

Sourton Parish Council (the Council)

Communication and Involvement Strategy and Policy

1. Introduction

This strategy is based on the guiding principles that communication must be effective and that protocols should be followed to ensure clarity and professionalism. The strategy covers both internal and external communications. The Council aims to be transparent in its dealings and for communications to be timely and effective.

2. Objectives

The Council aims to reach everyone who has an interest in the parish, be it that they live, work or visit the village. It is important that we are able to effectively communicate with anyone who is interested and may want to become involved in influencing the future of the parish. These people include:

- Village residents
- Community groups and organisations
- Agencies and partners (including the local police)
- Local school
- County Councillors
- The local MP
- Voluntary groups
- Local media
- Tourists
- Workers

3. The Role of Councillors, Chairman and Clerk

Councillors represent the community in which they live and are governed by a Code of Conduct which encourages open, informed, timely and courteous communication at all times. Our aim is to keep all with whom we come into contact informed of our actions and to encourage stakeholders to actively participate in influencing the future of the parish.

The Clerk is the executive of the Council. As such, the Clerk should receive all communications which ought to be formally brought to the attention of the Council and should issue all formal communications made by the Council.

Councillors should immediately refer any complaints or concerns relating to their conduct or the Council received from residents to the Clerk.

Councillors should make it clear in all interactions with residents the press or third parties that they have no authority to represent the Council's view unless the matter has been agreed at a Council meeting or they have been given specific mandate to do so at a council meeting.

It is important not to raise the expectations of the residents before a matter has been debated and agreed at a Council meeting.

Unless otherwise specified the Chairman should comply with this protocol in the same way as other councillors.

4. General Rules of Communication

It is important that all Council communications are effective and in so doing must be:

- Short and to the point
- Courteous
- In plain English
- Based on facts and information
- In a consistent format and style
- Clear about the action required or taken
- Informative

5. Methods of Communication

The Council will use a variety of methods of communication based on what reaches its intended audience most effectively and efficiently. Over 80% of the population generally use electronic communication now (*Office for National Statistics*), so this is the Council's preferred and primary method of communication.

However, we recognise that not all people are able to or wish to use electronic methods of communication, so we will continue to utilise different media and approaches in order to reach our audiences.

The table below shows our main means of communication.

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| Council Website | The Council website is our primary method for general communication with our stakeholders. It has recently been totally overhauled. Its existence needs to be more widely publicised. We wish to make it the main means for two-way communication between the Council and its stakeholders. The website must be kept up to date and we want to include information on activities and news on an ongoing basis, as well as provide details of the Council's policies and procedures. We also need more links to other websites offering information considered to be of interest to our stakeholders. |
| Clerk's contact details | Contact details are published on noticeboards and on the website to encourage open access. |
| Council notice boards | The noticeboards are updated regularly with important information about the Council's activities and events. |
| Council meetings | All Council meetings are publicised and are open to the public to attend. There is a short period at the start of each Council meeting where the Council are able hear issues raised by members of the public. This is a very important part of our communication strategy. Members of the public are then welcome to stay and hear the rest of the meeting. |
| Council Agendas and Minutes | Agendas of Council meetings are available to all on the website and on the council notice boards. Minutes are on the website and are available on request by email. |
| Annual Parish Meeting | The annual parish meeting is held in May every year and provides an opportunity to communicate and discuss Council activities over the past year and objectives for the following year. |
| Press Releases | Press releases are given to local media on significant points of interest or achievement. |
| Councillor's Representation and Networking | We are committed to regular involvement with local groups and organisations through representation. |

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| Twitter and Facebook | We are not planning to get involved with Twitter and Facebook at the moment, due |
| | to the time commitment to keep them up to-date. The Sourton Facebook page is not council run and all comments and posts are as individuals not as councillors. |
| External Correspondence | We will reply to external correspondence in a timely manner which is both courteous and compliant with the General Rules of Communication (see above). |
| Internal Correspondence | Internal communication is to be simple, courteous and kept to a minimum, in accordance with the General Rules of Communication (see above). Matters should not be debated by email but debated at public meetings to uphold democratic values. |

6. Responsibilities

- (a) The Clerk has overall responsibility for all issues in this strategy unless specified otherwise.
- (b) In the event of any media enquiry, the Clerk in consultation with the Chair, is responsible for issuing a response from the Council. Individual members of the Council must make clear, if they are approached for comment directly, whether they are giving an **individual or personal opinion** or referring the matter to the Council for a formal response. In the former case, Councillors should be mindful of the policies and decisions of the Council and respect the integrity of fellow Councillors and the Clerk. It must be made clear that the response is from the individual concerned and NOT from the Council. In any event, the Clerk and the Chair must be notified of any contact with the media as soon as possible.
- (c) The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, shall issue a press release on behalf of the Council where it is considered necessary to publicise an activity of the Council.
- (d) The content of the Council's website is mainly managed by the Clerk. However it is the responsibility of all Councillors to check it regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and inform the Clerk if issues arise.
- (e) The Clerk is responsible for receiving correspondence and documents on behalf of the Council and dealing with them, bringing such items to the attention of the Council. The Clerk issues correspondence on the Council's behalf as instructed by the Council or in accordance with known policy. A Councillor corresponding with a third party does so as an individual and the rules relevant to media contact (see above) apply.
- (f) Any advice relevant to Council business given to a Councillor by third parties and which affects their opinion on any such matter should be declared at Council meetings.