

Char Valley Parish Council

13 April 2015

New Code of Transparency – Report by Parish Clerk on the Implications

1. Introduction

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 sets out a new audit framework for local public authorities that are currently covered by the Audit Commission regime. Under the new audit framework smaller authorities including parish councils with an annual turnover not exceeding £25,000 will be exempt from routine external audit (but not until 2017/18). In place of routine audit, these smaller authorities will be subject to the requirements in the new Code of Transparency. This will enable local electors and ratepayers to access relevant information about the authorities' accounts and governance.

The Government considers that publication of the items in the Code will provide the local electorate and ratepayers with a clear picture of the activities of smaller authorities. The Government asserts that most of this information is already produced by the majority of authorities with a turnover not exceeding £25,000 and considers that compliance will not place a significant burden on these authorities.

The code is mandatory by the start of the 2015/2016 financial year.

2. The requirements of the code

The requirements of the code are summarised in the table I have produced below. Full details can be found in the code itself at : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-code-for-smaller-authorities>

Requirement to be published on our website by 1.7.15	Do we do this already ?	Commentary
Annually a list of all items of expenditure above £100.	No	This is a comparatively low sum. We would have 40-50 items meeting this requirement in a typical year.
End of year accounts in the format used in the annual return, accompanied by a bank reconciliation and other details of variations, etc. if appropriate.	No	Although it will add slightly to the complexity of our website we should be able to do this fairly easily.
Annual governance statement.	No	Again it should not be difficult to publish this.
Internal audit report, including explanations where necessary for any exceptions.	No	I assume that a scanned copy of the signed checklist form included in the annual return will prove sufficient.

List of councillor responsibilities	yes	These can be updated following the election as part of a review of our standing orders and the website updated accordingly.
The details of public land and building assets	No	A list can be published, but more detail about these assets is required than that given previously in our annual accounts.
Minutes, agendas and meeting papers of formal meetings	Not entirely.	We do not currently publish agendas. This can be done although, it will create a little extra work for the webmaster.

3. Implications

The publication of the information mentioned will require a slight reconfiguration of our website, probably by the addition of one or more further pages. Individually none of the items above is particularly onerous but taken together they will require an element of additional work by the Clerk and the Webmaster. The expectation would be to manage this within the current website budget. The Clerk monitors time spent on his role (not an exact record) and will report back if there is evidence that this work is requiring a level of additional input that consistently exceeds the contracted hours.

The Government has indicated that they will provide funding to smaller councils to help with the burden of complying with the code. As yet however, there is no further information or confirmation of this. From 2017-18 there will be saving of approximately £100 as there will be no external audit fee.

4. The way forward - recommendations

Subject to the council's observations and wishes, it is recommended that the Clerk is empowered, with immediate effect to start the work necessary to enable compliance with the code, including discussions with Logomotion to ensure that the additional content is published on the Council's website.

The Clerk will update the Council on any further news or changes to the Code and on the progress in implementing the required changes.

John West

30 March 2015.