

MELLOR PARISH COUNCIL

ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATION POLICY

Introduction

Mellor Parish Council will not consider anonymous communications unless there is corroborating evidence/information which suggests that content of the communication might be substantiated.

This policy determines how Mellor Parish Council (MPC) will act where

- a) it has received information by means of an anonymous communication as defined in section 4
- b) a person or persons communicating with MPC, by any means, requests that their identity remains confidential (“confidential communications”) as defined in section 5

Scope

The Policy applies to all Councillors and all Staff.

Aim

To provide a consistent approach to dealing with anonymous/confidential communications.

Definition of Anonymous Communication

Consistent with General Data Protection Principles an anonymous communication is defined as one lacking personal data “capable of identifying a natural person, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, identification number, location data or online identifier”

Definition of Confidential Communication

This is a written or verbal communication where the Data Subject requests *that his/her/their identity not be put in the public domain.*

This may include phone calls, letters, discussions, emails, texts or other forms of communication.

Anonymous Verbal Communications

As a general principle all anonymous contacts should be encouraged to provide their contact details, and be directed to contact the Clerk for recording and for deciding on further action.

- a) Any Member receiving a verbal anonymous communication should respond by stating that MPC will not take any action in respect of such a communication unless the Member determines that the communication is so “exceptional” that the need for immediate action by MPC overrides the need to obtain a written communication (See Section 9 below for more explanation). In these circumstances the Member will inform the Clerk of the communication and its content at the earliest opportunity.
- b) If no written communication is provided by the contact, a note summarising what verbal communication took place should be created by the Member and passed to the Clerk.

Anonymous Non-Verbal Communications

Anonymous Non-Verbal Communications shall, in the first instance, be treated as being in strict confidence and shared only with the Clerk, to whom it must be sent at the earliest opportunity.

- a) Such communications should not be discussed with any other person.
- b) Potentially vexatious and/or malicious anonymous communications shall be treated in accordance with MPC policy on vexatious and malicious communications following ICO guidance.

Expressly Confidential Communications

Communications where the Data Subject has provided contact details but has asked for anonymity, their right to privacy should be respected and the communication shall be sent to the Clerk at the earliest opportunity. N.B. this does not abrogate MPC from any legal or quasi-legal responsibilities arising from such communications.

Action(s) to Consider

MPC expressly reserves the right to take no action unless the anonymous communication raises

- a) significant health & safety issues
- b) allegations that a criminal offence has been committed
- c) allegations of fraud or irregularity within MPC
- d) issues of a profound effect on the community
- e) allegations impugning the integrity or the credibility of MPC members or the MPC as a corporate body

and, in all cases, only where sufficient information is provided to corroborate the allegation(s) and enable a thorough investigation to be carried out.

Anonymous communications or indeed any form of communication considered to be vexatious or malicious must be brought to the immediate attention of the Clerk and dealt with in the manner outlined in MPC's Complaints Policy

Following investigation and if appropriate, the Clerk may forward the communication to the correct authorities. MPC will provide whatever assistance it can to support those authorities in carrying out their investigation.

Other Matters

- a) The Clerk will discuss all communications covered under this policy with the Chairman of the Parish Council (or Vice Chairman if that is more appropriate due to the nature of the communication) and consider what action should be taken.
- b) The Clerk will maintain a record of anonymous communications which should be reviewed at least quarterly to identify any developing trends.

c) The Data Subject will normally receive a response from the Clerk within 20 working days, which may include an explanation for any investigation or delay in response and any action to be taken.