Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council Communications Policy

1. Introduction and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to define roles and responsibilities within Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council regarding communications and provide guidelines. This policy will set out guidance how to ensure efficient and effective communications between Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council members and with third parties via various mediums.

2. The Importance of Good Communication

Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council is committed to ensuring it is effectively and meaningfully communicating with all residents and stakeholders.

Good communications will enable Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council 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, and the wider district.
- Be an effective voice of the community
- Maintain and enhance the reputation of Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council
- Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council.

3. General Communications

All councillors and members of Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council will be provided with a council email address which will be made available to the public so stakeholders can contact Parish Councillors directly. Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council email addresses are only to be used for matters relating to the Parish Council – they should be kept separate from personal activities and information. In the event a councillor or staff member resigns or retires from Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council the Clerk can gain access to the email for business continuity.

Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act therefore the content of communications of Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council can be subject to public scrutiny (with certain conditions.) This includes the private Whatsapp Group which is used to distribute information quickly to all Parish Council members.

- All correspondence should be polite and respectful.
- Do not write anything in communications that might be construed as offensive or discriminatory.
- Do not make negative comments about an individual, members of the public, staff members or councillors.
- Do not share anyone's personal contact details outside of the Parish Councillor group as this could be a GDPR breach.

3.1 Proper Officer

The Proper Officer (The Parish Clerk) has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community, contractors, employees, Rugby Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council Representatives and other stakeholders. 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. The Clerk is provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

Official correspondence just be sent only from the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council, making it clear that the content has been authorised by the Parish Council.

3.2 **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 Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council. 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. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not under the remit of Stretton on Dunsmore. It is appropriate to manage the expectations the member of the public by directing them to the correct authority. If approached face to face or by telephone councillors should not feel pressured to respond immediately. Listen to the individual then direct them to the Parish Clerk, or to the relevant authority, or if it is a matter that has been discussed in a public meeting impart the information you have available.

At no time should councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them. It may be appropriate to inform the resident that Parish Councillors do not have the power to act as individuals and ensure that they express the decision or policy of the Parish Council when communicating with residents. Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council will agree its statements for release to the press and social media or rely on the delegated authority of the Parish Clerk to do so.

Should Parish Councillors wish to comment on a matter as a private resident they should do make it clear they are not corresponding in their capacity as an elected official and/or use their own personnel email address.

All councillors are provided with a council email address which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business. The Parish Clerk should be cc on all communication for continuity.

Emails received by the Council's Proper Officer, or Members may be disclosed following a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or following a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998, under the General Data Protection Regulation or in the course of legal proceedings.

3.3 Communications with Contractors and Staff

While Parish Councillors do not have the power to instruct contractors, they may via a resolution of the Parish Council be invited to liaise with contractors or assume the role of a lead on a specific project.

Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (for example, through a HR Committee). No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not

they are the Chair of the council, the Chair of a committee or other meeting, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

4. Meetings

Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council ordinary meetings take place Knightlow Primary School or occasionally in another location if the school is unavailable at 7pm on the second Monday of every month, with the exception of August and December. Each meeting shall have within it an opportunity for electors of the parish to comment on items on the agenda or to raise new topics for consideration at future meetings – see Public Participation Policy.

The agendas for these meetings are prepared by The Parish Clerk and displayed at least three working days in advance of the meeting date. Councillors must ensure that they have read and understand any supporting documentation which is circulated to them by the Parish Clerk along with the agenda, so they are able to make informed decisions.

The agenda and minutes are published on the website which is kept up to date by the Parish Clerk.

5. Press

Members of the press are welcome at any public meeting of the Parish Council and are by law entitled to film the meeting or take notes. The Clerk is the point of contact for the media, he/she will ensure that the visiting reporter has space within the hall with good visibility and good acoustics.

Outside of a meeting, the first point of contact for the media is the Parish Clerk however any statements released will be circulated to all Parish Councillors. The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public consultation or to explain the council's position on a particular issue.

Individual councillors are not permitted to issue media releases on behalf of Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council or be interviewed by the press regarding Parish Council business unless expressly given permission to do so at a minuted meeting. 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 Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council.
- That other councillors may hold a different personal view.
- That the matter may still need to be discussed or resolved by Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council.
- Confidential matters, including items discussed at meetings where the press and public have been excluded must not be divulged.

6. Online Presence

The website should be regularly updated by the Parish Clerk online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
The website content will minimally include:-

- Agendas of meetings
- Approved Minutes of meetings
- Annual Reports
- Annual Returns
- Parish Councillors details and contacts

- Contact details of Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council staff
- Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council policies and procedures

7. Social Media

Stretton on Dunsmore Parish Council currently uses Facebook and its content is managed by the Parish Clerk.
The social posts are largely designed to disseminate information, therefore on occasion facility for public comment may be turned off.

The Parish Council has its own Facebook profile and does not host or provide admin support to the Facebook page 'All Things Stretton'.

8. Noticeboards

The Parish Council provides a noticeboard on Brookside outside the village shop.
It is a small single sided board which is in keeping with the area.

The noticeboard is kept locked; the Parish Clerk is responsible for the upkeep of this board.

9. Other ways to Communicate

The Parish Council works closely with the Village Hall Trustees and All Saints Church who are established groups within Stretton.

All Saints Church produces The Pendulum which is a printed booklet delivered to most of the homes within Stretton containing local information. The Parish Council shall submit an article to the Pendulum each month, which will be prepared by the Parish Clerk. The contact details of individual councillors and the Parish Clerk are included in each edition.

All Saints also run community hubs out of the Village Hall on a weekly basis which are open to all members of the public providing a warm space, company and community engagement. The Parish Council uses this facility and to host drop-in sessions with the Police and other local authority groups or to gather feedback on specific projects.

The Parish Council reflect the value of both these facilities by paying the weekly rent for the Warm Hub and covering the printing costs of two editions of the Pendulum each year.