



SEND PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Send Parish Council (SPC) articulates and represents the views and needs of the local community. It provides information on important parish matters affecting the community and encourages comment from interested individuals and groups.

The overall aim is to make Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what SPC does, whilst also enabling SPC to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

The principles of these Guidelines apply to Parish Councillors and The Clerk to SPC (*in all following references, The Parish Clerk/The Clerk to SPC will be taken to include the Deputy Clerk to SPC*). It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

Good communications will enable SPC to:

- better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities
- raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the parish, the borough and region.
- be an effective voice of the community
- maintain and enhance the reputation of SPC
- raise the e profile of Send as a destination
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of SPC or the parish

WHO IS COMMUNICATING

PARISH CLERK

The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies.

The Parish Clerk is provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

Members of staff will be required to communicate both verbally and in writing on a regular basis with the community as part of their duties. It is imperative that staff handle such communication with courtesy and professionalism at all times.

COUNCILLORS

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on SPC. Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.

When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry, the guidance of the Parish Clerk will be sought.

At no time should councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to SPC. Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the Parish 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 Parish Clerk.

Councillors must ensure that any all communication with the public on council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of SPC regardless of the councillor's individual views on any subject.

COUNCIL MEETINGS AND COUNCILLOR INTERACTION

SPC meets on the third Monday of every month. Meetings start at 7:45pm. The floor is open to the public for representations and questions until 8:00 pm, when the formal meeting starts.

SPC has a number of working groups whose activities are reported back to the council in the monthly meetings.

An initial draft of the minutes shall be produced by the Clerk and issued to all Councillors within 10 days by email for review. Any amendments shall be made and a subsequent draft issued for publication. The Agenda and Minutes of the meetings are published on the council website following approval at a council meeting.

Councillors who have taken on responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications with third parties shall lodge a copy of any such communications with the Clerk.

Guidance on interaction:

- SPC Councillors should always disclose their identity and affiliation to the parish council,

- All media enquiries should be directed to the Chairman or the Parish Clerk or as delegated to a member of the Communications Working Group.
- If appropriate, for a specific issue the Chairman may authorise another councillor to make a statement on behalf of SPC.
- All media comment must accurately reflect SPC's position on the topic, as adopted in documents
e.g. minutes and policies.
- All decisions of SPC made in an open meeting can be quoted and made available to the media.
- The person responding to the media enquiry should have the necessary facts and understanding and be able to speak with some authority, using plain English.
- Councillors should not make 'personal comments' which could damage the reputation of SPC or negatively impact on teamwork or credibility of the council or members of the community.
- Comment on matters which are, or are likely to be, subject to legal proceedings should be subject to advice taken from SPC's Solicitor before any response is made.
- Councillors wishing to make a 'personal statement' to the media must clearly inform the media:
 - that their comments are made as an individual and are not necessarily the view of SPC;
 - that other councillors may hold a different view;
 - that the matter may still need to be discussed or resolved by SPC.

WHO WE SHOULD BE COMMUNICATING WITH

The council's audience is wide and varied but will typically include:

- SPC employees and contractors
- Residents
- Guildford Borough Councillors and staff
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people
- The media
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- The business community
- MPs
- Other public sector organisations (police, health, fire)
- Visitors and those who work in the area

HOW WE SHOULD BE COMMUNICATING

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups and demographics so it is important to ensure that within reason, all options for increasing communication and participation are reviewed over time in order to communicate effectively with everyone.

The advances made in information technology offer new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods – newspapers, telephone, and leaflets – still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

Currently Council communication is achieved mainly through Council meetings and Councillor interaction, managed by the Parish Clerk. In addition the following are managed by the Communications Working Group (CowG) formed in July 2014.

- Press releases
- Some notices on village notice boards
- Online messages via
 - the Send Village website
 - the Send Village Facebook page
- Contributions to local publications
 - the quarterly 'Ripley & Send Matters'
 - the monthly St Mary's Parish magazine
 - the weekly St Mary's newsletter
- SendInfo emails
- Certain issue specific consultation and communication as approved by the Council.

The CoWG will continue to explore ways in which communication could be improved:

PRESS - MANAGE THE MEDIA EFFECTIVELY

Key points for effective management of media relations:

- Respond to journalists in full within a reasonable time
- Be helpful, polite and positive
- Never say 'no comment'
- Ensure all statements or responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the Parish Clerk or the Chairman
- Evaluate media coverage
- Issue timely and relevant press releases
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from council agendas/minutes by issuing proactive PR (where possible)

VILLAGE NOTICE BOARDS

The village notice boards will be kept updated to ensure that members of the community who are less active online are kept aware of key information.

The Parish Clerk will manage all posting of notices to the locked boards.

ONLINE PRESENCE

Council Website

Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What is written on the web is permanent.

SPC's website is to be regularly updated and kept up-to-date.

All communications should promote the council website and if appropriate its social media accounts.

It is important to ensure that links to the website are provided from other key partners, especially Guildford Borough Council.

Council Facebook page

The Send Village Facebook is a forum for both SPC and the village community. SPC will continue to engage with the community to grow the Facebook audience. It is recognised that this forum has a wide reach, as posts can be shared by the audience with their Facebook friends.

People who  the page can also post to the page, providing a forum for local groups and businesses. Posts are monitored by the administrators to ensure the content is appropriate to the forum.

PUBLICATIONS

Ripley & Send Matters

The 'Ripley & Send Matters' quarterly publication is shared with Ripley village and is delivered to all households in the villages.

To help to cover the long gap between issues, SPC will trial a quarterly newsletter in October 2014 to publicise parish council specific events and issues.

St Mary's Magazine and Newsletter

Regular contributions are prepared and submitted by the CoWG to the St Mary's Parish monthly magazine and occasionally to their weekly newsletter.

EMAIL

SPC councillor emails should be considered to be in the public domain.

With the refresh of the SPC website, the option to provide all Councillors with 'sendvillage.org' or 'send.parishcouncil.gov.uk' POP email addresses will be pursued. These email addresses may be used by other Councillors, or members of the Parish to communicate with them, and will be added to individual parish councillor contact details on the website.

clerk@sendparishcouncil.gov.uk will continue as the email address managed by the Parish Clerk.

All-inclusive group email addresses shall be provided to cover the entire Council including the Clerk, and 'SendInfo'. 'SendInfo' email communications, currently hosted by a free email provider, are sent by blind carbon copy to a distribution list maintained by the CoWG. The email communication is primarily focused on parish council activities.

VILLAGE LOGO

The village logo is used as a brand to identify SPC and the parish, which includes the areas of Send, Send Marsh and Burnt Common. It will be used in all communication material from the council.

The logo is owned by SPC and can only be used with their permission

COMMUNICATION - GOOD PRACTICE

It is imperative that:

- all communication from SPC is courteous, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the decisions and policies of council;
- all individuals communicating on behalf of SPC are aware that every piece of communication reflects on the reputation of SPC in the community;

Staff and councillors are ambassadors of SPC and this is reflected in all communications. Any communications from SPC will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which SPC does not own the copyright or does not have permission to use;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- if official business, in any case of doubt, communications will be referred to the Chair or the Clerk to SPC prior to release;
- social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Equally, it is expected that any communications to SPC would meet similar criteria:

Any information posted on the Facebook page which is not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.

Last reviewed 18/04/16