**REPORT TO PICKMERE PARISH COUNCIL**

**4 October 2016**

**9.1 Application to Transparency Fund**

**1 Background**

1.1 The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 set out a new audit framework which requires smaller councils, including parish councils with an annual turnover not exceeding £25000, to implement new transparency requirements in place of being subject to routine external audit. The Transparency Code, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, was issued to meet the Government's desire to place more power into citizens' hands to increase democratic accountability. Transparency gives local people the tools and information they need to hold public bodies to account. Pickmere Parish Council seeks to comply with the Transparency Code, for instance in terms of the financial information about the Council that it publishes on the Council's website.

1.2 In parallel with those provisions, Government has established a Transparency Fund, which is intended to assist smaller councils to comply with the requirements of the Transparency Code. The Fund aims to help such councils improve public access to relevant information through the tool of the councils' websites. The Fund is administered through the county associations of local councils - in Pickmere's situation through ChALC. Applications for funding are considered on a monthly rolling programme. Typical items for possible grant funding include the establishment of those elements of a Council website necessary for the council to comply with the Transparency Code and the provision of equipment the use of which will enable or assist the addition of information to the Council's website. Applications may be considered for contribution to work undertaken or equipment bought after 1 April 2015 solely to comply with the Transparency Code.

**2 Report**

2.1 In Pickmere's case, the Council website was set up prior to 1 April 2015 and is therefore not eligible for grant funding. However, the Parish Council does not own its own dedicated computer - the Clerk is currently using a personal laptop to carry out Council work (though a laptop that is not currently used for personal purposes). In addition, the Council has recently acquired a printer/scanner so as to avoid use of the Clerk's personal printer/scanner. (From a Transparency Code point of view, the important element of this technology is the scanner rather than the printer, as it is the scanner that facilitates the uploading of information onto the Council's website. However, it is understood that an 'all-in-one' printer/scanner is in principle eligible for funding.)

It would seem sensible to include in any application the purchase of an external hard disk drive to allow regular data back-ups. It is not clear whether such a purchase is eligible for grant. The purchase of appropriate office software and virus protection software however is essential.

It appears therefore that it would be worthwhile the Council making an application for funding:

* to purchase a laptop computer - maximum grant payable £350 (net of VAT);
* to purchase appropriate software and virus protection software
* to purchase an external hard disk drive;
* to reimburse the Council for its recent purchase of an all-in-one printer scanner.

**3 Recommendation**

3.1 That the Clerk submits an application to the Transparency Fund for the purchase of a laptop and external hard disk drive, and appropriate software and for reimbursement of its purchase of an all-in-one printer scanner.

**Jack Steel**

**Clerk to Parish Council**