

Carsington and Hopton Parish Council

Agenda item: 17/15

Issue: How to meet the requirements of the Smaller Authorities Transparency Code 2014. These are to publish on a website, that is publically accessible and free of charge, all audit information. See Appendix A for the list of requirements.

Recommendation: Decide on one of the three options outlined below.

Timing: Urgent. Information must be published by 1st July 2015. Price of option A may rise after end of May 2015.

Members Interests: None known

Further Information: Clerk

Background: The Parish Council (PC) had a successful website which is not now working. The PC also communicates through a village email list via g-mail and on notice boards. The Clerk uses her own email address and computer equipment. Document storage is on the Clerk's personal lap top and some hard copy. There is no back up.

Discussion: The PC could use this major audit change as an opportunity to formulate a wider digital policy encompassing communication with electors, transparency of documents, storage of documents, email and working between members of the council.

Three options have been identified.

A. Full Virtual Office

This would involve a web site with both a public section for communication and transparency purposes and an office section accessible to members and staff for working documents. Emails would go through the site. It would also include a document management system, automatic routing to the relevant tier of local government and a planning field. Documents and email would be held on the provider's server. The Clerk would have to load information within a framework provided. Set up costs £250 and running costs £250 pa via 2commune.com.

B. Web Site which PC Builds Itself.

This could meet the needs of the transparency code and communication with electors. The level of sophistication would depend on the time and expertise devoted to the task. The costs for this are unknown, but are advertised from £99. It is likely that the current arrangements for email would continue and a backup system for documents would have to be agreed. A free web site is available via HugoFox.com or Moonfruit.com. Hosting and Domain names would have to be paid for and back up equipment purchased.

C. Ask CARE for Space on their Site.

The PC could ask CARE if the transparency documents could go on their web site and continue to use Gmail. Purchase of backup equipment – external hard drive and data sticks to be swapped between Chair and Clerk at each meeting for off -site storage. Use of cloud storage could be considered.

Financial Implications: The set up costs of A are £250, of B £100, and of C say £50 donation. The ongoing costs of A are £250; of B say £100 and C say £50. There may be an opportunity to apply to the NALC transparency fund but details are not yet available. Option A might be presented as a project for wind farm funding.

Risk Implications: Non compliance with Transparency Code may lead to qualification of the accounts and or a fine. All options mitigate this risk. Storage of documents is more secure with the full virtual office option as documents and emails are automatically stored elsewhere.

Appendix A

Details of all expenditure over £100

End of year accounts, annual governance statement and internal audit report

Copy of year end bank reconciliation

Explanation of significant variances

Explanation of difference in balances

Agendas and approved minutes

List of councillors and their responsibilities

Assets owned