



Rural Village Services Group – Case Studies

Froyle Parish Council - Inclusive Communication

Project aim

The Parish Council recognised that we were struggling to communicate effectively with all members of our community, as residents span a wide range of age groups, and there is a variety of preferences for communications using different media, whether print communications through the village newsletter delivered to homes, public notices on notice boards, or digital communications via email or social media. We did not have a good understanding of how well our Parish Council website was reaching the community, and whether our efforts in updating it were useful to people.

We also noted that a number of different community websites had been created for different village activities, but hosted with different providers and created using different software, and with reliance on key individuals to maintain them. There was also no single place to look for events happening with different groups in the village, so we wanted to bring a diverse set of information together in one place to enhance engagement with the variety of activities available, but also do it in such a way that it did not rely on a single individual.

Project actions

We reviewed the electoral roll, social media group membership and multiple village email distribution lists to develop statistics on how the community engaged with the different forms of village communication. We learned that for our village it split approximately into three equal groups - a group who preferred printed communication, a group who preferred email communication, and a group who engaged on social media - and that there was little overlap between those groups. We concluded that we needed to communicate the same messages across all the various media - print, email, social media - to ensure that we were reaching as many people as possible across the Parish.

Specific actions taken included:

- Moving the parish email distribution list from a manual list maintained by the Clerk to a managed platform for self-service subscribe and unsubscribe, enhanced security and GDPR compliance.
- Moving various community websites all on to the same hosting provider and using the same content management software (Wordpress). This was more cost effective overall, and using a single software platform for all the websites eases training for those updating websites, and enables them to support each other with questions, removing previous single points of failure.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

PO Box 101, Craven Arms, SY7 7AL

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- Creation of a Village Marketing Guide, so that those who are leading village events know how best to publicise them effectively to as many residents as possible via all media.
- Creation of an online village event calendar in WordPress, hosted on the Parish Council website, where events are automatically imported from different groups such as the village hall booking software, or from community groups running their own calendars - this creates an automated centralised single view of all activities in the village for residents. This minimises manual intervention and enables each group to manage their own events. The calendar even includes the all-important rubbish bin collection dates in colour coded by the bin colour with a reminder of what goes in them!

Costs and timescale

This project took place over approximately a year, starting with research on engagement, discussion with the current website managers for different community projects, and implementation of the website moves and updates and development of the village calendar.

The calendar has an annual cost of circa £100 on top of our usual Parish Council hosting, and consolidation of various village websites onto a new hosting provider has saved a few hundred pounds a year compared to the previous arrangements. It took a few days work to reconstruct the village websites using WordPress and we were lucky enough to have this volunteer expertise in the village.

Outcomes

- Parish communications are now the same across all platforms, from the printed Village Magazine to email distributions to Facebook posts.
- Residents can see online, day by day, which events are happening in the village and the village hall.
- Integration of the calendar software with, for example, the village hall booking system has been challenging, we've been helped by <https://www.parishcouncilwebsites.co.uk/> but we are getting there!
- We have driven traffic towards the Parish Council website and increased awareness (monthly visits are up 300%). We have data showing how people use the Parish Council website, how many are using the event calendar and how often the village magazine is downloaded.
- We no longer have a risk in relying on key individuals for maintaining the village community websites, and we have professional cost-effective hosting.

Key learning

One key learning was that our analysis of current communication methods identified that there is a diverse set of ways that residents want to receive communications from the Parish Council.

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It is important to let residents choose the best way of communication that works for them, so that they feel part of the community and not isolated. While much of the world is “going digital”, not everybody is!

We also felt it important to be open about the project within the village and supporting individuals to contribute is really effective - we have held workshops with individuals in local organisations to bring them on board and show them the benefits of working together and making it easier to reach the village community.

Next steps

We continue to work through the final tweaks on the online village calendar, and we are now reviewing how to ensure the village magazine can continue to thrive economically, as readership is increasingly shared between print and online.



June 2024 < >

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27	28	29	30	31	1 FOG - Froyle Open Gardens	2
3 Recycling Bin C...	4	5	6	7 Meeting place	8	9 Life drawing
10 Rubbish Bin Co...	11	12 VH committee	13 Garden Waste ...	14 Meeting place Film night	15	16
17 Glass Bin Colle... Recycling Bin C...	18 Life drawing	19	20	21 Meeting place Froyle Magazin...	22	23
24 Rubbish Bin Co...	25	26	27 Garden Waste ...	28 Meeting place	29	30

If you have organised a public event in the Village Hall, then it will automatically appear in the calendar; Other events are automatically added from various club calendars. If you believe any event is missing or would like to add one, please email clerk@froyleparishcouncil.org.uk (please note past events are not currently shown)

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