

Purpose: To promote clear and open communication between all members. We want all members to be able to participate as fully as possible in meetings, discussions and events and to be able to express their views safely and effectively within the group. We aim to ensure all members have equal access to relevant information by employing effective methods to share that information.

Preamble: As members it is our responsibility to keep ourselves informed about meetings, events, decisions etc. To that end:

1. In all cases it is helpful for us all to assume that we are all doing the best we can in the circumstances, and that we generously make allowances for one another and our differences in age, experience, life opportunities, health, etc.
The aim is to do our best to enable each one of us to feel comfortable within the group and free from any fear of judgement.
Supporting members is part of the brief of the Soul Circle and the OL will be happy to field members' suggestions or queries on 'communications'.
2. At any time members can email any questions and ideas to the Members Circle Operational Leader and the Members Circle Secretary, who will redirect it to the appropriate circle if necessary. And at the Members meeting there will be a regular slot for members' questions and suggestions.
3. All meeting minutes, agendas, draft policies and other important documents will be sent out by e-mail;
4. Documents are stored in our googledrive and can be accessed via a link on our virtual noticeboard;
5. Training and support, via the buddy system and specific training, will be provided to ensure that members can make full use of e-mail communications and stored information.

THE POLICY

1. Communicating by Email:

In order to help ourselves manage our emails and ensure they have the best chance of being read and retrieved, adopting the following etiquette and guideline when needed:

When sending emails it is really helpful to:

- Choose a relevant subject heading;
- If you want to hitch a ride on an old email, in order to use the email addresses, please change the subject header – this will start a new email conversation.
- Using capitals letters in email is interpreted as shouting, whereas it would suggest emphasis or a header in a document. So use the most accurate words possible to reflect your tone and avoid misunderstanding in the process.
- We do sometimes need to send 'list' type emails, but it is generally recommended that each email contains only one subject, to avoid one of the subjects being overlooked.
- Send emails only to the people for whom the content is relevant or useful;

- Only use the BC list of email addresses for BC business.
NB We have set up the Virtual Notice Board for those who wish to share items that are of not BC business but may be of general interest.

When replying to emails it is really helpful to:

- reply to emails, even if just to say 'thanks or 'noted,' other than when receiving general 'for information' emails. This confirms the email was successful sent and received.
- check that the subject heading is still relevant and the recipient list is adjusted if necessary – this is really easy to overlook.
- when an email specifically asks for a response please reply by clicking on 'reply' to rather than starting a new email. This makes it easier for the sender to collate the responses because they are all in one place.
There may be situations where this is tricky, perhaps when working remotely, but it risks your email being overlooked when the responses are collated.

General email

- Have a designated member or two who is able to help members experiencing difficulties with email and IT.

2. Communicating by Documents

- Using standard formats for meeting agendas, minutes and papers can make it easier for us to read and understand them.
The templates for these documents are in a folder on our Googledrive account.
- Alternatively, open an existing document of the sort you wish to use, eg an agenda; give the file a new name so that you create a new file without changing the original; update the header, etc; remove the old content that is not going to be used again and type in the new content, etc.
- Using Word, where possible, makes it easier for members to open and store document they receive.
- Those who are familiar with Excel may find it more effective for communication data.

3. Communicating by the Virtual Notice Board

Is accessed by a link given to all members.

It aims to be like a physical notice board, being a source of

- links to all the places where BC information is stored
- information from within and without BC that might interest BC members
- and however else members find it useful.

Any member can put text on the noticeboard. If they need to put a link there, the linked document needs to be stored somewhere else. This could be a website or the member's own storage space (eg their own googledrive or dropbox) - or if necessary, Derek will store it on the BC googledrive.

Dates when an item becomes irrelevant are helpful and any member can remove something that is out of date.

This is a work in progress which will be monitored by the IT sub-circle.

4. Communicating by Sociocracy

The folder in googledrive has/can have:

- a diagram of the structure of Bridport Cohousing - which helps us see how the circles interact;
- a list of operational leaders, secretaries, representatives and facilitators and job descriptions of those roles;
- a list of the roles and responsibilities of each circles.
- the Sociocratic 'vision, mission and aims' of each circle
- documents describing processes done regularly, eg meeting planning, the membership process, etc, both as a check list and for the benefit of new members.

5. Communicating Person to Person

If, in spite of the first paragraph in this policy preamble, someone upsets you - if you can, seek clarification and listen;

If that doesn't resolve the situation speak to the person with another member present;

If a breakdown in communication remains unresolved BC will assist by introducing an outside mediator/facilitator.

6. Communicating within meetings

Communications within meetings are guided by the principles of Sociocracy eg the use of rounds so everyone has an opportunity and obligation to speak or 'pass'. Sociocracy actively invites members to express their views.