Stinsford Parish Council
Communication Strategy (v. 2.1, 23.8.22)

1. Purpose

1.1 This strategy is designed to achieve an improved level of communication between Stinsford Parish Council (SPC) and the Parish's residents, businesses and others living and working in the parish.

1.2 Ultimately, improved engagement should also result in increased interest and participation in SPC-initiated activities that will further improve our natural landscape and local area, and achieve some of the ambitions raised by the community in the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan. It should also help tackle some of the challenges associated with the changing climate and help us do more to reverse the decline in biodiversity.

1.3 A priority is to engender a stronger sense of community in the parish. SPC should facilitate effective communication about parish activities, initiatives and issues that are likely to be of interest to the community.

2. Current situation

2.1 At present, residents, businesses and others can obtain limited information about SPC activities through minutes of meetings, ad hoc articles in the Pilot and occasional news articles in the Echo.

2.2 SPC does not consider this to be 'effective engagement' and this strategy is designed to address this issue directly with the important added benefit of creating a stronger community.

3. Target audiences

- Residents.
- Business owners and people working in the parish.
- Staff and students at Kingston Maurward College (KMC) and the Dorset Studio School.
- People who visit the parish regularly.
- Charities and voluntary organisations operating in the Parish.

4. Aim and desired outcomes

- To inform residents and businesses of work being carried out on their behalf by the Parish Council.
- To generate interest in Parish Council and other locally-led initiatives.
- To encourage active involvement in, and support for, Parish Council and other activities.
- To encourage more people to join the Parish Council

5. What constitutes success

- While initial communication may be one-way, with Parish Councillors explaining their work and planned initiatives to start the conversation, this strategy can only be considered a success if it results in significant engagement between Councillors, residents, businesses and other interested parties, and active involvement in Parish Council-led or -supported initiatives as well as other activities taking place in the parish.

Picture courtesy of Sarah Jane Pattison

6. **Ensuring success**
   ▪ Given the critical need for sufficient time and effort to be devoted to implementing this communication strategy to ensure success, the key priority is to identify someone/a small team of people who have the ability, time and enthusiasm to implement this strategy. This may be one or two Parish Councillors or volunteers who can support SPC.
   ▪ Ultimately, everything should be signed off by the Chair or his/her deputy.

7. **Approach**
   ▪ Communication should be inclusive – SPC will work hard to create an environment where all people can feel respected and valued.
   ▪ Communication should be relevant – it will be important to understand what information different groups want and need.
   ▪ Residents/businesses and others should not be overloaded with information.
   ▪ A steady flow of information is important to build confidence in the agreed channels (but only when there is something that is newsworthy/interesting/informative to communicate).
   ▪ Information should be accessible, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

8. **Communication channels**
   8.1 Work is required to understand the channels that are preferred and most used by residents, businesses and other groups.

   8.2 In the meantime, with the very limited resources available, SPC will focus on the following channels during **Phase I** of the implementation of this strategy:
   ▪ The Pilot (monthly editorial)
   ▪ SPC website (the focus of all comms, to include blogs, pics and messages)
   ▪ Noticeboards (scope for more ambitious use)
   ▪ Traditional media (as required but a priority is to build stronger relations with the Echo and other local news outlets)

   8.3 With additional specialist support, **Phase II** could include a couple of social media platforms and work to understand more about communication desires and needs. The following will be considered:
   ▪ Facebook
   ▪ Twitter
   ▪ Survey Monkey (or similar) – to understand what residents and others want and to start the conversation

   8.4 **Phase III** under consideration:
   ▪ Digital media – understanding the role of digital media in the area
   ▪ Emails to particular groups in the parish – taking care to ensure that any contact lists are managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR
   ▪ Parish news sheet – annual or twice-yearly letterbox drop, but cost and practicalities wr.t. distribution will have to be considered
   ▪ Establishing better contact with voluntary organizations and other groups operating in the parish who could help push forward SPC and wider initiatives
   ▪ SPC generated events – e.g. parish picnics or a parish boundary walk that could increase awareness, enhance community spirit and bring people together
   ▪ Piggybacking on other events – e.g. those arranged by Kingston Maurward

9. **Key challenge to overcome before implementation**
   ▪ The most significant challenge faced by SPC is a lack of resources. To be effective, a communication strategy requires sustained effort and it is not clear that any of the Parish Councillors, individually or

> collectively, have the capacity to establish and maintain a steady two-way flow of information, particularly through social media.
- Specifically, two-way communication has to be timely to be effective. If questions, comments or feedback is posted by residents or businesses, they have to be acknowledged at least and, ideally, proper engagement should follow quickly.
- Any negative comments or feedback has to be handled sensitively and appropriately.

10. Practicalities
- Communication should be an agenda item on every SPC meeting.
- If the Chair or Deputy is unable/unwilling to take the lead, a councillor should be appointed as communication lead if communication activities are carried out by others.
- A draft workplan should be prepared at the first meeting setting out potential news and communication activities to be considered in the next year. A template is at Annex A.
- A phased approach may be adopted to ensure the effective implementation of a manageable plan. Priorities are listed in Phase I communication channels above with initiatives listed in Phase II to be implemented as soon as practicable.
- Whatever is agreed, the approach must be flexible enough to react to new issues as they emerge.

11. Comms priorities for 2022/23
The draft workplan may include the following immediate comms priorities:
- Actions being taken by SPC regarding **North Dorchester**.
- **Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan** – seven projects designed to further improve the natural landscape and address some of the concerns raised by the community are to be taken forward by SPC. Communication must focus on what action is being taken in respect to each of these.
- **SPC Climate and Ecological Strategy** – Of the seven projects listed in the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan, four (P1, P3, P5 and P7) feed directly into SPC's commitment to take action on climate change.

12. Evaluating success
Actions taken in the context of this communication strategy should be reviewed every six months. In general terms, the following could be constitute success.
- Phase I & II: informal positive feedback from residents and business to councillors and monitoring traffic to the website. Expect to see a steady increase in traffic to the website.
- Phase III: an increasing number of residents, businesses and other interested parties following, commenting, posting and ultimately engaging with the Council and each other – this may be through debate or active participation in SPC-led or SPC-supported activities.

More specific indicators should be developed for each comms activity.

Annex A: Workplan, template

This is a suggested draft to be amended and developed as activities are carried out.

Activity	Council lead	Supported by	Deadline	Status/progress