

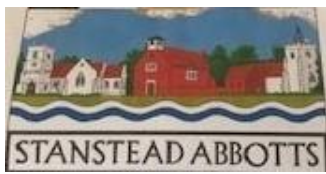
## **STANSTEAD ABBOTTS PARISH COUNCIL**

### **DIGITAL, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY**

1. The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that promotes effective communication both within the Council and between the Council and the community it serves.
2. The Council currently uses the following platforms and media:
  - A website.
  - A Facebook page.
  - Email.
  - WhatsApp.
  - Zoom.
  - Telephone.
  - SMS (text).
3. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time, the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to build on the way it communicates with the community and responds to opportunities provided by new platforms. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

#### **Communications standards**

4. Communication from the Council, its employees and individual Councillors will meet the standards set out in the Parish Council Code of Conduct:
  - a. They shall behave in such a way that a reasonable person would regard as respectful.
  - b. They shall not act in a way which a reasonable person would regard as bullying or intimidatory.
  - c. They shall not seek to improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.
  - d. They shall use the resources of the Council in accordance with its requirements.
  - e. They shall not disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure is prohibited by law.
5. As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors and employees must



adhere to the Data Protection Act, respect privacy rights of individuals and not share confidential information inappropriately.

### **Parish Council Website**

6. The website is maintained by the Clerk. It is used to provide basic information about the Parish Council, such as:
  - Contact details.
  - Information about Councillors.
  - Meeting dates, agendas and minutes.
  - Information on key projects and priorities.

### **Parish Council emails**

7. All Councillors and the Clerk must use designated Council email accounts for Parish Council business.
8. Email signatures will contain the following footer:

*This message is intended for the use of the addressee only. If you have received it in error please notify the sender and destroy it. You may not use it or copy it to anyone else. Please be aware that emails sent to or received by Stanstead Abbotts Parish Council are not private. Although we take reasonable precautions to ensure our e-mails and attachments are virus-free, we cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising from the use of this e-mail or attachments. Reduce waste: Please do not print this email unless absolutely necessary.*
9. Parish Council emails may be subject to disclosure under The Freedom of Information Act and should be written with this in mind.
10. Emails and the content of emails should not be forwarded to third parties without explicit consent of the sender.
11. When sending emails to multiple recipients, "BCC" should be used to protect the private emails of recipients.
12. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant information to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. The Clerk works part-time and will aim to reply to correspondence promptly within normal working hours and the Clerk's normal working days. Communication on behalf of the



Council will usually come from the Clerk, or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk to maintain appropriate records of Council business.

13. Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with members of the public and in relation to their own personal views.
14. Councillors and employees should use anti-virus software to prevent the spreading of viruses and malware.

### **Parish Council Facebook page**

15. The Council Facebook page is managed by the Clerk.
16. It is used to provide information and updates to the community regarding Parish Council business and to promote our community positively.
17. The Clerk works part-time and will aim to reply to any communication received promptly within normal working hours and the Clerk's normal working days.
18. The Clerk will remove as quickly as practically possible, comments or content that:
  - a reasonable person would regard as disrespectful, bullying or intimidatory;
  - is unlawful;
  - is private, personal information published without consent;
  - is unrelated to the content of the forum; and
  - comprises commercial promotions or spam.

### **SMS (texting) and WhatsApp**

19. Councillors and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate urgently with each other.
20. The council has a Whatsapp group set up and managed by the Clerk for Councillors only.
21. Use of the WhatsApp group should be limited to:
  - Reminders (but not the primary means of notification) of practical aspects of meetings, for example Zoom room numbers, or Zoom room passwords, timings.
  - To notify and provide assistance for Parish Council members and the clerk in the event that a member is having technical difficulties accessing a meeting or is late/unable to attend at short notice.



- As a tool for rapid communication for sharing information in the event of an emerging situation facing the Parish, for example, flooding.
22. The WhatsApp group and texts should not be used for:
- Day to day discussion of and views on Parish Council policies and their implementation.
  - As evidence of agreement/disagreement (e.g. not an alternative to voting or agreement to a specific course of action or financial spend by the Parish Council).
  - Providing feedback to other Councillors.
  - Proposing agenda items, sharing papers, notification in advance of apologies where non-attendance could be reasonably foreseen.

### **Video Conferencing e.g. Skype, Zoom**

23. Legislation permits Parish Council meetings to be conducted by video conference platforms. The Parish Council uses Zoom to do so when meetings that must be held in public cannot be held in person.
24. Meetings conducted by video conference platforms are open to the public in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Parish Council.
25. Meetings conducted by video conference platforms are conducted in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Parish Council, with the following additional arrangements.
26. All members of the public wishing to attend the meeting must register in advance with the Clerk, who will advertise how to do so on the noticeboards, the website and Facebook. Upon registering, they will be given joining instructions. Access to the meeting will normally be controlled by the Clerk.
27. The Clerk will open the meeting room fifteen minutes before the advertised start time for the meeting.
28. All Councillors and the public must mute their microphones when not speaking in order to promote good audio quality during the meeting.
29. Councillors, and members of the public during the public forum, who wish to speak must normally raise their hand using the hands-up function on Zoom. The Chair will explain how to do this at the start of each meeting. The chat function should not be used to communicate during the meeting unless there are exceptional reasons agreed by the Chair (e.g. to share links to information online). The Chair will monitor the room for



raised hands and ensure that appropriate opportunity is given to all present to speak, in accordance with the Standing Orders.

30. Voting is conducted in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Parish Council.

Councillors must raise their hand using the hands-up function on Zoom. The Chair will ensure that all Councillors have been able to do so and that the Clerk has been able to record the outcome of the vote.

### **Video and audio recording of meetings**

31. In law, all public meetings can be subject to video or audio recording by the Council or by members of the public, press and media. The agenda should carry a notice to explain this. Meetings or parts of meetings from which the press and public are excluded may not be filmed or recorded.

32. It is the policy of this Council to record all meetings, whether in person or held on Zoom. In the interest of transparency, when the Council is recording a meeting, participants should be informed that a recording is being made, how the recording will be used, who will have access to it and how long it will be kept. This information should be included on the agenda and explained by the Chair at the start of the meeting.

33. Meeting recordings by the Council will be stored by the Clerk and the master copy must not be edited. They will be retained for two years. Recordings will be published on the Council's website and will be available for one year. A link will be shared on Facebook.