WhatsApp Use Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how WhatsApp may be used for operational communication with volunteer drivers. It is intended to support timely communication while protecting the confidentiality, safety and personal data of clients, volunteers and the scheme.

2. Scope

This policy applies to duty officers and volunteer drivers who use WhatsApp in connection with scheme activities, whether on a personal or organisation-managed device.

3. Policy statement

WhatsApp may only be used where it is necessary, proportionate and appropriate for day-to-day operational communication. It must not replace official records, formal decision-making, safeguarding procedures or secure organisational systems.

4. Acceptable use

- WhatsApp may be used to confirm volunteer availability, collection times, delays, urgent updates and other brief operational messages.
- Use of WhatsApp by volunteer drivers must be voluntary and based on clear agreement.
- Messages should be professional, factual and limited to what is necessary.
- Drivers must not read or respond to WhatsApp messages while driving.

5. Prohibited use

- WhatsApp must not be used to share sensitive or excessive client information unless there is a clear lawful basis, it is strictly necessary and organisational procedures allow it.
- WhatsApp must not be used for formal decisions, complaints handling, safeguarding case management or confidential discussions that should be recorded through official channels.
- Personal opinions or comments, images or unrelated content must not be shared in scheme-related chats.

6. Data protection and confidentiality

- Only the minimum amount of personal information needed for the task should be shared.
- Client details, appointment information and contact numbers must be handled confidentially and only shared with those who need the information.
- Messages containing personal data should not be kept longer than necessary and should be transferred to official records where required.
- Any suspected data breach, message sent to the wrong person, lost or stolen phone, or unauthorised access must be reported immediately in line with Village Care Committee

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7. Device security

- Devices used for scheme-related WhatsApp communication should be protected by a passcode, password, fingerprint or facial recognition.
- Volunteer drivers should keep WhatsApp and their device operating system up to date.
- Where possible, message previews should be hidden on locked screens.
- Phones must not be shared with others where scheme-related messages or client information could be accessed.

8. Group chats

- Only authorised people should be added to scheme-related WhatsApp groups.
- Participants should be told the purpose of the group and what information may be shared.
- People who no longer need access must be removed promptly.
- Group chats should not be used to discuss individual clients unless this is strictly necessary and limited to essential information.

9. Record keeping

WhatsApp should not be relied upon as the official record of scheme activity. Where a message contains information that needs to be retained, such as a change to an arrangement, incident, complaint or safeguarding concern, it must be recorded through the appropriate organisational process.

10. Roles and responsibilities

- Nominated Duty Officers and Committee members are responsible for setting up and managing approved WhatsApp use.
- Volunteer drivers and duty officers are responsible for following this policy and reporting any concerns promptly.
- The organisation is responsible for providing clear guidance on confidentiality, data protection, safeguarding and acceptable use.

11. Breaches of this policy

Failure to follow this policy may result in access to WhatsApp communication being removed and may be managed under the relevant volunteer, safeguarding, data protection or disciplinary procedure.

Policy review: This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if there is a change in legislation, organisational procedures, WhatsApp functionality, or if a concern is raised by volunteers or clients.

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