Sparsholt Parish Council

Report on Communications

For meeting on 18th September 2014

This report makes recommendations regarding three related aspects of the Communications portfolio:

- The Parish Council Website
- Email Addresses for Parish Councillors
- Email Distribution List of Parishioners

1. The Parish Council Website

It would be highly desirable for the parish council website to provide essential information to the community in a timely way. To ensure this, the website content must be easy to keep up to date and be as secure as possible. The costs of providing the website should be kept to a minimum. Ideally there should be the opportunity through sponsorship or advertising on the website to offset the costs of providing communications to the parish community - the website, newsletter and notice boards, especially as there is now very little interest in advertising in the newsletter.

The parish council website is currently hosted on the HantsWeb service provided by Hampshire County Council. It uses a template system specifically set up for parish councils to use and it is free to use. Unfortunately, this system requires an out of date piece of software (Java) to be loaded on the administrator's computer. The manufacturer of this software (Oracle) do not recommend the use of this version of software as it is no longer supported by them and they claim that it therefore represents a security risk. Additionally, it is very difficult to setup this old software alongside the latest version of the software and it is not very easy to maintain the content of the website. Consequently, the website has not been maintained since it was established many months ago.

HantsWeb do provide alternative forms of hosting:

- the basic level is free and requires the user to maintain a separate version of the website on their own computer and transfer files to the web service to keep the website up to date. The facilities are very limited. For instance the address would be something like www.hants.org.uk/sparsholtpc and there are no email addresses provided with it.
- An enhanced service is provided at a cost of £110 per annum plus the cost of registering a preferred address name (eg sparsholtpc.org.uk). This service

provides 100 Mb of space and all of the necessary facilities and software to run a modern website and includes an email service. Additional storage is available at £63 per annum per 50 Mb. This amount of storage is very limiting and very expensive. Set up will take about 20 days and the minimum contract period is one year.

There are many other commercial alternatives and these are far more competitively priced. One of the most competitive currently is One.Com that costs £11 or less per annum depending on the chosen address name, technically the first year is free but there is a charge of £11 to register the address name. One.Com provides 15 Gb of space and all the necessary facilities and software. In addition it includes the use of an unlimited number of email addresses. Additional space is available at £17 per annum per 15 Gb. Set up is within 24 hours of ordering online and the minimum contract period is one year.

The Parish Council is recommended to use the One.Com web hosting service for a trial period of one year, with the expectation that if it is successful it will be continued, subject to a review report and recommendation to the Parish Council in advance of the renewal.

There are a number of options available for the Website address:
- Sparsholtpc.org.uk
- Sparsholtpc.org
- Sparsholtpc.uk
- SparsholtParish.org.uk
- SparsholtParish.org
- SparsholtParish.uk

Other suffixes such as .co, .com, etc are available but are more appropriate for commercial organisations.

While Sparsholtpc is shorter, SparsholtParish is more obvious

The parish council is recommended to approve SparsholtParish.org as the website address.

The design for the website should incorporate the following:

- A banner and menu visible on each page
- News sidebar visible on each page
- Sponsorship/Advertising beneath the news visible on each page
- A Home page listing Actions and Achievements
- Our Meetings with links to Agenda, Minutes and Reports of each meeting
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Contact us - contact details and link to register of interests for each Member
- Planning – lists of applications under consideration, recently considered and enforcement cases

- Documents – links to our documents
- Our Parish – links to websites describing the parish and descriptions of key features
- Useful links to not-for-profit organisations in the community

The parish council is recommended to approve the initial outline design as set out in the images at the end of this report.

POLICIES

The development of the website should be based on commonly used software such as PHP for scripting and MYSQL for database management, supplemented where helpful by public domain software that is free to use. All purpose built software from the development must be provided to the parish council on a free to use in perpetuity basis.

The structure of the website is to be maintained by the nominated webmaster, who would normally be the Communications Portfolio holder in an unpaid capacity, but could be anyone nominated and if necessary paid for by the parish council.

The content of the website is to be approved by the parish council and maintained by the parish clerk.
While the webmaster will be able to modify content, they will only do so on the specific written (including email) instructions of the parish clerk.

The webmaster is expected to develop the system in such a way that it minimises the need for their own intervention in maintaining the content of the website.

The parish council is recommended to approve the policies as set out above.

2. **Email Addresses for Parish Councillors**

Some councillors have requested that they should have specific email addresses for parish council business rather than use their private email. If email addresses are formulated as portfoilo@sparsholtpc.org.uk eg highways@sparsholtpc.org.uk then they have the advantage of remaining the same when the portfolio holder changes. It also has the advantage of not making private email addresses public.

The parish council is recommended to set up and adopt portfolio based email addresses.

3. **Email Distribution List of Parishioners**

There are times when it would be very helpful for the parish council to quickly send messages to as many parishioners as possible eg when a contentious planning application is received. Posting notices on the notice board is not an effective means of

achieving this nor is having to rely on the good will of other organisations to make use of their email networks.

The parish council is recommended to establish its own voluntary email network by placing a request in the next Parish Council Newsletter.

Website Design Images
See separate attachment.