



Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council

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POLICY TITLE

Communications Policy

ADOPTION DATE

15th October 2020

POLICY AIM

Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council has a duty to engage effectively with its residents, partners employees and stakeholders. The overall aim is that Parish Council communications should be a two-way process; to give people the information to understand accurately what we do, so they can make informed decisions and to get information from residents and stakeholders so we can understand their needs.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- That the Parish Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- That the reputation of the Parish Council is not adversely affected;
- That our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council;
- The Council's information and data are handled appropriately and in line with current GDPR and data protection legislation.
- To provide a regular flow of information as part of the Parish Council's commitment to be accountable, open and transparent to the residents and businesses in the parish and provide value for money.

The policy sets out the overall approach to communications and more specifically the Parish Council's approach to;

1. Media

Where information is not available via the Council's publication scheme, the Parish Council shall endeavour to assist the media with timely responses to enquiries about the Council's functions, decisions, projects, consultations and actions endeavouring to meet stipulated deadlines where resources allow. The purpose of this policy is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. This policy will set out who is authorised to

speak on behalf of the Council to ensure views and policies of the Council are present accurately, to ensure consistency when dealing with the press and media and to ensure the press and media are treated equally.

2. Website and social media

To establish the principles of use of the Parish Council's website and social media by the Parish Council employees, Councillors, representatives and volunteers and to provide guidance on the use of Social Media.

POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Achieving the Parish Council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with and provide services for. An important part of our role is to ensure that information provided is easily accessible, relevant and timely. The Parish Council recognises the importance of communication and is committed to developing its own services to meet the expectations of the community it serves.
- 1.2 The Parish Council will publish;
 - Information about Parish Council decisions
 - Advice about our services
 - Information about the Council's finances
 - Information supplied to us about local facilities and groups
 - Public consultations and public inquiries
- 1.3 The Parish Council has several audiences which include;
 - Residents
 - Parish Council staff
 - Hard to reach groups, including young people and BME groups;
 - The media
 - Doncaster Council
 - Voluntary groups and organisations
 - The business community
 - Local MP's and Ward Councillors
 - Other public sector organizations (police, health and fire)
 - Visitors and those who work in the parish.
- 1.4 Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decision and actions. This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act, the General Data Protection Regulation and the Council's Standing Orders. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 1988.

2. Methods of communication

- 2.1 The Parish Council will engage in core actions which deliver the aims of this policy. They are;
- Manage the media effectively to promote the Parish Council
 - Publish a regular council newsletter for residents
 - Ensure the Parish Council brand is consistently linked to services.
 - Carry out regular consultation
 - Maintain and develop the Parish Council website
 - Engage in social media.
 - Residents, businesses and wider stakeholders are encouraged to communicate with the Parish Council through email, letter, social media and Parish Council meetings.
- 2.2 The Parish Council will brand its communications consistently, ensuring single brand identity by using template documents using the parish council logo and uniform font types.

3. Press and media

- 3.1 All media work carried out by the Parish Council follows the provisions of the legislation, provisions and code. The general points of the Code are:
- The Parish Council is prevented from publishing, or helping others to publish material which may appear to affect public support for a political party.
 - Any publicity describing Parish Council policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.
 - The Clerk to the Council or authorised deputy can only publicise the views of the Council.
 - The Chair of the Council has a wide-ranging remit and can be quoted in media material and undertake media work across all areas of the Parish Council's services as required and only with authorisation from the Clerk to the Council. This work can be deputised where required and appropriate to do so.
 - The Chair of the Council represents the Parish Council for civic and ceremonial functions and will be pictured and quoted accordingly.

Press Protocol

- 3.2 The Clerk to the Council as proper officer for the Council acts as press officer for the Parish Council with the authority to issue official press releases and statements to the media. The Clerk should be the first point of contact for all enquiries. No other member of staff (other than the Deputy Clerk when deputising for the Clerk under delegation) has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.
- 3.3 On contentious matters, the Clerk, will consult with the Chair of Council where there is insufficient time for a Council meeting before issuing a press statement. The Chair of Council may speak to the press on behalf of the Council where there is an agreed Council position or in case of emergency,

national news story or another major event. In all other cases the Chair of Council should refer the press to the Council office.

- 3.4 The Parish Council will be pro active in approaching the media with press releases, articles and information that publicises an event, story or topical subject that is associated with and has a positive impact on the residents, businesses and visitors to the Parish.
- 3.5 Parish Councillors will be proactive in communicating with the Clerk anything they feel is worthy of publicising to the media.
- 3.6 Political Party of group affiliation of any Member(s) will not be identified or quoted in any press release.
- 3.7 Press releases and statements will be prepared by the Clerk in association with the Chair of the Council and any other Councillors as required. They will normally be restricted to matters that have already been debated and agreed by the Parish Council.
- 3.8 When the media seeks information on an issue that is, or likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, professional advice should be sought before any response is made.
- 3.9 In some circumstances a quote will be attributed to the Chair, Vice Chair or other Councillor. Where possible, a suggested draft response will be provided by the Clerk to the relevant Councillors. All Councillors will be sent a copy of the Parish Council's response to a press enquiry once it has been issued. This is for information only.
- 3.10 During election year, from the issue of the Notice of Election until the day following the election, the Clerk to the Council would not normally issue press releases.
- 3.11 Any enquiries that are deemed to be political will be advised to contact the relevant Councillor. Councillors should make their own arrangements for issuing party political material to the media and ensure that the material does not use the Parish Council's brand identity.
- 3.12 If a Councillor or Employee receives an approach (including unsolicited approaches) or enquiry from the media relating to the Parish Council and its activities the Clerk should be informed so that appropriate action can be taken.
- 3.13 Nothing in this policy is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Councillor or Employee from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Councillors must however make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Parish Council policy and agreed decision making are their own personal views. However, Councillors and Employees should take care not to misrepresent and/ or bring the Parish Council into disrepute, and must have regard to their responsibilities under their Code of Conduct (for Councillors) and contract of employment (for Employees).

- 3.14 Employees should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Parish Council unless specifically authorised by the Clerk.
- 3.15 All press releases and other materials will be kept for reference in line with the Parish Council's document retention policy.

Councillors

- 3.16 Councillors should be aware that according to case law the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. Councillors cannot speak on behalf of the Council; reporters should be directed to contact the Clerk if they want to carry out an interview or obtain a statement about the Council's business or actions.
- 3.17 When speaking to the Press or Media in any other capacity this should be made clear, for example as an individual or spokesperson for a community group or political party. Never use the prefix "Councillor" when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meeting open to the press and public.

4. Social Media

What is social media?

- 4.1 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and tablet technology, but may extend in the future.
- 4.2 Examples of social media platforms include:
- Social networking – (e.g., Facebook)
 - Professional networking (e.g., LinkedIn)
 - Video sharing – (e.g., YouTube)
 - Blogs (e.g., WordPress)
 - Micro-blogging (e.g., Twitter)
 - Message boards (e.g., BBC Message board)
 - Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia)
 - YouTube
- 4.3 The only approved social media accounts the Parish Council currently have at present are;
- Facebook page;
<https://www.facebook.com/SprotbroughCusworthParishCouncil/>
 - Twitter; @SprotCusPC
 - YouTube;
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UHSHVuxiFVQKEfhzMzf4VFZA>

Use of Social Media

- 4.4 The Parish Council uses social media to publish information about the work of the Parish Council to a wider audience including hard to reach groups.
- 4.5 The Parish Council will avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council's work.
- 4.6 Social media will NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues.
- 4.7 In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, the Clerk is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other person (other than the Chair of Council acting in an emergency or at a time of crisis or the Deputy Clerk when deputising for the Clerk under delegation) has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.
- 4.8 The responsibility of overseeing the administration of the Parish Council's website and social media platforms is a dedicated media officer to ensure content is appropriate.
- 4.9 All Parish Council representatives including employees and councillors should acknowledge that information shared through social media, even in private spaces, are still subject to copyright, GDPR and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other such legislation. They must also operate in line with the Council's own policies and for Councillors the Code of Conduct.

Guidance for Council Officers on the use of Council social media

- Employees should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – e.g., Facebook - and adhere to these at all times.
- No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain – i.e., available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, or approved by the Clerk (or Deputy Clerk under delegation).
- Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
- Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
- Copyright laws must be respected.
- Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
- Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
- Employees must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

Third party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage

4.10 Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of the Parish Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If you use Social Media in your official capacity as a Councillor, you should always be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Do:

- Set appropriate privacy settings for any networking site
- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such views
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a Councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network.
- Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriate – if using a Council-provided site or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity
- Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a Councillor.
- Be careful if making ‘political’ points, and avoid being specific or personal about individuals including other Councillors.

Don’t:

- Comment in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to face contact
- Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes

Never:

- Post comments that are in breach of the Council’s Equality and Diversity Policy or that incites violence or hatred.

5. Parish Council website

5.1 The Parish Council will maintain a website which is regularly updated and contains key information about the Council and important events. The Council will further develop the website to ensure it keeps pace with media advances.

5.2 The website shall contain material that arises from Council business including;

- Agendas and minutes
- Policies
- Financial information
- Factual information about the Parish Council and Parish Councillors

- Reports, Surveys or any other material derived from the Parish Council

5.3 The website may also contain;

- History and geography about the Parish
- Parish news and local events
- Information about local businesses
- Details about local community groups
- Links to local external resources
- Links to Doncaster Council websites where appropriate

IMPLEMENTATION

The Parish Council may be held legally liable for any statements made to the media or via its other communication methods by its employees and Councillors. It also has a responsibility to make sure the information we hold on clients, citizens and employees is held confidentially and securely.

All Councillors and employees will be responsible for:

- making sure you have read and understood the Communications Policy and considered this in conjunction with the related policies below;
- meeting the standards set out in this Policy and any associated guidance which may be published from time to time; Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action being taken against Employees and Councillors being reported to the Monitoring Officer under the code of conduct.
- ensuring that you do not make a statement about a person, company or organisation that is considered to harm reputation. If the defamatory statement is written (in print or online) it is known as liable;
- reporting any breaches of the policy to the Clerk

MONITORING

The policy will be monitored in the following ways:

Monitoring Activity	Person Responsible
Any breach of the policy to be reported to the Clerk/ Deputy Clerk	Anyone
Reports will be investigated and remedial action taken if required	Clerk/ Deputy Clerk
Changes in legislation	Clerk

POLICY CONSULTATION

A copy of the policy has been given to all staff and is available to view on the Parish Council's website and Parish Council office.

POLICY REVISION DATE

Policy reviewed August 2024
Next review date August 2025

This document shall be reviewed annually; or upon any changes to legislation; or subject to the requirements of Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council.

RELATED POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Community Engagement Strategy
Annual Risk Assessment
Health and Safety Policy
Councillor Code of Conduct
Disciplinary Policy