STILTON PARISH COUNCIL

Stilton Pavilion, High Street, Stilton PE7 3RA
Telephone: 01733 639106 - Email: clerk@stiltonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Social Media & Communications Policy

Introduction

The aim of this policy is to establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication in relation to members of the public, other agencies, fellow members, the press and Parish Council staff.

The Parish Council aims to provide information on important matters affecting the community and to encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

Each Parish Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. They will always try to help with matters relating to Stilton Parish Council (SPC). However, an individual councillor cannot respond to enquiries outside of Parish Council meetings other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. An individual councillor, including the chairman, cannot make a decision or respond on behalf of the Parish Council.

Introduction 1
Methods of Communication 2
Website 2
Newsletter 2
Notice boards 2
Meetings 2
Annual Meeting of the Parish Council 2
Annual Parish Meeting 2
Correspondence 2
Communication with the Press and Public 3
Internal Communication 4
Social Media 4
Code of Practice relating to Social Media 5
Published comment by other groups on Parish Council activities 6
Related Policies and procedures: 6
Policy Review 6

Methods of Communication

Website

In the interests of transparency and to provide electors with a clear picture of its activities, the Parish Council will publish information on the SPC website: www.stiltonparishcouncil.gov.uk This will include Parish Council meeting agendas, the full minutes of Parish Council meetings and a publication scheme. Hard copies are available by request to the clerk.

Newsletter

The Parish Council publishes a monthly digital newsletter on its website and village social media (using Facebook). This is also published in SCAN (Stilton Community Association Newsletter) describing the work of Council, summarising resolutions made at the last full Parish Council meeting and informing the village of important events and information.
The Parish Council produces a bi-annual hard copy newsletter, which is delivered to all houses in the village. The Parish Council has set up an Editorial EMR to budget for this.

Notice boards

The notice boards by the Village Pump, the Parish Room, and The Pavilion display contact details for the Parish Clerk, an annual list of full council and committee meetings, the agenda for the next meeting, a QR code linking to Parish Council minutes, any statutory notices and other items of interest.
There is also a Community notice board near the old bus shelter. Due to limited space on notice boards, more comprehensive and diverse information such as current and previous Minutes, previous Agendas, Policies, Regulations, Councillor details, planning applications, news, Facebook, forthcoming events, etc are available on the SPC website, www.stiltonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Meetings

The Parish Council usually meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Church Meeting Room. At every Parish Council meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise a matter of concern or to comment on an item on the agenda.
After the conclusion of the public speaking section members of the public are not permitted to comment on further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chairman. The Council also has various Committees and Working Groups, details of which are on the SPC website.

Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

This meeting is held in May each year. It is in effect a normal Parish Council meeting except that the first item on the agenda has to be 'The election of the Chairman'.

Annual Parish Meeting

This is a meeting of the Parish and not the Parish Council. Electors can contribute to the agenda and these meetings can celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community. It can be a very social meeting. Seven clear days' notice of the meeting will be given and the meeting is held in May each year.

Correspondence

All correspondence to the Parish Council should be addressed to the Clerk by email at clerk@stiltonparishcouncil.gov.uk or by post to Stilton Pavilion, High Street, Stilton PE7 3RA. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for their attention at the next meeting.

If a resident wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Parish Council meeting, then the Clerk will have to be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda.

The Parish Council will determine the response, if any, to correspondence received. The Parish Council reserves the right to not respond to any correspondent that takes up a disproportionate amount of the Clerk's time. The Clerk will aim to respond to all correspondence within 14 working days of receiving it. Advice will be sought upon receipt of vexatious communications.

All official correspondence from the Parish Council should be sent by the Clerk on Stilton Parish Council official headed notepaper (unless via email).
Correspondence from individual Parish Councillors should be avoided. However, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for a Parish Councillor to issue correspondence in their own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the Parish Council.

Communication with the Press and Public

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chairman. The Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media. However, where it is appropriate for a councillor to represent the Parish Council, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the Council.

Individual councillors will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the Parish Council.

In the restricted period before an election, commonly known as "purdah" media releases will not include quotes from councillors who are due for re-election

Press reports from the Parish Council, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.

Unless a Parish Councillor has been authorised by the council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Parish 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 this.

Parish Councillors will be approached regularly by members of the community, as this is part of their role. Care should be taken over how councillors deal with enquiries from the public because this will reflect on the Council.

At no time should councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter.

All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the Parish Council. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- Refer the matter to the Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- Request an item on a relevant agenda
- Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Clerk.

Unless a Parish Councillor is absolutely certain that they are reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view. The only clear way of being aware of the Council's view is if the matter has been discussed at a Parish Council meeting, and a decision made on that item.

Internal Communication

- E-mails should be kept to a minimum and should be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.
- Matters for information to the other councillors should be directed via the Clerk as should Parish Council emails to District and County Councillors
- Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk.
- Telephone calls should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.

External Communication

- Emails from councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk.

Social Media

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- ✓ Parish Council Website
- ✓ Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- ✓ X and other micro blogging sites
- ✓ YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- ✓ LinkedIn
- ✓ Bloggs and discussion forums
- ✓ Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication. The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors and council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories (linked website or press page)
- Vacancies for councillors and/or staff
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Heath, District and County Councils
- Announcing new information
- Post or share information from other parish related community groups such as school, sports clubs, community groups and charities.

Code of Practice relating to Social Media

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The Council will appoint a nominated person (normally Parish Clerk/RFO) as moderator of parish council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy and Communication Policy.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Published comment by other groups on Parish Council activities

Should the Parish Council become aware of miscommunication or inaccurate publication of facts involving the Parish Council and/or it's activities, the Finance, General Purpose and Communication committee shall be advised and the Clerk asked to request a published correction from the source.

Councillors should be mindful of the Code of Conduct, respect confidentiality, not reveal sensitive information and ensure they post viewpoints as an individual (without referencing their councillor status) when using social media privately. **There is a difference between communication on behalf of the council or as a private citizen.**

Related Policies and procedures:

These include, but are not limited to:

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Data Protection Policy
- Privacy Notice
- Freedom of Information

Policy Review

Reviewed/Adopted: 10 November 2026 (agenda item PC238/26)
Next review date: May 2027