



Online Usage, Social Media and Mobile Phone Policy

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the expectations and responsibilities relating to the use of social media, online communication and mobile phones within the ministries and activities of Waringstown Presbyterian Church.

The Church recognises that digital technology and social media can be positive tools for communication, ministry, learning and pastoral care when used appropriately and safely. This policy seeks to promote responsible use of technology while protecting children, young people, adults at risk, leaders, volunteers and the wider congregation from harm, misuse or abuse.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- Ministers, elders and church leaders
- Employees and volunteers
- Children's and youth organisations
- The congregation
- All church-related online communication and digital activity
- Use of mobile phones and devices during church activities, events and residential

The policy applies both on church premises and during any church-related activities, including online meetings, social media engagement, livestreaming, messaging apps, youth events and residential trips.

3. Core Principles

All online activity connected to the congregation must:

- Reflect Christian values, respect and integrity
- Promote safeguarding and wellbeing

- Protect privacy and dignity
- Maintain transparency and accountability
- Follow PCI safeguarding procedures and legal requirements
- Support a safe and welcoming environment for all

4. Social Media and Online Communication

Approved Platforms

Only social media accounts, websites and online platforms approved by Kirk Session may be used in the name of the congregation or organisation.

Account Management

- All church social media accounts must be password protected.
- At least two approved leaders must have administrative access to each account, ideally including one elder or Kirk Session-appointed representative.
- Accounts must be regularly monitored to ensure appropriate content and conduct.

Appropriate Communication

All online communication must be:

- Respectful, encouraging and faith-building
- Appropriate to the age and understanding of participants
- Transparent and accountable
- Free from bullying, harassment, intimidation or discriminatory language

Leaders must never engage in:

- Private or secretive online relationships with children or young people
- Inappropriate messaging
- Sharing offensive, sexual, threatening or abusive content
- Online bullying, exclusion or manipulation

“Banter” or humour that could be humiliating, offensive or misunderstood should be avoided.

Direct Messaging

- Communication with children and young people should normally occur through group messaging platforms or channels visible to parents and/or other leaders.
- Parents/carers should be informed about communication methods used by organisations.

- Leaders should avoid unnecessary one-to-one communication with young people online.

5. Use of Images and Media

- Written parental or guardian consent must be obtained before photographs or videos of children or young people are shared online.
- Group photographs are preferred over individual images.
- No personal identifying information (addresses, schools, phone numbers or personal details) should be published online.

The congregation reserves the right to remove any inappropriate content or comments from its online platforms.

6. Mobile Phone Usage During Activities

The congregation recognises that mobile phones can support communication and safety but may also create safeguarding, distraction and wellbeing concerns.

Therefore:

- Mobile phone use during church activities should be respectful and appropriate.
- Leaders may restrict or prohibit phone use during specific activities where necessary.
- Mobile phones are not permitted in bedrooms during residential events or overnight trips.
- Photography or recording during activities should only take place with permission and in line with safeguarding guidance.
- Mobile phones must never be used to bully, intimidate, shame or harass others.

Some organisations may choose to implement mobile phone agreements or contracts with young people and parents to encourage responsible use.

7. Safeguarding Responsibilities

All safeguarding concerns arising online must be treated seriously and responded to in line with PCI safeguarding procedures.

This includes concerns relating to:

- Cyberbullying
- Grooming
- Online harassment
- Sexting or sharing indecent images

- Emotional abuse
- Threatening behaviour
- Exploitation

Any leader or volunteer who becomes aware of a safeguarding concern online must report it immediately to the congregation's Designated Person. Immediate danger should be reported to PSNI via 999.

8. Training and Accountability

All leaders and volunteers involved in online ministry or communication must:

- Maintain up-to-date safeguarding training
- Follow PCI safeguarding and online safety guidance
- Keep AccessNI checks up to date.
- Use technology responsibly and transparently

9. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly by Kirk Session alongside PCI safeguarding guidance and any legislative or technological developments.

The congregation acknowledges that online risks and digital communication continue to evolve and commits itself to maintaining safe and responsible online practices in all areas of church life.

This policy is to be implemented under the authority of Holy Scripture and in accordance with the Confessional Standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Approved by Kirk Session

Date Approved: June 2026

Review Date: June 2027