

Sutton-on-Trent Parish Council

Communications and Social Media Policy

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use, two-way channels of communication between Sutton-on-Trent Parish Council and members of the local community.

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

Each parish councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. A contact list is available on the notice-board and on the Parish Council website.

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and to the Clerk to the Council. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

Means of Communication

Parish Council Meetings

The Parish Council meets on the second Tuesday of every month except for August at the Methodist Community Centre on High Street at 7.30pm.

The agenda for a meeting is posted on the village notice boards on Main Street and Crow Park Avenue and on the parish website at least three working days prior to the meeting.

The meeting format allows for two ten-minute Open Forum sessions where by members of the public can raise questions or concerns or comment on an agenda item. Once the meeting has commenced however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to the discussion unless the Chairman feels that they have some expertise or experience in the matter being discussed. In this case, the Chairman will temporarily suspend the Standing Orders to allow them to speak.

Minutes to the meetings are posted in draft format on the parish website and the notice board on Main Street within seven days of the meeting. Minutes are signed as a true record at the next available meeting and posted as such on the parish website.

Any Councillor who has a query about an item recorded in the draft minutes should raise this at the next meeting for clarification. Only if agreed by a majority of the Council will the draft minutes be amended and then only to amend a resolution. Once an item has been resolved on, it cannot be discussed at a meeting for six months.

The Annual Meeting (AGM) of the Council is held in May, in an Election year it will be held on the fourth day after the election or within 14 days. Councillors will elect the Chair and appoint the Vice Chair for the forthcoming year during this meeting.

The Annual Parish Meeting (APM) is held between 1st March and 1st June and will not commence earlier than 6.00 pm unless otherwise agreed. Its purpose is to provide parishioners with a summary of the activities of the Parish Council and other village organisations during the past year. Any issue can be raised for discussion to enable parishioners to air their views and debate local issues of concern to them. The Parish Council will work in partnership with other village organisations in order to prepare for this meeting.

Under exceptional circumstances and with guidance from the National Association of Local Councils, the Council may at its discretion delay holding either or both the AGM and APM in which case they will be held as soon as is practicable.

Correspondence

All correspondence relating to the Council should be addressed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for its attention at the next meeting.

Where possible, all correspondence to the Parish Clerk will be acknowledged within seven days of receipt. If email is used then an acknowledgment will be sent by email.

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

The Parish Council reserve the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Parish Council Clerk's time.

The personal data of any resident in contact with the Parish Council through any medium will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Privacy Policy.

Social Media

Social Media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience, instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information and sharing relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger age group, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups. The term Social Media includes but is not limited to:

- Parish Council website
- Facebook and other social networking sites such as Next Door
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council Emails

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What is written on the web is permanent. In the main, Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk to the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

Parish website

The Clerk is the nominated 'webmaster' with responsibility to maintain and update the website including

- Posting dates of council meetings, agenda and minutes
- Council policies and financial information kept updated
- Share information, news and events relevant to the parish including information from community groups and clubs
- Share information from partners, e.g. District and County Council, Police, health organisations etc.

Facebook

To be used to support the website information above as detailed above and will be Moderated by a nominated Councillor with back up provided by the Clerk. The Moderator has the authority to remove any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Emails

Email will be used to distribute information on Council business. Hard copies will be provided by exception by request. Councillors are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure anti-virus software is kept up to date on personal computers, laptops, tablets through which council correspondence is accessed.

When participating in any online communication Councillors are reminded to:

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- Be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
- Ensure comments are respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud". Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasise points.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or beliefs should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- Gain permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites from the person or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.

Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response:

- There will not be an immediate response to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council.
- The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
- If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. The poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
- If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Parish Clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.
- Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.

Freedom of Information Requests

The Council's Publication Scheme is available to view on the parish website at

www.suttonontrent.org.uk

Any request for information under the scheme that is not available to download from the parish website should be sent in writing to the Clerk at clerk@suttonontrent.org.uk and will be responded to within the time frame laid out in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as detailed in the published Publication Scheme.

Media Relations

Any requests for information received from the media will be forwarded to the Chairman and Clerk for a response.

The Chairman may from time to time delegate to another Councillor the responsibility for responding to a media enquiry.

Councillors should at no time, other than when having been given express permission to do, make any representation on behalf of the Council when dealing with the media.

Adopted: 12th May 2020