

Southery Parish Council

Communications and Community Engagement Policy

Adopted November 2021; Next Review November 2025

(adopted from the Governance Toolkit for Parish & Town Councils)

INTRODUCTION

This policy aims to establish a protocol for effective communication of the Parish Council's activities and pertinent information to the media and members of the public.

The Parish Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media. All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner. The Parish Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Parish Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the Council, the press and members of the public.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Parish Council will facilitate community engagement with its electorate by:

- Publishing its meeting dates, times and venues on its website.
 - Providing an allocated period of time for Public Participation in meetings and if held within a building it will be fully accessible. The period of time for the public is at the beginning of each ordinary meeting, sometimes included within an extraordinary meeting and annual meeting. If any person is unable to attend they are welcome to send someone on their behalf, or via the Parish Clerk or any member of the Council. The Clerk will endeavour to advise any person who makes contact with the Council that this is an option for them in communicating a topic or issue.
 - Consulting with the electorate to gauge public opinion. As a smaller parish there are generally less occasions where there is a need to gauge public opinion, though if needed it will be carried out, via hard copy or online surveys where people can be anonymous if they wish. Surveys will endeavour to request views of the public and provide options where available. The Council can only act on issues where it has a power to do so.
 - Maintaining an up to date website. The Website is hosted by the Norfolk ALC who have expertise in keeping the website within necessary regulations particular accessibility. The Parish Council website is maintained and administered by the Parish Clerk on a month by month basis and is kept up to date as possible. The website and policies are opportunities for the Council to explain its responsibilities, and where they are not responsible it will provide information to signpost the public elsewhere.
- It will abide by the engagement detailed within its Equality Policy.

METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

The Council will use the following media to communicate its activities:

ACTIVITY METHOD OF COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARISH CLERK

- Approved minutes: Website
- Draft minutes: Website
- Agendas: Website / Noticeboards

- Council Policies/Procedures: Website
- Annual External Audit: Website
- Adopted Annual Accounts: Website
- Councillor vacancies: Website
- Financial information: Website

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Council will review that it has sufficiently covered requirements of communicating with as many different groups within the community as possible. As a result an action plan will be put in place to address identified gaps. Any new methods of communication would be trialled before putting in place permanently and this would be stated. As part of a review residents might be surveyed to see if they are clear on how they can communicate with the Council and the benefits of doing so.

1. Parish Council Correspondence

1.1 The point of contact for the Parish Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed. This is because this is the most efficient and consistent way of responding to enquiries in line with the Southery Parish Council's policies. This is also important to ensure that regulations relating to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) is upheld and the Parish Clerk is custodian data processor when receiving correspondence from members of the public.

1.2 The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

1.3 No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a Committee, sub-Committee or working party. Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

1.4 All official correspondence (e.g. Parish Council responses to Planning Applications) should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper or from the Parish Council's email address. Responses to correspondence received will be given with ten working days of receipt, where possible, if not an acknowledgement will be sent, and the letter will be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting.

NB: Correspondence that includes sensitive information relating to any persons will not be included on Parish Council's agenda and will be dealt with by the Clerk in consultation with the Chair or in their absence the Vice-Chair.

1.5 Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).

1.6 Data of individuals such as name, address and email address will be deleted on all emails and communications before they are copied, shared or forwarded by the staff and Councillors in line with GDPR Regulations. Unless it is felt by the Clerk that an individual should be known to Councillors then they will seek permission from the individual to process their data for this purpose. an individual's data will never be shared with the public written or verbally.

1.7. Agendas for Parish Council meetings, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties

- (i) Agendas should be clear and concise.
- (ii) They should contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision, and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions are to be taken at a meeting.
- (iii) Items for information should be kept to a minimum on an agenda.
- (iv) Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes fellow Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information will be circulated via the Clerk.

PROTOCOL

1. The Parish Clerk is solely responsible for the preparation of notices of Parish Council meetings, agendas and minutes. These are always checked in draft with the Chair and if required the Vice Chair.
2. The Parish Clerk is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Parish Council's website so that it remains current.
3. All correspondence addressed to the Parish Council will be actioned by the Parish Clerk on behalf of the Parish Council in the local authority's name
4. Agendas for Parish Council meetings will be accompanied with sufficient information to enable Members to make an informed decision.
5. Agendas will be issued electronically so that they are received by Members at least 3 clear days before all meetings of the Parish Council.
6. Agendas and minutes for all meetings of the Council will be published on the Parish Council's website
7. Other relevant information will be emailed to Members in between meetings.

2. Communications with the Press and Public

- 2.1 The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, with the Chair of the Parish Council or Vice Chair in their absence.
- 2.2 Press reports from the council, its committees or working parties should be delivered by the Clerk or an officer or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- 2.3 Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Parish Council to speak to the media or with a member of the public on a particular topic, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press or discuss issues with the public, should firstly decline to comment and advise that as per this protocol they will discuss with the Clerk and Chair or Vice Chair in their absence
- 2.4 Unless a Councillor is certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Parish Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
- 2.5 If Councillors receive a communication that is a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Parish Council's adopted complaints policy and be directed immediately to the Parish Clerk copied to the Chair and Vice Chair. Care should be taken in regard to personal details and the information received if on email should be only forwarded to the Clerk and Chair or Vice Chair and preferably deleted as soon as possible.

2.6 The Parish Council's Aim is to communicate clearly and effectively both within the Parish Council and to the public. Please see appendix 1 for further information.

We will:

- always use the agreed Parish Council style;
- keep sentences short and paragraphs to 3 or 4 sentences;
- use active not passive verbs and sentences;
- use everyday words, avoiding jargon and acronyms;
- keep to plain English;
- always give the Clerk's contact details, e-mail address and website if applicable;
- always use the correct name of the Parish Council;
- Use standard templates for letters, reports and official publications.
- Address all correspondence being from the Southery Parish Council in any form sent so it is clear that responses from the Parish Council never reflect personal views. The response would have been cleared with the Chair or Vice Chair in their absence, and the whole Southery Parish Council depending on what is appropriate.

2.7. Communications received from the public will be communicated to all Parish Councillors preferably by email. The Clerk in consultation with the Chair will decide how best to take any matter forward and, if appropriate, to place on the agenda. Members of the public will be informed, via the parish Clerk, as to how their communication will be dealt with. The matter may be formally referred to a Committee, be placed on the agenda of the next meeting, responded to by the Clerk, or simply noted. There is no discussion at a Parish Council meeting on a matter for which there has been no prior notice. However, the Parish Council has arrangements for public questions, comments or representations in "Public Participation". This is limited to three minutes per person (unless agreed otherwise).

2.8 The Council engages with various different groups in the community and will ensure that methods of communication is keeping with the needs of those groups. Groups it might consider would be teenagers; isolated people; older people; parents' school children (primary and high school); church; young people; working with no family and disabled people and those who have had no contact or knowledge of the Council's work.

Appendix 1

Ways of Communicating what the Council does:

- Southery Parish Council Website which has a home page explaining what the Council does and news page which acts as an update for publicity statements as they arise. The Council minutes are provided on the website.
- Village Voice Magazine – Free delivered parish magazine provided independently locally to every household in Southery.
- Meetings of the Parish Council – Ordinary, Extraordinary and Annual.
- Noticeboard centrally placed within the village outside the school.
- Signage around the village advises that the Council are responsible for an area with contact details of the Clerk such as the playing field, play area and cemetery.
- Where there is a project that the Parish Council requires input from the public, they are able to use the village hall either for focus groups or at current organised activities, or placement of a survey in the building for response.
- The Parish Clerk shares their mobile phone number and email address on the website, letters, surveys, parish areas responsible for the public to make contact either way if they wish. The Parish Clerk is generally available and if not at work there will be messages advising when they will next be available and if urgent to call in particular.