

STONE PARISH COUNCIL

Community Engagement Statement of Intent

Adopted on 13th January 2010

Aims & Objectives

Stone Parish Council is an open and transparent Quality Status Council which values the opinions of the local community. The council believes that democracy only exists when residents are involved, engaged and active in council decision-making.

We also recognise that residents pay for the activities of Stone Parish Council and have a right to influence how the money is spent. As such, the council will endeavour to provide opportunities to achieve the following objectives:

- Improved communication with residents through existing and new methods
- An increased awareness among residents of the role of the council, members and officers
- An increased awareness of the electoral process
- Improved engagement and interaction between the council and the community in activities such as consultation, surveys and attendance at meetings

Defining the Community

Stone is an urban parish set in the borough of Dartford. There are five wards in the parish. Approximately 9,500 residents live in 4,600 households.

The community comprises many groups and can be considered as consisting of:

- Parish residents
- Users of parish council services
- Head Teachers and Governors of the three primary schools in the parish
- Retail and business in the local area
- Interest groups – clubs and societies
- Voluntary organisations
- Groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, sexual orientation, faith and others
- Councillors and public service representatives including council staff.

Provision of Information to the Community

Customer Service point The parish office is open to the public three days a week from 9am-3pm. Council officers can be contacted by telephone outside of these times. Documents are available to view by request and prior arrangement.

Online @ www.stoneparishcouncil.com The council's web address is widely publicised and the website contains comprehensive information regarding council activity, services, copies of all council publications and policies and details of local groups and organisations. The website provides visitors with the ability to 'sign up' to receive council html newsletters which are sent out periodically with details of council news and events.

Notice boards The council currently has nine notice boards across the parish which display agendas for forthcoming meetings as well as local events, clubs and group information.

Publications The council publishes statutory documents which reflect the council's decisions. These include agendas and minutes of meetings, the annual report and financial statements. The council is also poised to publish a five-year strategy for 2010-2015, outlining aims and objectives of the council for the medium-term future.

Meetings The agendas for all council and committee meetings are displayed in the notice boards and on the council's website. The draft minutes are also uploaded within two weeks of the meetings to inform the public of the decisions taken.

Members of the public are welcome to attend all meetings of the council or their committees and agendas all include an item for the public to comment on agenda items or raise issues with members for inclusion on a future agenda.

Press releases The council issue press releases of activity and issues facing the council or the parish which it wants to bring to public attention. All releases are sent to the **Dartford Messenger, Dartford Times, News Shopper** and relevant industry periodicals, as well as national press when appropriate.

Parish Newsletter The council publishes a quarterly four-page colour newsletter, **Stone Parish News**, which is delivered to every household in the parish. The newsletter aims to keep local people abreast of council activity, local issues and events as well as provide important contact information for relevant authorities and assistance.

Opportunities for Community Involvement and Representations to the Council

Public session	<p>A public session is included at the beginning of each council meeting to allow the public to make representations on agenda items or to bring issues to the attention of the council.</p> <p>Any items raised that do not form part of the agenda may be scheduled for discussion at a future meeting to allow for any necessary research to be carried out.</p>
Annual Parish Meeting	<p>Although not a statutory council meeting, the council organise the annual meeting of the parish which gives local residents the opportunity to set the agenda and discuss topics of local interest. The council aims to schedule speakers of interesting topics, which in the past have included representatives from Bluewater, Kent Wildlife Trust and Stone Pit II Restorations Ltd. Annual reports are also delivered by the council's chairman and the neighbourhood policing team.</p>
Surveys	<p>The council carries out an annual survey to assess the views of local residents on particular issues or projects that the council may be considering. Many council policies are based on the information obtained and, as such, we wholly encourage residents to participate in the surveys to ensure that they help influence local services.</p>
Youth council	<p>The council has an ambition to establish a youth council for Stone, to give a voice to the younger generation and ensure that they are represented on local issues affecting them.</p>
Consultation	<p>The council will undertake consultation either solely or in partnership with relevant organisations, to assess interest or views on specific projects or issues. This may include activities such as a consultation event, an online poll or survey and email feedback.</p>
Complaints Procedure	<p>The council has a procedure in place providing complete details of how a complaint can be made and how it will be dealt with. The full policy can be found on the council's website or a copy requested by post.</p>

Involvement in Partnerships

The council is represented on a number of external committees, forums and community meetings and aims to uphold the interests of parishioners at meetings of these bodies.

Information obtained from these meetings is reported to full council meetings.

The council also works closely with other authorities such as Kent County Council, Dartford Borough Council and neighbouring parish councils, as well as with partner agencies such as Kent Police and Fire Service and the NHS to secure good service and provision for the parish.

Role of Council Members and Officers

Councillors are the decision-makers and provide the direction of the council. They represent parish residents through raising issues of local importance with relevant bodies, making observations on planning applications affecting the parish, and ensuring that local parish services are effectively delivered. Contact details for each member are published in each edition of the quarterly council newsletter and are on the council's website.

The council currently employs seven staff comprising: the Clerk; two part-time Administration Assistants; two Grounds Men; a Park Ranger and a Caretaker.

The Clerk is the Chief Executive Officer of the council and head of administration and daily management of council staff. As Proper Officer, the Clerk is the most appropriate contact in most cases for raising matters or requesting information from the council, as well as for addressing council correspondence.

Specific Areas for Community Involvement

Where a particular local issue arises or where the council intends to undertake activity that is of interest to the community then the council will endeavour to provide additional information or hold an individual event for discussion or consultation of these matters.