



COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Good communication and effective engagement with the whole community is essential to achieving the Council's aims and objectives.

The aims of this policy are to increase transparency, provide information that is accurate, easily accessible, relevant and timely for the benefit of residents, partners, employees, stakeholders and visitors, to enable local people and groups to influence the development and delivery of services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities, and to encourage their participation in community events and activities.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- raise residents' awareness of services provided by the Council and the quality of service they can expect
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence in the Council's activities and their costs
- increase understanding of how to get involved with, or influence, Council policies and services
- raise the profile of Stonehouse as a wonderful town in which to live, work and play
- support elected members in their role
- engage with all sections of the community, particularly hard-to-reach groups and those often excluded
- increase interest and participation in community groups and activities such as Stonehouse in Bloom, Share & Repair, Stonehouse Community Climate Action Forum and Christmas Goodwill Fest
- ensure that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks, nor the reputation of the Council be adversely affected, by inadequate communications or failure to correct inaccurate information appearing elsewhere

We will communicate and engage with:

residents, Councillors, Town Council staff, voluntary groups and organisations, local businesses, Stroud District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, local ward Councillors and constituency MPs, other public sector organisations, contractors and service providers, visitors, the local press and broadcast media.

We will communicate information about:

- Council, committee and working group elections, meetings, decisions and activities
- Council policies
- Council finances
- our services and those of other local authorities
- news and other information supplied to us about local facilities, groups and organisations
- public consultations and inquiries
- opportunities to participate in Council affairs and other community activities
- Data as required by the Local Government Transparency Code

We will communicate and engage by:

- Publishing a regular Council newsletter for residents: see Appendix I
- Displaying information in notice boards, via banners or other appropriate street display
- Responding to enquiries promptly and in full
- Communicating with the local press and broadcast media: see Appendix II
- Carrying out regular consultation: see Appendix III
- Communicating via the STC website: see Appendix IV
- Engaging in social media: see Appendix V
- Establishing a clear and consistent Council identity for the presentation and content of all communications

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES - SEE APPENDICES I-V

The members of the Town Council, its Officers and other employees, and individuals and organisations working with or acting on behalf of the Council are responsible for implementing and adhering to this policy.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with other relevant policies, including Bullying & Harassment Policy, Code of Conduct, Data Protection Policy and Equality & Diversity Policy.

MONITORING

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy we will:

- monitor the local press and broadcast media for items concerning or originating from the Town Council or the community of Stonehouse

- seek feedback from local groups, organisations and businesses with whom we communicate
- carry out periodic consultation to measure satisfaction in the community
- monitor participation in elections and other Council activities

APPENDIX I - NEWSLETTER

Stonehouse News will be published at least twice each year and will include news and information regarding past, current and forthcoming Council and community activities and events. Deadlines for articles and advertisements will be determined by the Communications Working Group and the Facilities & Communications Coordinator, to whom they should be addressed.

The format and distribution of the newsletter will be determined by the Facilities & Communications Coordinator and the Communications Working Group with the agreement of Business Committee.

If deemed necessary an interim newsletter will be published online, with paper copies available in selected outlets and for others in the community who may lack internet access.

APPENDIX II - LOCAL PRESS AND BROADCAST MEDIA

The Town Council will produce press releases, articles and information publicising events, stories or subjects concerned with, and having a positive impact on, Stonehouse residents, businesses, the community, the Town Council and the local environment.

The format of press releases will conform to current best practice.

The Town Council Office should be the first point of contact for all enquiries. Day to day enquiries will be dealt with by Council officers in consultation with the Town Clerk. Requests for comment or interview should be referred to the Town Clerk to determine a response, normally restricted to matters that have been agreed by the Town Council, in consultation with the Chair and/or Deputy Chair.

Quotes may be attributed to the Chair, Deputy Chair or other Town Councillors after consultation. Where possible, a draft response will be provided by the Town Clerk to the relevant Town Councillors.

Enquiries that are deemed to be party political will be directed to the relevant Town Councillor(s). Elected members should make their own arrangements for issuing party political material to the media and ensure that the material is clear that it does not emanate from the Town Council.

Any Councillor responding to a journalist in their personal capacity or as a representative of another group should state clearly that they are responding in that capacity and not as a Town Councillor.

Nothing in these guidelines is to be interpreted as preventing, or attempting to prevent, a Councillor from expressing a personal opinion through the media, for example by writing to a newspaper or posting an item on an internet site. Members must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. Members must take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Town Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct.

Employees other than the Clerk (or Deputy) and Facilities & Communications Coordinator should not contact the media on any matter relating to the Town Council unless specifically authorised by the Town Clerk and Chair.

Copies will be retained of all communications with the media. Should there be a need to make an official complaint against a publication or broadcast the Town Clerk will be the first point of contact.

APPENDIX III

The Council is committed to consulting local residents, businesses and community groups, service providers and contractors, visitors and our own staff and Members, to identify ways in which we can improve the services we provide. We will:

- invite public participation in Council and Committee meetings
- encourage public membership of Working Groups
- invite local and community groups to participate in the formulation of specific policies
- publish questionnaires on major issues via printed media including Stonehouse News, social media and the website
- hold drop-in events in various locations in the town
- invite correspondence to the Town Clerk

APPENDIX IV

The Town Council will maintain a regularly updated website. Its contents may include, but not be limited to:

- the work of the Council, its members and officers, agendas and minutes of meetings, policies, reports and projects
- information concerning schools, churches, doctors, dentists and community organisations and activities
- a directory of/information about local businesses
- visitor information including the history and environs of the town, travel information, etc
- local news
- useful links

The website will be administered by the Facilities & Communications Coordinator under the direction of the Town Clerk.

APPENDIX V

The Town Council will post relevant communications on social media. Such communications may include:

- details of local events
- reports and photographs (with appropriate consent) of past events
- updates about Town Council projects and activities
- notification of press releases
- responding positively to residents' enquiries, comments, questions and suggestions

- other content which promotes and upholds the reputation of the Council

Councillors and officers will not, as representatives of the Council:

- engage in debate with residents
- comment on sensitive issues such as planning applications
- publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute
- publish any content for party political purposes or specific campaigning purposes as the Council is not permitted to publish material which 'in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party '(LGA 1986)
- promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns
- publish any content that is abusive or hateful, that would put Council representatives in breach of Council codes of conduct or policies relating to Councillors or staff, or that breach the Council's Equality and Diversity or Bullying and Harassment policies

Members will make it clear that any views expressed that differ from Council policy are their own personal views.

Last reviewed: 14th March 2022 (TC2769)

Next Review: 2025