

Transparency Fund: becoming more open via being a digital council

11.55 – 12.25 - Digital Councils' Event

AON The Leadenhall Building, 122 Leadenhall Street, London, EC3V 4AN

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Overview

A. National Picture -

- Openness & Transparency
- The Code
- The Fund
- Strategic Aims

B. Case Study Council – Darley & Menwith Parish Council (Yorkshire) –

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- Difference Funding Made
- Does the Council Feel More Open & Transparent?

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A. Openness & Transparency

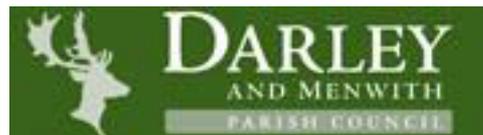
- Huge need for parish councils nationally to be more transparent and open with financial transactions
- 6000 smaller parish councils in England
- Government introduced Smaller Authorities' Transparency Code in 2015 to help these councils be more open and transparent (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-code-for-smaller-authorities>)
- Government expects these councils to now legally be compliant with the Code
- A Fund exists to help these councils comply with the Code (see <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/the-transparency-fund>).



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A. The Code

- **Councils with turnover of 25,000 p.a. or less are now expected to publish on their websites the below data;**
 - **all items of expenditure above £100;**
 - **end of year accounts;**
 - **annual governance statement;**
 - **internal audit report;**
 - **list of councillor or member responsibilities;**
 - **the details of public land and building assets; &**
 - **minutes, agendas and meeting papers of formal meetings.**
- **Some smaller councils do not own corporate computers or have a website – they should apply for a new burdens grant through their County Association from the Transparency Fund to comply with the Code during 2017-18.**



A. The Fund

- Covers laptops, scanners, web provision, web set up, internet connection and officer time (within ceilings) to facilitate the above
- Fund went live for final year on 28 April, 2017
- Please ask for an application form from your County Association of Local Councils (<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/about-county-associations>)
- 3200 grants have been funded so far – with a value of 2.3 millions
- 2017-18 is the final year for making grants under this Fund – so apply now (<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/the-transparency-fund>).



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A. Strategic Aims

- Will be a challenge for all 6k smaller councils to be compliant with Code by 03/18
- NALC / CALCs will have promoted compliance and the Fund to all 6k councils by 03/18
- Most persistent challenges for non compliance with Code will be local
- Technically in 17-18 councils could still be reported to an external auditor
- Most smaller councils probably already publishing this data anyway if they have a web-site – but check.



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B. Darley & Menwith Parish Council – Background (Yorkshire)

- Darley & Menwith is a rural parish of some 810 electors in North Yorkshire
- It is a thriving village with 2 churches, 2 village halls, a primary school, a community centre and playing fields and a community library
- There are also several community groups, including Darley Debs WI, Darley Heritage Group, as well as scouts and cubs and a Cricket Club
- 5 years ago the Parish Council worked with North Yorkshire County Council to establish a Community Wireless Broadband Scheme



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B. Context Before Had Website

- All Council documents were created and stored on the Clerk's own personal computer and printed
- Agendas and Minutes were posted on 2 noticeboards in the village, and copies were also kept in the Village Shop and in the Community Centre for people to peruse
- Budgets and other financial information were not generally available to parishioners other than the Annual Return which was posted on noticeboards according to the legal requirements
- There were occasional request to view documents, and Freedom of Information requests.



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B. Difference Funding Made

- The funding allowed a Council computer and scanner to be purchased, so that all Council documents and e-mails are stored and dealt with on one secure computer, which can be passed on to the next Clerk.
- The funded clerk time meant that the website could also be set up so that documents can now be easily loaded and easily accessed. Anyone can now see agendas, minutes and papers for discussion as well as budgets and end of year accounts and lists of payments.
- The Clerk is now also able to easily update parishioners regarding the progress of large planning applications and local roadworks. The Council is thus seen as an important source of village information.



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B. Does the Council Feel More Open & Transparent?

- The Council is now undoubtedly more transparent, in that all its documents are readily accessible
- Information about a recent large increase in the precept to allow a grant to be made to the Playing Fields' Association could be readily seen, meaning that there were only 2 complaints
- The required list of payments over £100 has been extended to include all payments, so all financial transactions are in the public domain
- The Council has also helped 2 other local small Councils who did not have websites, by creating a Nidderdale section on its site and posting their agendas, minutes etc., so that they were accessible as required. One now has its own website and the other is almost there.



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C. Recommendations & Q. & As

- Recommend that you read the Transparency Code if it applies to your council
- Recommend that your council applies for new burdens funding under the Fund if you are not yet compliant with the Code
- Recommend that you have a look at the excellent Darley & Menwith Parish Council web-site (<http://www.darleyvillage.info> – and select Parish Council)
- Recommend that your council ensures its finances are published in line with the Code soonest during 17-18
- Recommend you follow the steps taken by Darley & Menwith PC to become Code compliant.



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Contact Data

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