

D&H PARISH COUNCIL MEETING JANUARY 26TH 2017

Five Items need commenting on:
(red = quote from the Minutes)

Item 9: Accounts – Payments by BACS since last meeting (and From Finance meeting)

Included in this item are the following types of payments:

- (i) *Grants to Charities:*
- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Children in Need</i> | <i>£150</i> |
| <i>MS Therapy Centre</i> | <i>£100</i> |
| <i>St Peter's Hospice</i> | <i>£100</i> |
| <i>Wapley Bushes</i> | <i>£ 50</i> |

These grants were not for the benefit of D&H residents. Do other PCs give such grants? In 2016 -17:

- Marshfield PC: made 3 grants, all for the benefit of their residents;
Wick & Abson PC: one grant to the benefit of their residents;
Doynton PC: one grant to the benefit of a resident;
Pucklechurch PC: no grants; but several for residents and local organisations in 2015
Dodington PC: unknown, as it seems not to publish any grant or financial Data on its website (hello Transparency!).

Why is our PC the only one to give grants for the benefit of non-residents? (See comments on Appendix 1 of the Minutes below).

I had to look up the intriguingly-termed Wapley Bushes. I found it is a charity operating in aid of a nature reserve owned by Dodington PC of which our clerk is a councillor – an interest seems not to have been declared in the minutes.

Anyway, it turns out this is not a proper charity grant but a payment in lieu for a bill for the PC's website.

The same applies to the Children in Need grant: this was in lieu of de-silting a waterfall pool. I assume this is not the one next to one councillor's property, as no interest seems to have been declared.

Finally, two councillors have an interest in two of the above excellent charities. Nothing wrong there, but they seem not to have declared an interest.

- (ii) *Mystery Payments:*
- | | |
|---------------------|------------|
| <i>Kevin Pitman</i> | <i>£60</i> |
| <i>SLCC</i> | <i>£82</i> |

Our PC has signed up to transparency, so it would be good if residents knew who these recipients were and what they were being paid for.

- (iii) *Computing:*
- | | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| <i>Yate computing</i> | <i>£60</i> |
| <i>Yate Computing</i> | <i>£40</i> |

As with Wapley Bushes, our PC needs to be transparent about all the costs of their website, perhaps making a designated section in the accounts so residents can see how expensive it is compared to the previous free alternative. The PC has

nothing budgeted for the website in the “Detailed Income And Expenditure By Budget Heading As At 21/12/2016” shown on its website.

Item 17: State of the roads and verges due to local farmers.

The state of the roads and verges was a real problem as local farmers were dropping slurry and mud all over them. The Clerk had e mailed Tracey Hamblett and Environment Officers to see what could be done and read out their replies. It was agreed not to take this forward,

Having had my car splattered in slurry the other day by a passing tractor driver, I agree this is a problem for residents.

One can accept that cows “unload” on roads and wheels may be muddy coming out of a field (yes, it’s the country) but not that verges are destroyed or slurry containers are not covered over in transit.

We were not given a summary of Tracy Hamblett’s email nor why the PC agreed not to take this forward if it was a “real problem”.

Not all local farmers may be at fault. One council member might possibly have needed to declare an interest in view of the council’s decision.

Item 19: Parish Council Website

“It was agreed that we have an outside contractor to deal with this in future.”

As predicted by our boffins at EdWeb Inc, it was unlikely our PC could handle such a complex project as a website especially at the cost they initially projected. Residents now need the PC to be transparent and tell us how much has been spent already and how much more it will cost for a contractor to run their website in the future.

Let’s hope the new contractor will include Google Analytics on the PC’s website whereby we can see how often the website is accessed and judge if it is cost effective. This is standard for EdWeb’s free to residents D&H website and our figures exclude access by EdWeb staff.

Appendix 1: Community Benefit Grant Rules And Regulations

Here are the criteria the PC sets out in this appendix for grant applications:

2. Who can apply for a grant? Any organisation or group may apply provided that the Council is satisfied that the grant is in the interest of, or will directly benefit, the parish or its inhabitants or some of them.

Grants will not be given to national organisations (without a locally based group).

So why, earlier in the meeting, had they had given £400 to organisations that don’t benefit some (i.e. more than one) residents and one of which is a national organisation without a locally based group?

Appendix 2: Dyrham And Hinton Parish Council Notice

Here the PC defends its decision to support NT’s application for parking ticket machines. They did everything correctly apart from not foreseeing the possible unintended consequence of increased parking on Sands Hill and Upper Street. As far as I can tell, there is no communication between the PC and residents in Dyrham (Web Ed has even been banned from receiving Agendas and Minutes!) and we are not allowed to email councillors, so how are we going to make our views known to them?

Better communication would have avoided the PC having to publish this embarrassing appendix.

Their proposals to remedy the possible consequences are fine but yellow lines would be rather harsh on Sands Hill.

My Verdict of This Meeting:

- (i) Our PC seems to be confused. It needs to smarten up its act.
- (ii) It needs to implement its Transparency policy with regard to its finances and website.
- (iii) Not declaring interests is a serious error, not deliberate I'm sure, but it needs to be corrected at the next meeting.