

# SWALLOWFIELD PARISH COUNCIL



## COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

*Adopted at the  
Parish Council Meeting held on  
9<sup>th</sup> November 2021*

**REVISION HISTORY****Revisions**

<b>Adopted</b>	<b>Significant Amendments</b>
November 2021	First adopted

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

As a Parish Council, we aim to communicate openly and effectively and to engage positively with our local community and other key stakeholders, as outlined in this policy.

We believe strongly in the importance and value of communication, which intersects with everything that the Parish Council does.

Our communications policy and practices take into account guidance found in the 'Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity', published at gov.uk, as well as in 'The Good Councillor's Guide', published by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC).

As such, we will seek to ensure at all times that our communications:

- are lawful;
- are cost-effective;
- are objective;
- are even handed;
- are appropriate;
- have regard to equality and diversity;
- are issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

This policy will be reviewed periodically by the Parish Council.

## 2 WHO WE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH

Our key stakeholders are:

- Residents (parishioners) who live in the Parish.
- Tenants of premises/properties owned and let by the Parish Council.
- Community groups/clubs located in the Parish.
- Other existing/potential users of our premises and facilities.
- Businesses/employers located or operating in the Parish.
- Local government.
- Local schools and childcare/education settings.
- Healthcare providers operating in the Parish.
- Transport providers operating in the Parish.
- Local charities operating in the Parish.
- The media.
- Our employees.
- Our suppliers.

In addition, we will seek to communicate, if helpful and where possible, with residents located on the outskirts of the Parish. We will also look to share information and best practice with neighbouring or nearby parish councils.

### 3 WHAT WE WILL COMMUNICATE

We aim to provide relevant and up-to-date information on a range of important matters affecting our community and to encourage engagement with, and informed comment or questions on, these areas.

Relevant topics may include information in relation to:

- The Parish Council and our activities, including elections.
- Planning applications, appeals and decisions.
- Local government and Borough-wide matters.
- Highway and transport.
- Crime and the police.
- Sustainability and the environment.
- Local schools and childcare/education settings.
- Healthcare provision.
- Facilities and amenities.
- Community groups/clubs.
- Local charities.
- Local community-based events and initiatives.
- Surrounding areas beyond the Parish.

### 4 HOW WE WILL COMMUNICATE

Our approach takes into consideration research published by independent research body MORI and the Local Government Association, in a report titled 'The Reputation of Local Government', which outlines the most important drivers of a council's reputation as being:

- Perceived quality of services overall.
- Perceived value for money.
- Media coverage.
- Direct communications.
- Council performance.
- Clean, green and safe environment.
- Positive experiences of contact with council employees and contractors.

We will seek to ensure that at all times we communicate in a way that reflects all aspects of this policy and is clear, approachable, accessible, relevant, informative, helpful and engaging, whilst aiming to nurture mutual respect, trust, collaboration and pride within our local community.

We reserve the right to not respond to any person who or which is occupying a disproportionate amount of the Parish Council's or Clerk's time (except as may be required by law) or where, in the Council's reasonable opinion, the dialogue is not helpful or constructive. Advice may be sought upon receipt of vexatious communications and acted upon accordingly.

To ensure that we reach a high proportion of our intended audience, we will utilise the following channels:

#### 4.1 Parish Council meetings

The Parish Council normally meets once a month at Swallowfield Parish Hall and may on occasions meet a second time in a month for the planning committee to consider planning applications where the consultation period expires before the next full council meeting. Dates for all meetings are available on our website at [www.swallowfieldpc.gov.uk](http://www.swallowfieldpc.gov.uk).

Prior to each meeting, a copy of the agenda is published on the Council's website. Following a meeting, draft minutes are prepared by the Parish Clerk and circulated to all Councillors for review. These may then be revised if required and are approved at the next meeting, before being made available on the Council's website.

Members of the public are invited to bring forward any ideas and/or to make representations to the Council at the beginning of a meeting. However, decisions cannot be taken at the meeting on matters that are not on the agenda and any decisions, if required, will be deferred until a subsequent meeting. A maximum of ten minutes is normally allocated for this purpose, but this may be varied at the Chair's discretion. Members of the public are invited to attend and observe all meetings in their entirety except for items where the Council votes to exclude the public on grounds of commercial confidentiality and/or a right to privacy. Such items are considered in a Part two session after the public meeting closes.

An annual meeting of the Parish Council is normally held in April, or in June during an election year. An annual Parish meeting also takes place and an annual report is published yearly. The annual Parish meeting is not a Council meeting; it is convened by the Chair and is an opportunity for residents to meet Councillors in a less formal setting to share ideas and vote on proposals that they would like the Council to consider but the Council is not bound by the outcome of any such vote.

#### 4.2 Website

Our website can be found at [www.swallowfieldpc.gov.uk](http://www.swallowfieldpc.gov.uk)

#### 4.3 Newsletter

We publish a quarterly newsletter with a total of four editions during a calendar year.

Copies are printed and delivered to all homes in the Parish. The newsletter is also made available at the same time to key stakeholders and others on the Council's website or via email, as below (4.6).

The newsletter aims to summarise and signpost content, with further and more detailed information generally available online or upon request (4.6, 4.7 and 4.8).

Please contact the Parish Clerk if you would like to suggest an item for inclusion in the newsletter.

#### 4.4 Facebook

We consider that, in addition to the Council's website, Facebook is currently the most effective social media channel through which to communicate with our community and key stakeholders and the Parish Council's official page can be found at [www.facebook.com/SwallowfieldParishCouncil](http://www.facebook.com/SwallowfieldParishCouncil). We do not currently maintain an official presence on any other social media platforms.

The Parish Council may respond to simple questions or general requests for basic information via its official Facebook page but reserves the right not to do so. Please instead direct any correspondence to the Parish Clerk as below (4.6, 4.7 and 4.8). We will neither engage with

other Facebook groups, pages and users directly nor will we engage publicly via Facebook in relation to more detailed matters.

Parish Councillors will not engage in their capacity as Councillors or on behalf of the Parish Council via personal social media accounts. Views expressed by Councillors via such channels shall be construed as being of a purely personal nature. Unsolicited or inappropriate content posted on our official Facebook page will be promptly removed without notice. All users are reminded to avoid sharing personal or confidential information via social media.

#### 4.5 Noticeboards

We maintain and update a series of noticeboards located around the Parish. Certain noticeboards are no longer in active use but have not been physically removed. Parish Council meeting agendas and minutes are no longer displayed on noticeboards. For further information on where in use noticeboards can be found, or to suggest an item for inclusion on any of our noticeboards, please contact the Parish Clerk.

#### 4.6 Email

Anyone wishing to contact the Parish Council should please email the Parish Clerk at [clerk@swallowfieldpc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@swallowfieldpc.gov.uk). This will ensure that the communication is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for their attention.

All email communications involving Councillors acting as Parish Councillors or on behalf of the Parish Council, or from or to employees of the Parish Council, will be sent and received via official Parish Council (@swallowfieldpc.gov) email accounts. This is to ensure that we comply with data protection and privacy laws as explained below. Any emails directed elsewhere may not be received or responded to.

A full list of Councillors and their contact details is available on our website at [www.swallowfieldpc.gov.uk](http://www.swallowfieldpc.gov.uk).

We will seek to develop and maintain an email “mailing list”, to which our key stakeholders and other parties can subscribe to receive information and updates from us, including links to online copies of Council meeting agendas and minutes, Parish Council newsletters and any invitations to participate in consultations and surveys where relevant.

#### 4.7 Correspondence

Please address all non-email correspondence to the Parish Clerk at Swallowfield Parish Council, Swallowfield Street, Swallowfield, Reading RG7 1QW. As above (4.6), this will ensure that the communication is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for its attention.

#### 4.8 Face to face

Anyone wishing to contact the Parish Council should please contact the Parish Clerk to make an appointment to visit our offices at Swallowfield Parish Hall.

On behalf of the Parish Council, Councillors may engage in person with key stakeholders and other parties in relation to Parish Council matters. However, no formal communications, information sharing, or decisions will take place without the prior approval of the Parish Council.

#### 4.9 The media

We will seek proactively to engage with the media to promote the Parish as an excellent place to live and to celebrate the achievements and successes of the Parish Council and members

of our community. At times, this may involve working collaboratively with, or providing support to, residents, businesses, community groups/clubs and other stakeholders in the Parish.

Individual Councillors are not permitted to issue statements or releases, or to engage with the media individually as a Councillor or on behalf of the Parish Council. Any requests will be passed to the Chair of the Parish Council, the lead Councillor for communications and the Parish Clerk in the first instance.

All communications with the media will be reviewed and signed off by both the Chair of the Parish Council and the lead Councillor for communications, working with the Parish Clerk. Input from members of the Communications Working Group and/or other working groups or the wider Parish Council will first be sought as required.

As above (4.8), should anything inaccurate or misleading be shared in the media about the Parish Council or matters involving the Parish, the Communications Working Group, in conjunction with the Chair of the Parish Council and the Parish Clerk, will convene promptly to propose a suitable course of action. This may include a public (e.g. online) or private (e.g. a letter or email) response or a decision not to engage further on the issue.

## **5 HOW OUR COMMUNICATIONS WILL BE MANAGED**

We have appointed a “Communications Working Group” to manage and oversee our communications policy and ongoing communications. This Working Group consists of a lead Councillor and at least two further Councillors, selected by the Parish Council.

Key projects and priorities relating to our communications will be discussed and agreed periodically (and at least annually) by the Parish Council and the necessary financial provision must be included in the annual budget. These projects will be implemented and managed by the Parish Clerk and Council staff on an ongoing basis supported by the Communications Working Group and contractors as appropriate.

An annual budget for communications will be reviewed and agreed annually by the Parish Council.

## **6 OUR OBLIGATIONS**

### **6.1 Freedom of information**

Please see the Parish Council’s insert policy name, available on the Parish Council website or by contacting the Parish Clerk, for further information.

### **6.2 Data protection and privacy**

Please see the Parish Council’s insert policy name, available on the Parish Council website or by contacting the Parish Clerk, for further information.

### **6.3 During elections**

During the period of “purdah” between notice of a local election and the election itself, all publicity involving current Parish Councillors and candidates must be paused. The aim is to ensure that no individual obtains an unfair advantage during the process.

The Electoral Commission requires all candidates to adhere to published standards, including providing details of any expenditure on advertising and promotional materials during an election. Further information is available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk).