PC117 2627a) Parish Office – public opening hours

Background

Melbourn Parish Council currently advertises public opening hours of 10.00am–4.00pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, with the office closed to the public on Thursdays and the weekend.

The Parish Council remains committed to being accessible to residents and providing opportunities for residents to speak to staff face-to-face when required. However, the current public opening hours provide 24 hours of unrestricted public and Councillor access each week.

A review of opening arrangements at other parish councils, including larger village councils in Cambridgeshire, indicates that significantly fewer public-facing hours are common practice. Fewer public hours would benefit staff with workload, attending and arranging meetings and flexible working.

Examples: *Willingham Parish Council currently offers public opening from 10.00am–1.00pm Monday to Thursday*
Fulbourn Parish Council provides public office hours of 9.00am–12.00pm Tuesday to Thursday
Sawston Parish Council, which is a similarly large village parish council, is open to the public from 8.30am–1.00pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, with Thursday closed to the public
Linton Parish Council states that public admission to its office is by appointment only.

Proposal

It is proposed that, from 1 November, Melbourn Parish Council reduces its advertised public opening hours to:

Monday:	10.30am - 1.30pm
Tuesday:	10.30am - 1.30pm
Wednesday:	1.30pm - 4.30pm
Thursday:	Closed to the public
Friday:	Closed to the public

This would provide 9 hours of dedicated public access each week.

The Parish Office would continue to operate outside these hours and staff would continue to undertake their normal duties, including responding to telephone calls and emails. Members of the public who require a face-to-face meeting outside the published public opening hours would be able to arrange an appointment with the appropriate member of staff. A phone triage system is now in place where callers are asked to leave a message allowing the relevant staff member to return the call.

Reasons for the proposed change

The proposed reduction would:

- provide dedicated periods during which staff can undertake administrative and Council work without interruptions;
- improve staff productivity and concentration;
- allow for meaningful flexible working arrangements to be in utilised;
- provide a clearer distinction between public-facing time and administrative/office working time;
- retain regular opportunities for residents to visit the office without an appointment;
- bring Melbourn's arrangements more closely into line with other larger parish councils;
- encourage residents to use email and telephone contact for routine enquiries, which can often be dealt with more efficiently;
- allow staff to arrange appointments for matters requiring a longer or more detailed face-to-face discussion.

The change would not reduce the Council's overall staffing or working hours. It would simply distinguish between the hours when the office is available for unrestricted public visits and the hours when staff can work without interruption.

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Communication

The revised opening hours would be clearly advertised on the Parish Council website, office door, social media and other appropriate Council communications.

The Council would also make clear that residents can contact the Parish Council by email or telephone outside the public opening hours and that appointments can be arranged where a face-to-face meeting is necessary.

Recommendation

That the Council:

- approves the revised public opening hours of 10.30am - 1.30pm Monday & Tuesday, 1.30pm – 4.30pm on Wednesday, with the office closed to the public on Thursday and Friday;
- agrees that appointments may be arranged outside these hours where appropriate; and
- reviews the arrangement after six months to assess whether the revised hours continue to provide an appropriate level of public access.