

COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Purpose of this Policy

The aim of this policy is to assist trustees and centre management staff / volunteers to effectively communicate with each other, the public and service users in a timely manner.

Objective

To efficiently, consistently and politely use appropriate communication methods, e.g. online, email, messaging, written, telephone or face to face, that are appropriate to the purpose.

Communication Channels

1. Website

A website at meridale.co.uk will be regularly updated to inform visitors about the organisation, the activities it organises or hosts and the people involved in various roles. All Meridale policies and editions of Meridale Newsletter will be publicly available. A secured, private, document area will be available for trustees.

2. Social Media

A Facebook page will be maintained at facebook.com/meridalecentre. It will promote Meridale, Youth Group and hall hire activities and provide a two-way communication channel with the community. At least administrators will be responsible for managing the page. There are some important things to bear in mind about Facebook, whether posting on the Meridale page or from a personal account:

- There is an image and standards to uphold and how individuals conduct themselves online impacts this.
- People classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your posts and information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to your personal web site or blog and then realising that a story or photo should be removed. On a social networking site, once something is posted it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
- Your user profile’s security and privacy settings require careful setting. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to “only friends”. “Friends of friends” and “Networks and Friends” open the content to a large group of unknown people.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous at any time (even in a humorous or anecdotal manner).
- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- When sharing third party posts caution must be exercised to ensure there is no conflict with The Meridale Organisation’s ethos and values.

Meridale will not operate Twitter or Instagram accounts.

3. Instant Messaging

The dominant platforms for this are SMS texts, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, although others are available. There are two main uses by Meridale.

i. Interactions with the public.

Use of personal accounts to engage with the public on Meridale issues should be avoided if at all possible. Members of the public should be directed to the messaging facility on the Meridale Facebook page or other adopted secure messaging service. This ensures that there is an accurate record of message exchanges. Where this hasn't been possible, trustees and staff should take and keep screenshots of exchanges, especially where contentious issues are aired.

ii. Interactions between groups of trustees and staff / volunteers.

Methods of fast, efficient communication are essential in many circumstances, especially where there is a 'crisis' situation. Meridale will establish and maintain instant messaging (IM) channels to suit the needs of various groups such as Centre Management Staff + trustee officers, Youth Group Committee, working groups etc. Some may be suitable for a Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp group. However, to ensure equal opportunity of access on any device and encrypted security, some groups will need to use a specific platform. Where necessary training will be provided.

4. Email

When enquiries are received to a Meridale email address, wherever possible a detailed reply should be given within 5 working days. If that is not possible, a holding response should be sent within 5 days.

There is no need to respond to unsolicited invitations or spam emails, indeed there are very good reasons for not so doing.

Inevitably, a Meridale address may receive repeated communications from individual members of the public on the same subject(s). It is acceptable to merely acknowledge such emails/letters without having to respond to each and every point. In any such case, the Chair of Trustees or Youth Groups should be consulted as appropriate.

The trustees will keep under review whether it would be beneficial for all trustees and Centre Management staff to have an individual Meridale email address.

Email is the preferred method of distribution for meeting agendas and minutes.

5. Written

As with email, for written enquiries a detailed reply should be given within 5 working days wherever possible. If it is not possible, a holding response should be sent within 5 days. All written communication will use a Meridale headed letter template.

Press releases will be approved by the Chair of Trustees

6. Personal (Face to Face and Telephone)

A calm and helpful manner will be maintained when engaged in such communications.

Trustees, staff and volunteers are not obliged to listen to abusive and obscene tirades or to address members of the public in this way. In such a case the enquirer should politely be asked to desist and advised that if they continue to use such language the call will be terminated or they will be asked to leave the premises. If the abuse or obscenity continues then the warning can be carried through.

Care however should be taken, as some 'vivid descriptions' are used in the ordinary course of speech by certain sections of the community. A judgement should be made from the tone if that is the position. In such cases the Meridale representative can ask for moderation but may choose to continue the contact.

Referenced Policies

The following policies should be referenced in conjunction with this policy:

Online Safety & Internet Use

Equality & Diversity

Security

Data Protection

IT Policy

Review of this policy

The Trustees will review this policy periodically and no later than three years from the date below.

Signed: (On behalf of the Meridale Organisation)

Name:

Position:

Date: