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## **Transparency Fund Guide 17-18**

***Promoting Good Practice in Securing Applications for the Transparency Fund***

**For Use by County Associations of Local Councils**



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## Aim of Smaller Authorities' Transparency Code

The Smaller Authorities' Transparency Code came into force on 1 April 2015 and requires the on-line publication of certain information to provide taxpayers with a clear picture of their local authority. It will improve the ability of communities to hold local public bodies to account. The Government made it clear when the Code commenced that it fully expected every parish council (with a turnover of £25,000 or less) to comply with the Code.

The Transparency Code ensures the online publication of information to provide taxpayers with a clear picture of a council's activities, meetings, spending and governance. The legislation provides clear guidance for exactly what must be published (see [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/388541/Transparency\\_Code\\_for\\_Smaller\\_Authorities.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388541/Transparency_Code_for_Smaller_Authorities.pdf) ).

The Government's transparency expectations are not just for smaller authorities and have been promoted across all of the other levels of local government in similar ways (for instance there is a separate code for larger parish councils). Overall, the Code will modernise local government, create certainty for residents and enable better financial planning. This is why it is crucial that as many parish councils with an annual turnover of £25,000 or less comply with the Code - or they risk being subject to challenge (which is something all County Associations will not want their parishes to be subject to now or in the future). The Code will improve the ability of communities to hold local public bodies to account.

## Transparency Fund for Smaller Authorities

The good news is that the government has made £4.7 million in grant funding available to alleviate the financial implications of compliance, so this need not be a burden or pressure for smaller councils (see the application form and related guidance at <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/the-transparency-fund>). Smaller councils can claim for funding for things like computers, scanners, broadband access and training.

This new burdens funding is called the **Transparency Fund** and is available to smaller authorities with an annual turnover of £25,000 or less.

The funding and associated programme is being overseen and delivered by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in collaboration with County Associations of Local Councils. NALC developed the application process in consultation with the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) and DCLG and extensively tested with County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) and parish councils. The process involves eligible councils applying via their relevant County



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Association. Applications are considered on a monthly basis and applying is easy. In order to apply eligible councils with an annual turnover of £25,000 or less should;

- Obtain an application form from their County Association of Local Councils;
- Complete the application form and return to their County Association for triaging;
- Make any final changes requested by the National or their County Association; &
- Use grant monies awarded to deliver specific outputs agreed on the application.

Full details can be found on the NALC website here: <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/the-transparency-fund> .

The programme began on **8 June 2015** and the application process commenced on **1 September 2015**. The first grant funds were made available to parish councils in **November 2015** and monthly from then until the end of the 2015/16 financial year when the process was reviewed and restarted for the new financial year (2016-17). The three year Transparency Fund will only be available until 2018 so as such it is critical that eligible councils apply through their County associations within this period.

#### **Progress So Far:**

Many smaller councils eligible for the Transparency Fund are now complying with the Code or are working hard to comply with this. Given that there is a mix of smaller council demographics across England and across counties it is recognized that some counties contain far more eligible councils than others.

#### **Purpose of This Guide:**

#### **Supporting County Associations to Raise Application Rates in low uptake areas.**

There has been a good application rate for Transparency Fund grants in many areas of the country and the approval of these applications is high with the vast majority being approved. **However there are a number of areas where application rates are low.**

Where smaller councils are not yet compliant with the Code, now is the time to act. Given that eligible councils can only apply to the Fund through their County Association and the fund is only available until 2018 the National Association and other stakeholders are largely reliant on County Associations working as hard as they can in their areas to promote the Fund and Code compliance. As such it is imperative that County Associations do everything in their power to promote the Fund as far as they can in their county areas to eligible councils. This will include engaging with, supporting and submitting simple application forms on behalf of eligible councils to NALC as relevant. County Associations should ensure they engage with both member and non-member councils alike.



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County Associations of Local Councils should use whatever methods work most effectively in their own areas to promote Code compliance through the Fund - this might be by holding small events (as in Essex and Suffolk) or holding local drop-in sessions (as in some other county areas).

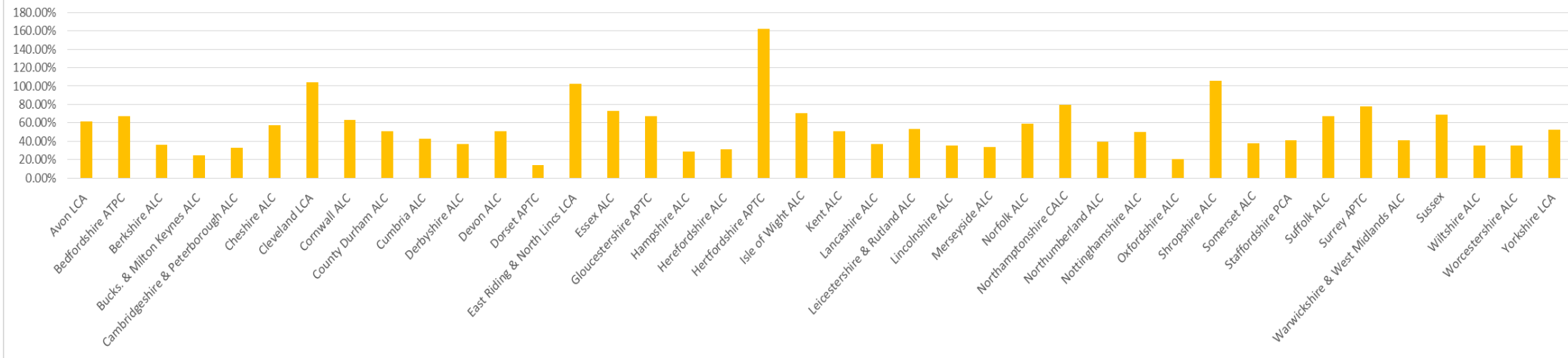
This short guide for County Associations of Local Councils is a good practice reference to;

- learn how the County Associations active in the Fund have secured and submitted high numbers of applications from eligible councils in their areas; and
- learn how other County Associations with high numbers of approved Fund applications have promoted the Fund in their areas.



Table 1;

Percentage Take Up/County Association



Above: histogram showing the percent of eligible local council in each county that have received Transparency Fund grants between September 2015 and November 2017.

*\*Those county association of local councils who have a percentage rating of 100% or more have managed to get every local council in their county to apply for grant funding at least once\*.*

## Good Practice Learning Points So Far

These out-reach and engagement case studies are drawn from County Associations who have had a cumulative value of more than £20,000 of applications approved for the Fund so far. We encourage you to read and see how you might apply this good practice in your own county areas.

### 1. Hold Transparency Surgeries

**Essex** – The Essex Association has promoted the Transparency Fund at every opportunity. Staff were hired specifically for the purposes of the Transparency Fund. Every eligible parish council was e-mailed to promote the Fund and this was followed up via a telephone call to progress chase, advise on and assist with applications. Training days were held and funding days organised where one hour slots per council were allocated to go through council applications and assist with any queries. The Transparency team at Essex have been in constant contact with NALC always ensuring they were up to date with the latest information for the Transparency Fund (see <http://www.ealc.gov.uk/links-and-funding-sources/>).

**Contact info:** [joy.darby@ealc.gov.uk](mailto:joy.darby@ealc.gov.uk) / 01371 879 722.

### 2. Communicate Regularly With Your Councils

**Yorkshire** – The Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations' Transparency team have published and promoted the Transparency Fund at every opportunity. The team have discussed the Transparency Fund at all branch meetings, detailing the application process and assisting councils where necessary. All publications sent out included all relevant information promoting the Transparency Fund and all guidance material. Also all local Associations within Yorkshire were contacted via email and progress chased via telephone. Yorkshire is one of the biggest county associations and has 12 branch offices. There are staff in each branch assisting with applications for the Fund (see [http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk/YLCA-Web/transparency\\_fund-3247.aspx](http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk/YLCA-Web/transparency_fund-3247.aspx)).

**Contact info:** [chris.pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk](mailto:chris.pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk) / 01904 436 622.

### 3. Promote Early Compliance

**Gloucestershire** – The Gloucestershire Association's team directly engaged very early on with eligible councils, strongly encouraging councils to apply to the Fund. The Association compiled a list of all eligible councils that had not applied and contacted them electronically and then followed up by telephone strongly encouraging the council to complete its application as soon as possible in order to comply with the Code (see <http://www.gaptc.org.uk/news/tags/Transparency+Fund>). The Gloucestershire Association also regularly promotes local successful application outcomes on its website so that other eligible councils know that they too can apply successfully to the Fund.

**Contact info:** [advice@gaptc.org.uk](mailto:advice@gaptc.org.uk) / 01452 883 388.

#### 4. Promote the Fund In Your Newsletters

**Leicestershire – Leicestershire and Rutland – T<sup>5</sup>** Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils initially started encouraging councils to consider their needs well before the Fund opened, allowing them to be prepared to make an application. Once the Fund opened they emailed all eligible councils relevant application material to apply along with the guidance asking if councils met the criteria to contact the county association. Support for individual applications was prioritised, with a great deal of officer time spent assisting councils to complete the form properly. LRALC have promoted the Transparency Fund at every available opportunity, holding training sessions, briefings, parish liaison meetings and promoting the Fund in every newsletter and on their website

(see <http://www.leicestershireandrutlandalc.gov.uk/news/2016/06/only-one-week-until-smaller-councils-must-publish-their-annual-data>

**Contact info:** [admin@leicestershireandrutlandalc.gov.uk](mailto:admin@leicestershireandrutlandalc.gov.uk) / 0116 235 3800.

#### 5. Promote the Fund Monthly & Hold Training Days

**Cheshire –** The Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) feels that the reason it has been so successful was due to promoting the information on the Transparency Fund on a monthly basis. Cheshire also held training days assisting councils with queries and completing their applications. ChALC also put councils in contact with web providers to ease the process of having to find a suitable provider on their own.

**Contact info:** [jackieweaver@chalc.org.uk](mailto:jackieweaver@chalc.org.uk) / 01948 871 314.

#### 6. Contact and visit Local Councils.

**Hertfordshire –** The Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils (HAPTC) has worked hard to engage with councils to ensure compliance with the code. Those councils who have not yet applied for transparency funding have been contacted and visited in order to encourage them to make an application. Councils who have applied are being provided with assistance to enable them to use their websites in accordance with the requirements of the code.

**(Contact info:** [sue@haptc.org.uk](mailto:sue@haptc.org.uk) / 07956 590 094.

#### 7. Issue Regular Reminders.

**Shropshire- The Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC)** ensures that reminders for eligible councils to apply are issued at every opportunity. Staff at SALC use bulletins, their website and targeted phone calls to get the message about the fund across. In addition, when

### 8. Develop a web portal & hold local events on the fund.

**Northumberland** – The Northumberland Association of Local Councils has worked hard to reach all eligible councils in the region. They are developing a web portal onto which councils will be able to upload documents required by the fund. In addition they are holding a number of very local events to ensure that no council staff or councillors have to travel far. These events cover the transparency fund, the code itself and also the benefits of complying.

**Contact info:** [info@northalc.org.uk](mailto:info@northalc.org.uk) / 01670 500 810.

### 9. Cover all bases.

**Northamptonshire** – The Northamptonshire Association of Local Councils has been covering all bases when promoting the Transparency Fund to their local councils. They have promoted the fund through regular email bulletins, newsletters, phone calls and direct mail. They say ‘it’s a case of drip feeding information to councils and covering as many bases as possible. We’ve found that some councils need four or five interactions before they realise what the Transparency Fund is all about.’

**Contact info:** [dmoody@northantscalc.com](mailto:dmoody@northantscalc.com) / 01327 831 482

### 10. Provide encouragement and support with the application process.

**Cleveland** - The Cleveland Local Councils’ Association (CLCA) attribute the increase in take up of transparency funding in Cleveland to the additional support the association has provided smaller councils. CLCA have facilitated drop in sessions and one to one conversations with Clerks and Councillors to enable them to identify what their council require to become compliant with the code. They have also provided councils with a continuous supply of information, guidance and advice plus assistance with the application process itself. For the very smallest councils with limited resources CLCA have provided much ‘hand holding’ and encouragement to secure commitment and the take up of the opportunities provided by the funding.

**Contact info:** [hardwickpartnership@hotmail.com](mailto:hardwickpartnership@hotmail.com)/ 01642 808700



## 11. Asking Another County Association To Process your Association's Applications

**Suffolk & Norfolk** - The Transparency Fund Board has become aware that many County Association areas and Associations are not resourced / have available staff hours to process Transparency Fund applications (or for related reasons). In these cases you could consider following the example of Norfolk who work with their neighbouring Suffolk Association who briefly processed the Norfolk Association's applications in 2015-16. If a County Association for resource or significant other reasons wants a better resourced neighbouring County Association to process and submit its Fund applications for the remainder of the 2016-17 financial year it is able to do so – by written local agreement between those Associations.

In order to confirm this to the National Association a County Association which is transferring responsibility for processing its own councils' Fund applications for the remainder of the 2017-18 financial year (and then submitting them to NALC) – is asked by NALC to confirm initially and copying in the partner (handling) Association in – this in writing to [transparency@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:transparency@nalc.gov.uk) marked for the attention of Ben Murray and labelled **Confirmation Of Transfer Of TF Processing Responsibility From XXXX CALC To XXXX CALC**. Please include brief information in the message confirming;

- 1. that the transferring Association has the written agreement (please attach that agreement) of the Association due to process your Association's Fund applications – that for the remainder of the 2016-17 financial year it is undertaking to do so;*
- 2. that the Association the transferring Association is transferring this responsibility to has agreed to label all of your councils' Fund applications clearly marked On Behalf Of XXXX CALC when they are submitted to NALC; &*
- 3. the specific length of time (preferably with a clear end date to the end of the 2017-18 financial year) that this temporary arrangement is in place.*

Please ensure that the transferring Association attaches the written local transfer agreement to the confirmation message sent to [transparency@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:transparency@nalc.gov.uk) . The National Association will not become involved or a party to such local transfer agreements.



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