



# **Stockbridge Parish Council**

## **Communication and Media Policy**

Draft

This policy sets out the Stockbridge Parish Council procedures for both its internal and external communications using appropriate media and technologies.

The purpose of this document is to formalise the position of the council with respect to its commitment to maintaining reliable and robust internal communications within its day to day running and external communications with its outside customers/stakeholders and with the Press and Public.

The procedures contained in this Policy apply equally to both council members and employees.

### **Part 1: Parish Council Correspondence**

- i. The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.
- ii. No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, sub-committee or working group. In particular, councillors and officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- iii. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person e.g. copy to X.

### **Part 2: Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups**

- i. Agendas should be clear and concise. They should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- ii. Where the Clerk or a councillor wishes fellow councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

### **Part 3: Communications with the Press and Public**

- i. The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Council or the Chair of the relevant committee or working group.
- ii. Press reports from the Council, its committees or working groups should be from the Clerk.
- iii. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 permits a member of the public to take photographs, film and audio-record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings. While no prior permission is required to carry out this activity, it is advisable that any person wishing to film or audio-record a public meeting let the Parish Council know. A note to this effect will be included on each agenda so the Parish Council can provide reasonable facilities for any person wishing to film or audio-record.
- iv. Unless a councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.
  - i. Unless a councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view. This applies to both verbal and written forms of reporting. Council members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when publishing content.
  - ii. If councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a council agenda item.

#### **Part 4: Use of e-mail**

- i. The Parish Council promotes the use of internet and e-mail to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's functions. However, these facilities must be used responsibly and lawfully.
- ii. The use of e-mail correspondence requires the same professional standards as other forms of communication. You should not send or forward mail which is defamatory or offensive for whatever reason.
- iii. In order to protect from viruses, e-mail attachments which might contain macros (word processor and spreadsheet files) or applications, should not be opened if they are from a sender whom you do not recognise.
- iv. Every effort should be made to isolate junk e-mail at source, if not it should be deleted immediately and no attachments should be opened. It is important to keep virus protection up to date.
- v. Be aware that agreements made by e-mail may have the same legal status as letters or formal contracts and may be admitted as evidence in court proceedings.
- vi. E-mail that is sent to external addresses should include the standard Parish Council disclaimer. [disclaimer TBC]
- vii. It is recommended that e-mails are retained for no more than twelve months before they are deleted.
- viii. You must not include in the text of emails to be sent, or in files attached to them, sensitive personal data without appropriate protection in order to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- ix. E-mail addresses should be treated as confidential and care taken that private e-mail addresses are not wrongly circulated.
- x. E-mail to multiple addresses outside of the Council should be sent as blind carbon copy (bcc).

#### **Part 5: Use of social media**

- i. Social media usage by the Clerk or Councillors, whether personal or work, reflects an opinion or position that could be easily construed as Parish Council policy. Care should be taken to ensure all on-line content is objective, balanced, informed and accurate.
- ii. Council members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when publishing content. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public.
- iii. The Clerk and Councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationship with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other council members, the Council, or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.
- iv. Social media posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.
- v. If councillors publish anything personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites or refer to Council privileged information as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council. If you are in any doubt, please refer to the Clerk for advice.

- vi. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published anywhere.
- vii. Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright.

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