

Guidance: Instant Messaging Apps (including WhatsApp) on MPS Issued Devices

Introduction

Instant messaging apps have been introduced to provide our workforce with the tools they need to succeed. This document is designed to outline how instant messaging apps, including WhatsApp, should be used on MPS issued devices.

Personal responsibility, common sense and high standards are essential. This document cannot legislate for every scenario but is intended to provide useful guidance to all officers and staff. The guidance will at times specifically focus on WhatsApp but all users should follow the equivalent steps on other instant messaging apps and where unsure consult the DDaT Digital Delivery Team for advice.

When using instant messaging for a policing purpose an MPS issued device must be used. Users must comply with the policies relating to the use of MPS systems at all times.

Set Up and Configuration

To maintain a consistent and professional standard all users should complete the following actions before using instant messaging on an MPS device:

1. **Image and name** – Users must set the MPS crest* as their image and name as the user's full name and rank or band/role (see below image).



*To set the MPS crest:

- Open a [copy](#)
- Screenshot the image
- Crop and save the image to your phones gallery
- Access the gallery through WhatsApp when setting up your profile picture

2. **Group chat access** – All users must change the privacy settings so that only contacts are permitted to add the user to a group chat. Users must not join any group chats that they do not recognise. Those with 'admin' rights, or similar, should not add any unknown contacts to group chats. Users are advised to periodically review and validate contacts to ensure they are known.
3. **Consent** - When joining or setting up a group chat users you must obtain consent from all members to share contact details and information with each other and record said consent on an MPS central system be that outlook or other relevant MPS IT system.
4. **Disappearing Messages (or similar function)** – When using WhatsApp users must ensure disappearing messages are selected for all chats (groups and individuals), with the message timer set to 90 days.
5. **Turn off auto-save** – Within settings, users must de-select 'Save to Camera Roll'.
6. **Privacy Settings** – Privacy settings should be considered, including whether the account is visible in respect of 'last seen' or 'online' status, and whether 'read receipts' are turned off.
7. **Out of office** – If on leave, users should change their 'about status. This can be done by selecting settings > selecting where your profile is displayed > selecting your current status > selecting the status again and typing an out of office message.

General Principles of Use

- **Professional Communication Standards** - tone and content of instant messaging should be considered in exactly the same way as if communicating on any workplace forum. If a user would not consider a message suitable for a work email or conversation then it is not acceptable to send on instant messaging. Communication must be professional and the Standards of Professional Behaviour applies to all messages whether sent on or off duty. If an inappropriate message is received, there is an expectation this would be reported as soon as practicable.
- **Lawful Business Monitoring** - LBM will apply to messages sent through instant messaging apps on MPS devices.
- **Personal Devices** - all MPS business must be conducted exclusively on MPS issued devices. Personal devices must not be used for work purposes.
- **Communication Tool** – WhatsApp is an option for officers and staff to use to communicate, but they are not required to use it. Careful consideration should be made as to whether it is the most appropriate tool to use, there will be instances where the use of the radio or email, for example, will be more suitable.

Instant messaging: with colleagues

Instant messaging between colleagues or groups of colleagues is permitted, provided the messaging is professional. Acceptable communication will often be

logistical, regarding resource allocation, messages of support or encouragement, or non-sensitive advice and guidance. Instant messaging may also be used to arrange and coordinate work-related events. It is not possible to list every form of acceptable use and common sense and good judgment is required.

The content of instant messaging must **not** include:

- Information that would attract a protective marking of OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE or above (e.g. photos of offenders, PNC records, biometric information, intelligence etc.).
- Evidential material, or material generated in the course of an investigation which would engage CPIA retention and disclosure obligations – this would include significant updates on an investigation to victims of crime.
- Operational decision making, or a record of such decision making rationale.
- Central AID warnings or changes to duty times.

Colleagues are encouraged to think of instant messaging as a forum for short term disposable communications - similar to Microsoft Teams chat - to support the effective day to day functioning of the workplace and work relationships. Instant messaging is not a forum to create, share, record or store operational information.

Instant messaging: with the public (including stakeholders and partners)

Instant messaging can be used to contact members of the public, including stakeholders and partners. It may be a useful forum to engage with community groups or partners through individual chats, group chats, or broadcast lists.

Instant messaging with victims, witnesses and suspects, for a policing purpose, is permitted and that availability of WhatsApp in particular is a positive step in making the MPS more accessible and responsive. But these communications do require particular care and attention.

Instant messaging should only be used if the member of the public indicates that it is a preferred or acceptable method of communication, and the limitations of its use (e.g. not available 24/7, not to be used in an emergency) should be discussed and understood. Consideration when sending an update should be made, being cognisant of your shift patterns. Any communication should be properly recorded on Connect, where appropriate.

Confidential or evidential material must not be shared through instant messaging. There may be times where members of the public unexpectedly send evidential material through instant messaging, or the message is believed to be of evidential value. If this occurs then the chat can be exported (see guidance in annex 1) and uploaded to Axon Capture, by the user, as soon as possible and all actions properly recorded on Connect.

A summary table for the use of instant messaging is provided below:

Summary

Contacts for instant messaging

- ✓ Colleagues
- ✓ Partners, stakeholders, community groups
- ✓ Victims, witnesses and suspects (with agreement, and care)
- ✗ Routine personal contacts – family, friends*

**it is acknowledged that on occasions there may be no other way for an individual to be contacted/or contact their family in an emergency other than their MPS issued device.*

Use of instant messaging

- ✓ Work purpose
- ✓ Logistics and resources
- ✓ Arranging calls, meetings and work-related events
- ✓ Community, partner and stakeholder engagement
- ✓ Support and welfare
- ✓ Non-sensitive updates and advice

- ✗ Routine personal use
- ✗ Exchanging information or material at OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE and above
- ✗ Generating material in the course of an investigation, or sharing such material
- ✗ Generating or sharing evidence and intelligence
- ✗ Operational decision making (i.e. using WhatsApp inform and record a decision or detail the rational for making one)
- ✗ Sensitive, personal information Where a record of the contact is required, record on CONNECT (for example, arranging a time to meet a witness to take a statement).

Where any of the prohibited uses occur, use 'export chats' function to avoid loss and save the record accordingly (see below). Seek advice or inform a supervisor where necessary.

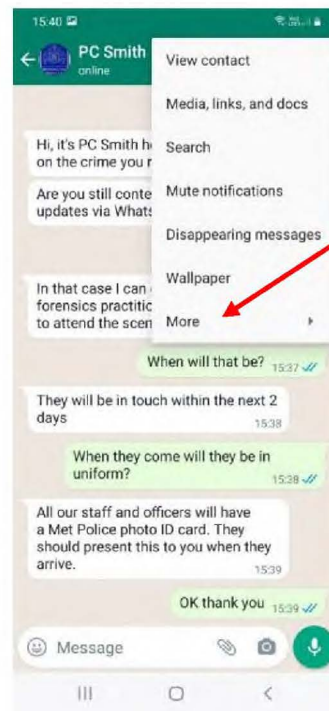
Annex 1: Exporting chats

Step One:



Select the three dots within the chat that is required to be exported.

Step Two:



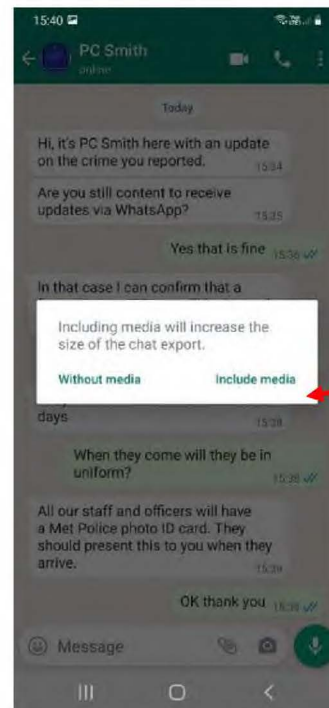
A list will appear; select 'more'.

Step Three:



Select 'Export chat'

Step Four:



Select either 'without media' or 'include media' depending on why the export is required.

Step Five:

Select email and input your email address for the exported chat to be sent to.