin, you must remove anyone who is no longer a member of the Party. Also remove those who are no longer part of the group, project or activity (if they haven't left the group chat of their own accord).

If an individual explicitly asks to be removed from the group, you must remove them immediately.

If an individual behaves in a way contrary to Party rules and guidelines, admins for the group should approach the individual directly to request they stop this behaviour. This may address the issue and they can remain in the WhatsApp group. However, admins should monitor the situation and if needed, remove an individual from the group entirely.

## Wellbeing

Being an admin or member of a WhatsApp group can be challenging. The 24/7 nature of the platform can make boundaries and space to 'switch off' difficult.

Although WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption, messages remain vulnerable to being screenshotted and distributed publicly without their original context.

This may be accidental or deliberate - individuals could use screenshots of WhatsApp chats as part of a complaint process, disclose on social media or share with journalists.

Furthermore, messages could be requested as part of Subject Access Requests (SARs).

To protect your own wellbeing and that of others:

- Take it in turns to moderate discussions as these can become exhausting at times
- Limit the number of chats you are an admin or participant in
- Do not post comments which you would not be willing to say in a face to face context or make statements you cannot substantiate as these could be subject to libel and defamation

As with any social media dialogue, if discussions are deviating from the intended topic or escalating into hostile, emotive or personal territory, we advise that participants should disengage or take a breather from the 'chat'.

*This document is version 1.5 and will be reviewed annually by the Compliance & Data Protection Team.*