

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Policy: Staplehurst Parish Council actively seeks to encourage parishioners to be involved in the community if they so choose.

Its main objectives for public participation are to:

Inform – provide information so the parishioners can be aware of the issues which could affect them

Consult – obtain feedback on information provided

Involve – draw on local knowledge and awareness of parishioners' views to improve its decision-making process

It will continue to:

- make contact details for the Council easily available
- make known Council meetings and activities and information about local government services as widely as possible. Resources include:
 - ✓ hard copies of notices and reports made available in the Parish Office and library;
 - ✓ its newsletter The Village Update;
 - ✓ the Council website;
 - ✓ the Council Notice Board;
 - ✓ other local publications;
 - ✓ word of mouth
- maintain a Parish Office which is open to the public Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays 0900 – 1300 and on Thursdays by prior appointment
- maintain a telephone (land) line to the Parish Office
- provide a web site, www.staplehurst.org.uk, giving information and suggesting resources
- provide an on-line forum through that website
- also use more traditional methods of communication, recognising that some members of the community are not familiar with computers, internet and e-mail
- attend community groups including those representing hard-to-reach sections of the parish
- ensure one of the Parish Councillors attends the monthly Surgery in the Library run by a Borough Councillor

- organise public meetings on specific subjects of interest when the need arises
- talk to parishioners informally face-to-face.

Over the life of this present Council, it aims to:

- continue to review its processes
- develop and improve flexible and accessible consultation and communication. The terms of reference of the Website and Publicity group, which reports to Full Council, include this
- consider options for reorganising the parish office accommodation to improve the clerk's interface with the general public
- consider holding informal meetings on a regular basis where local people can meet with the Councillors and raise matters of interest
- consider whether groups of councillors should walk the Parish to talk informally with parishioners and observe possible points where action is needed (e.g. potholes; overgrown hedges; litter & flytipping).
- encourage plain English in Parish Council reports, Minutes and publications
- consider a greater use of surveys, both face-to-face and on-line, as an accessible consultation process.

Longer term, this Council is aware of:

- its responsibility to the community it serves
- the continual need to build trust and earn the good will of parishioners
- the need to communicate effectively with young people
- the need to consider how effective communication can help promote democracy and citizenship
- the need to maintain cooperative working with other parish councils and local authorities through good communication.