**STOUGHTON PARISH COUNCIL**

**COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES**

**INTRODUCTION**

Stoughton Parish Council represents and articulates the views and needs of the local community. It shares information on parish matters affecting the community and supports comment from interested individuals and groups.

The aim is to make Stoughton Parish Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what SPC does, whilst also enabling SPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

The principles of these guidelines apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk to SPC. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION**

Good communication will enable SPC to:

* Better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities
* Raise residents’ satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues
* Be an effective voice of the community
* Maintain and enhance the reputation of SPC
* Make the best use of all forms of communication to engage with all residents

**WHO IS COMMUNICATING?**

**PARISH CLERK**

The Parish Clerk has responsibility for communication with members of the community and outside bodies via email, the Parish Council webpage and the village noticeboard.
The Parish Clerk is provided with a Council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting Council business.

**COUNCILLORS**

Councillors have responsibility for communicating with members of the community and outside bodies via email, the parish council Facebook page, village noticeboard and Stoughton Flyer. Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on SPC. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter, or email.
When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry the guidance of the Parish Clerk will be sought.
At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public on any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to SPC. Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

* Refer the matter to the Parish Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
* Request an item on the next meeting agenda
* Investigate the matter personally having sought the guidance of the Parish Clerk

Councillors must ensure that any verbal communication with the public on council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of SPC regardless of the Councillor’s individual views on any subject.

**COUNCIL MEETINGS AND COUNCILLOR INTERACTION**

SPC meets six times per year. Meetings start at 7pm, currently in the village hall. An initial draft of the meeting minutes will be produced by the Clerk and issued to councillors for review and issued no later than one month after the meeting has taken place. The Agenda and Minutes of the meetings are published on the Council website following approval at the following council meeting.
Councillors who have taken on responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal feedback with third parties shall respond or ask the Parish Clerk to respond.

**WHO SHOULD WE BE COMMUNICATING WITH**

The council’s audience is wide and varied but will typically include:

* SPC employees and contractors
* Residents
* Harborough District Council
* Leicestershire County Council
* The media
* Voluntary groups and organisations
* The business community
* Our MP
* Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire)
* Visitors and those who work in the area

**HOW WE SHOULD BE COMMUNICATING**

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups, and demographics so it is important to ensure that within reason, all options for increasing communication and participation are reviewed over time in order to communicate effectively with everyone. The advances made in information technology offer new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods (newsletter, notice board etc) still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

Currently Council communication is achieved mainly through Council meetings and Councillor interaction, managed by the Parish Clerk. Methods of communication include:

* Notices on village boards
* Online messages via the SPC website
* Quarterly Stoughton Flyer newsletter (paper version)
* Online messages via the Stoughton Parish Council Facebook page
* Social evenings to meet and mingle with SPC Councillors

SPC will continue to explore ways in which communication could be improved.

**VILLAGE NOTICE BOARDS**The village notice boards (Gaulby Lane and Stoughton Lane) will be kept updated to ensure that members of the community who are less active online are kept aware of key information. One side of the notice board on Gaulby Lane is unlocked and accessible to all, whilst the other side is locked for SPC use (key currently kept by June Sparrow.) The notice board on Stoughton Lane is unlocked and accessible to all.

**ONLINE PRESENCE
Council Website**Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. SPC’s website is to be regularly updated.
**SPC Facebook Page**SPC have a Facebook page (Stoughton Parish Council) to alert members of the parish to local news and events. Administrators manage the content to ensure it is relevant to the audience.

**PUBLICATIONS
Stoughton Flyer**The Stoughton Flyer is published by local residents to impart information to the villagers. It is delivered to households in Stoughton quarterly.

**EMAIL**All correspondence should be addressed to clerk@stoughtonpc.org.uk

**VILLAGE LOGO**A new village logo is currently being designed. This will be used as a brand to identify SPC. The logo is owned by SPC and can only be used with their permission.

**COMMUNICATION – GOOD PRACTICE**

It is imperative that:

* All communication from SPC is courteous, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the decisions and policies of council;
* All individuals communicating on behalf of SPC are aware that every piece of communication reflects the reputation of SPC in the community

Councillors are ambassadors of SPC and this is reflected in all communications. Any communications from SPC will meet the following criteria:

* Be tasteful, civil and relevant;
* Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
* Not contain any personal information;
* Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

Equally, it is expected that any communications to SPC would meet similar criteria.