

PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE

At the Open Parish Meeting in April 2016, D&H PC stated:

One important change this year has been getting our own PC website. Some transparency legislation came into force recently which we have to follow. The concept of the transparency act is that all important PC documents, including accounts and minutes, are to be made available free of charge to the public as a permanent record, and the only way that this can be guaranteed is if these data are published on a site over which the PC has absolute control. It is no longer acceptable is for the data to be published only on a 'private' site, since its permanent availability cannot be guaranteed. There is nothing to stop it also being published on a private site, but the main publication site must be under the control of the PC.

What the Legislation Actually Required

The Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities, updated 27 March 2015, Part 3, section 32 states that:

"data and information specified in this Code must be published on a website which is publicly accessible free of charge."

It does not specify permanency, or that the website has to be the authority's own website, or that it cannot be a private site, *only* that the website has to be "publicly accessible free of charge".

Check it out at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388541/Transparency_Code_for_Smaller_Authorities.pdf

Local Implementation of the Act

By 2018, one might expect on the basis of the advice alluded to in our PC's proceedings that all PCs should have acquired their own websites.

However, they haven't: 29 have but 10 still don't. Of these 10, 6 still use their community website to host their proceedings and 4 have no website access at all.

All parish councils receive the same advice via the National Association of Local Councils. So, either these 6 PCs were given different advice from the advice D&H PC got, or interpreted the legislation correctly and so 6 of them continued using the publicly accessible free of charge platform offered by their community website, or else our PC got the wrong advice or may have "over-interpreted" the legislation for local reasons.

Incidentally, of the 29 PCs with websites, 24 include a reference to being a PC in their address such as “pc” or “parishcouncil”. Of the 5 that don’t, 4 don’t have a community website. Dyrham and Hinton Parish Council website address, www.dyrhamandhinton.org (D&H.com is www.dyrhamandhinton.com) is the only parish council’s web address in South Gloucestershire that has a community website without “pc” or parishcouncil” in its domain name to distinguish it from the local community website. In the world of website etiquette, this is not something a website owner does without discussing with the owner of the original web address first if they know each other, unless they do want to act aggressively.

Taken with D&H PC’s apparently faulty interpretation of the legislation and the fact they never discussed their plans with the community website and their continued refusal to share their minutes with D&H.com, suggest our PC may have been wanting to “send a message” to D&H.com. Is this - what might appear to some to be settling a score - something a responsible and “transparent” parish council should be doing and at ratepayers’ expense?