

GCS Communication Policy

Created on 07/08/2026
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V1.0

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the acceptable use of Whatsapp and other similar software programmes as a group communication tool for Sevenoaks Town FC. (Known as GCS in this policy)

Its purpose is to ensure that club communications are clear, respectful, appropriate and consistent with the Club's safeguarding standards and values, where children and young people are involved as well as our adult teams.

GCS groups connected with Sevenoaks Town FC should support positive communication, good organisation and a respectful football environment.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Sevenoaks Town FC:

- Club officials
- Coaches and managers
- Volunteers
- Players aged 16 and over
- Parents and guardians
- Team administrators
- Any other individuals participating in an official or Club-related GCS group

For the purposes of this policy, any GCS group set up or administered by a Sevenoaks Town FC manager, coach or team administrator for the purpose of communicating with or about their team will be regarded as a Club-related GCS group and will be subject to this policy.

This applies whether or not the group has been formally created or authorised by the Club and includes groups used for youth, adult, development, recreational or other Sevenoaks Town FC teams.

Managers, coaches and administrators who create or manage their own team GCS groups are responsible for ensuring that those groups are operated in accordance with this policy.

3. Key Principles

- GCS should only be used for appropriate Club and team-related communications.
- All communication must be respectful, inclusive and appropriate.
- Communications must comply with the Club's safeguarding policies and expected standards of behaviour.
- Group chats must have a clear purpose and be appropriately administered.
- GCS must not be used to share sensitive or confidential personal information.
- GCS groups must not be used for disciplinary discussions, disputes or arguments.
- Members must remember that comments posted in GCS groups can be copied, forwarded or shared outside the group.
- Everyone using a Sevenoaks Town FC GCS group is representing the Club and should communicate accordingly.
- The same standards apply to team groups created independently by managers, coaches or administrators as apply to groups created directly by the Club.

4. Group Setup & Management

- Groups may be created by an appropriate Club official, manager, coach or authorised team administrator for legitimate team or Club purposes.
- **Any manager, coach or administrator who creates a GCS group for their Sevenoaks Town FC team accepts responsibility for ensuring that the group is appropriately managed and complies with this policy.**
- A team GCS group does not fall outside this policy simply because it has been created independently by a manager, coach or administrator rather than by the Club centrally.
- Managers, coaches and administrators should make members aware that the group is associated with Sevenoaks Town FC and that this GCS Policy applies.
- For players under the age of 16, team GCS groups should normally include parents or guardians rather than the players themselves.
- Players aged 16–17 may be included where appropriate, with parental/guardian consent and provided that appropriate Club adults are also present in the group.
- Wherever reasonably possible, groups involving young people should have at least two appropriate adult administrators.
- Administrators are responsible for helping ensure that the group is being used appropriately and in accordance with this policy.
- Members who no longer have a reason to be part of a Club GCS group should be removed promptly.

5. Appropriate Use

GCS may be used for:

- Match and training information
- Fixture details
- Scheduling changes
- Travel and meeting arrangements
- Last-minute notices, including weather-related cancellations
- Tournament and event information
- Relevant Club announcements
- Requests for volunteers or assistance
- GCS polls to confirm attendance at training, matches or Club events
- Positive messages supporting players, teams and Club activities

GCS must not be used for:

- Inappropriate one-to-one communication between an adult and a child or young person
- Offensive, abusive, discriminatory, threatening or inappropriate content
- Bullying, harassment or intimidation
- Sharing inappropriate photographs, videos, memes or other content
- Arguments between players, parents, coaches, officials or volunteers
- Public criticism of individual players, coaches, managers, volunteers, match officials or parents
- Disciplinary discussions that should properly be dealt with privately through the Club
- Sharing confidential or sensitive personal information
- Excessive non-football-related messaging in official team groups
- Comments which could damage the reputation of Sevenoaks Town FC

6. Respect Between Teams and Clubs

Sevenoaks Town FC expects all of its teams to support the reputation and values of the Club.

GCS groups must **not** be used to post negative, disrespectful, derogatory, sarcastic, inflammatory or otherwise unhelpful comments about:

- Another Sevenoaks Town FC team
- Players from another Sevenoaks Town FC team
- Coaches, managers, volunteers or parents associated with another Sevenoaks Town FC team
- An opposition team or club
- Opposition players, coaches, managers, parents or supporters
- Referees or other match officials

This includes comments about another team's ability, results, selection decisions, playing style, behaviour or performance where the purpose or likely effect is to criticise, ridicule, undermine or provoke.

Healthy football discussion is permitted, but messages must remain constructive and respectful.

Differences of opinion, concerns about another team or complaints about an opposition club should be raised privately with the appropriate team manager, coach or Club official rather than discussed negatively within GCS groups.

Members must not use one team's GCS group to encourage hostility, rivalry or criticism towards another Sevenoaks Town FC team.

Managers, coaches and administrators have a particular responsibility to set the appropriate tone within their team groups. They must not initiate, encourage, endorse or allow negative or unhelpful discussion about another Sevenoaks Town FC team or an opposition team. Where such comments are made, they should take reasonable steps to stop the discussion and remind members of the standards expected under this policy.

The Club operates as **one club**, and communications should promote cooperation and mutual respect between all Sevenoaks Town FC teams.

7. Use of GCS Polls

Coaches, managers and administrators are encouraged to use the GCS polls feature where it assists with planning.

Polls may be used to:

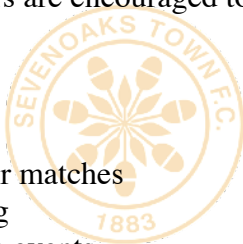
- Confirm player availability for matches
- Confirm attendance at training
- Organise tournaments or Club events
- Confirm attendance at social activities
- Assist with transport or volunteer arrangements

Polls should include clear options and, where appropriate, a reasonable deadline for responses.

Parents, guardians and players are encouraged to respond promptly to assist coaches and managers with planning.

Poll results must not be used to publicly criticise, embarrass or single out a player, parent or guardian because they are unavailable or have failed to respond.

Where an individual response needs clarification, this should normally be followed up privately.



8. Safeguarding & Conduct

All members of Sevenoaks Town FC GCS groups are expected to communicate appropriately and respectfully.

Members should:

- Avoid excessive messaging
- Avoid unnecessary messages late at night or early in the morning
- Consider whether a message needs to be sent to the whole group
- Avoid responding angrily or emotionally to disagreements
- Raise disputes privately with the appropriate Club official
- Never use GCS to bully, intimidate or embarrass another person
- Never use GCS to undermine a child, parent, coach, team or Club official

Where inappropriate behaviour occurs, administrators should take appropriate action. This may include asking for messages to stop, removing inappropriate content where possible, removing individuals from the group or referring the matter to the Club.

Any safeguarding concern involving a child or young person must be reported immediately through the Club's safeguarding procedures and to the appropriate Club Welfare Officer.

9. Photographs, Videos and Personal Information

Photographs or videos of children and young people must only be shared in accordance with Sevenoaks Town FC's safeguarding, photography and consent requirements.

Members must not share photographs, videos, telephone numbers, addresses, medical information or other personal information outside the group without appropriate permission.

Screenshots or messages from Club GCS groups should not normally be circulated outside the group without a legitimate reason or appropriate permission.

Nothing should be posted in a GCS group that a member would be uncomfortable seeing forwarded to the Club Committee, County FA, league, safeguarding authorities or another relevant organisation.

10. Complaints and Disagreements

GCS groups are not the appropriate place to resolve complaints or disputes.

Where a member has concerns about:

- Team selection
- Playing time
- Coaching decisions
- Another player
- Another parent
- Another Sevenoaks Town FC team
- An opposition team
- A referee or match official
- The behaviour of a coach, manager or Club official

the concern should be raised privately through the appropriate Club channels.

Members should not encourage other members of a GCS group to join in with complaints or criticism.

Where necessary, concerns should be referred to the appropriate Club official or Club Committee.

11. Manager, Coach & Administrator Responsibilities

Managers, coaches and administrators who create, manage or administer a GCS group for a Sevenoaks Town FC team have additional responsibilities.

They are expected to:

- Ensure that their group is operated in accordance with this policy.
- Make members aware that the group is a Sevenoaks Town FC-related group and that Club standards apply.
- Set an appropriate example through their own messages and conduct.
- Promote respectful and constructive communication.
- Not initiate, encourage or participate in inappropriate criticism of another Sevenoaks Town FC team, opposition team, player, coach, manager, parent, supporter or match official.
- Intervene where discussions become disrespectful, negative, abusive or otherwise contrary to this policy.
- Remind members of the GCS Policy where appropriate.
- Request that inappropriate discussion stops.
- Close or restrict a discussion where necessary.
- Contact an individual privately where their conduct is inappropriate.
- Remove an individual from the group where appropriate.
- Refer serious or repeated concerns to the relevant Club official, Welfare Officer or Club Committee.

Setting up a team GCS group independently does not make it a private group for the purposes of this policy where it is being used to organise, discuss or communicate about a Sevenoaks Town FC team.

Managers, coaches and administrators are not expected to mediate significant disputes themselves. Serious or repeated concerns should be referred to the Club.

12. Record Keeping

GCS should not be regarded as the Club's formal communication or decision-making archive.

Important Club decisions, disciplinary matters, safeguarding matters or formal agreements should be recorded through the appropriate Club systems, email communications or meeting minutes.

Where messages are relevant to a safeguarding, disciplinary or complaints matter, they should not be deleted if they may be required as evidence.

13. Breaches of this Policy

Failure to comply with this policy may result in action being taken by Sevenoaks Town FC.

Depending on the circumstances, this may include:

- An informal reminder or warning
- Removal of inappropriate messages where possible
- Removal from a GCS group
- Referral to the Club Committee
- Action under the Club's disciplinary procedures
- Referral to the Club Welfare Officer
- Referral to the appropriate league, County FA, The FA or safeguarding authorities where required

Managers, coaches and administrators may also be held accountable where they have knowingly permitted persistent or serious breaches of this policy within a team GCS group that they manage or administer and have failed to take reasonable action.

Serious or repeated breaches may result in an individual's continued involvement with the Club being reviewed in accordance with the Club's relevant policies and procedures.

14. Responsibility of Group Members

Participation in a Sevenoaks Town FC GCS group means accepting responsibility for the content of your own messages.

Before posting, members should consider whether the message is:

Necessary – Respectful – Constructive – Appropriate

If a message would be better discussed privately, it should not be posted in the group.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by Sevenoaks Town FC, or sooner where required because of changes to safeguarding guidance, football regulations, technology or Club requirements.

Approved by: Sevenoaks Town FC

Policy Owner: Club Committee / Club Welfare Officer

Review Frequency: Annually

