# **Mellor Parish Council –Communications Policy**

## **Background**

The recent issues raised regarding the open space/play area have highlighted our need to continually review and improve communications with the Parish. The aim of this documents is to identify some potential routes for improvement which can be discussed by Council and then form the basis for a formal proposal.

As a Council we need to keep residents informed as to what we are doing on their behalf. We also need to be good at listening to what the residents say to us. The challenge we have is that not all the residents prefer the same type of communication channel. Some like it written on papers, others tend to work online and some use more than one channel. When it come to expressing their views, some can be vocal but others may have equally strong opinions but cannot find a suitable route to express themselves, perhaps because they cannot attend a Council meeting.

As a Council, we also have statutory duties in terms of communications. We host an Annual Parish Meeting, and must hold an Annual Parish Council Meeting; we must publish agendas and minutes of our formal meetings – these are not choices we have to make.

## **Current communication routes**

Word of mouth – as Councillors & staff we will all to a greater or lesser extent tell people what the Council is doing.

Statutory communications – we publish on noticeboards and the website agendas of meetings and the resultant minutes are on Parish Council website: and we hold an Annual Parish Council Meeting.

Newsletter - in normal times the newsletter would be issued every couple of months or so. It is not clear how widely read the newsletter currently is.

MPC Website – many documents and announcements from other organisations are placed on our website, however there is little evidence that they reach a wide selection of the community.

## **Suggestions for consideration**

We should not rely on one channel of communication – the population is highly varied and no one size fits all.

**Social media** – we should look to communicate information through social media. There is an understandable fear that this will lead to uncontrolled debate about the actions of the Council. However this is happening already, publishing information will not necessarily make it worse. While there are many types of social media available, probably the best known for our residents is Facebook and possibly Twitter. It is possible to post on Facebook and disable commenting on the post, I don’t believe that is possible on Twitter. One of the issues with posting on Facebook is the time it takes to duplicate what is posted on the MPC website. It may be that this can be overcome by establishing a technical routine whereby a posting on the MPC website automatically triggers a Facebook post.

**Agendas/Minutes** –

We are obliged to publish agendas detailing exactly what will be discussed at meetings and this can’t change. However I don’t believe that there is any bar to additionally publishing shortened agendas. We could publish bright, attractive agendas highlighting 3 major items for discussion (e.g. speeding, planning issues and defibrators) and place them in One Stop, the library and Village Hall just to increase awareness.

**Newsletter**

The current format of the newsletter is both time-consuming and almost inevitably out of date when published. Dot made a helpful suggestion at the last Council meeting that possibly we could piggy-back onto the Parish Church newsletter. There may be benefit in investigating this further in that we could prepare less material and have it distributed more frequently, but an issue to be addressed would be how many households it is distributed to. If that doesn’t work, possibly we could look at a monthly format that largely consisted of material we had published on the website – thereby ensuring that all residents got the same information regardless of the route involved.

**Listening to residents**

Apart from the public section of monthly meetings we don’t have a route to directly hear the voices of residents. However the monthly meeting isn’t accessible for everyone, especially in the winter. Should we consider having a monthly on bi-monthly ‘drop in’ possibly in the Village Hall where 1 or 2 councillors and possibly the Clerk were available to talk and listen? In reality in many cases we would be taking on issues to pass on to RVBC and/or LCC but it would be a route for people to express their views. I don’t see take-up being high, but it may be worth trialling for a few months.