

# BLEADON PARISH COUNCIL



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14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

[xxx]  
Head of Challenge  
PKF Littlejohn LLP

Dear [xxx],

## **Re: Bleadon Parish Council – Objections raised to the 2020/2021 AGAR –**

Herewith the Parish Council's response to the undermentioned objections raised.

### **Objection 1: The Council's provision for the exercise of public rights**

Arrangements were made for the objector to exercise their rights under the Public Right of Inspection. A list of what the objector wished to see was sent in advance of the meeting. The objector met with two Councillors on the 30th June 2021 but the Clerk as the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO), was not present. The Councillors were unable to answer the questions asked and not all the documentation requested was present. The objector then emailed the Clerk with a series of questions on the 22nd of July 2021 at 12:14pm and then at 12:28pm filed a complaint in relation to the AGAR.

For the Public Rights of Inspection 2022/23 the Clerk / RFO will be available to answer any questions raised.

### **Objection 2: The Council's tendering processes during 2020/21**

Tender documents exist within Parish Council files for the toilet cleaning, grass cutting and village ranger. The following prices were received and presented to the Parish Council on November 12<sup>th</sup> 2020:

- Three prices for grass cutting
- Two prices for toilet cleaning
- One prices for the Ranger contract

Accepted were:

- Grass cutting at an annual cost of £4000.00
- Toilet cleaning at an annual cost of £1674.00
- Ranger contract at an annual cost of £6720.00

Financial regulations were complied with in relation to the grass cutting and toilet cleaning and 11.1 (h) states: *'When it is to enter into a contract of less than £25,000 in value for the supply of goods or materials or for the execution of works or specialist services other than such goods, materials, works or specialist services as are excepted as set out in paragraph (a) the Clerk or RFO shall obtain 3 quotations (priced descriptions of the proposed supply); where the value is below £5,000 and above £100 the Clerk/RFO shall strive to obtain 3 estimates. Otherwise, Regulation 10.3 above shall apply.'*

However, only one tender was obtained for the Ranger contract, but no explanation as to why non-compliance with financial regulations was being recommended; and the contract was approved.

In relation to the Editor post.

- The Parish Council were informed of a volunteer vacancy in Jan, Feb, March & June 2020.
- In July 2020 (minute 334.4 vi) the Parish Council were informed that an editor had agreed to produce the September issue for £350.
- In September 2020 (minute 335.7 (5)) the Council were asked to regularise the appointment of the Editor. It was resolved that 'the Chairman of the Personnel Committee Councillor Andy Scarisbrick, together with Councillors Ann Davies and Rob Tyson, would form a working party in order to generate "Heads of Agreement" for recommendation to the Parish Council at the October Parish Council Meeting'.
- In October (minute 336.4 ix) it was noted that a report from the Working Group had been circulated just a couple of days before the meeting. It was agreed that the said report would be placed on the November Agenda for acceptance of the recommendations set out in the report.
- On November 16th (minute 337.7 vi) the council received a report from the Working Party in respect to the Editorship of Bleadon Village newsletter. They resolved to accept the recommendations contained therein. Resolved that the circulated Report and the Terms of Reference be accepted in its entirety. There are no appendices to the minutes clarifying what was agreed.

The first payment was made to the editor in September 2020 (minute 335.8). A contract exists which runs from the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020.

**Objection 3: The Council's grant awarding procedures**

According to the 2020/2021 account statements there was one grant awarded to the Covid Group for £100. The Parish Council at the meeting of the 8th June 2020 (minute 337.8) agreed a retrospective £100 grant. These were exceptional circumstances due to Covid and the Parish Council had been unable to meet since March 2020.

The Parish Council also agreed to consider for transfer £1000 from the Small Business Grant received from North Somerset (see 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020 minute 337.9). There is no evidence that this was revisited, but £1000 was then earmarked from the Small Business Grant to Covid Group earmarked reserves, which still exists in the 2022/23 earmarked reserves. At the end of the financial year this will be reviewed with a view to closing this, as requested by the Covid Group.

Confusion exists within Council as to whether Bleadon in Bloom is a Parish Council run initiative or an independent entity. Given they receive grants and income from additional sources, which don't go through the Parish Council, then it is assumed that they are independent. As such, in the new financial year 2023/2024, any money budgeted for them will be accessed using the grant application form.

**Objection 4: The lack of transparency including failure to publish required information and use of working groups.**

Currently the working groups established have no formal agenda or notes for the meetings held. Any reports are presented verbally to the Parish Council on the night of the meeting. The Parish Council Standing Orders do not cover working groups.

As of February 2023, agenda papers are attached to the agenda and will be published on the Parish Council website three clear days before a meeting. A hard copy will also be available for those without internet access. These will include a monthly budget update and correct bank reconciliations.

For the Financial Year 2023/24 it will be recommended to Council that their Committee and Working Party structure is reviewed and terms of reference put in place for each and that working parties be added to standing orders. The terms of reference for working parties to include agendas and notes, which are then passed to the full Parish Council meetings as part of the agenda papers for noting and agreeing any recommended works.

**Objection 5: The asset register that supports Box 9**

It is acknowledged that the asset register was incorrect and therefore restated. However, it is currently being reviewed in relation to legal advice obtained in reference to the Coronation Hall and will be restated on the 2022/23 AGAR.

**Objection 6: The Council's reserves**

There is current confusion as to what and why some of the earmarked reserves are held. For the 2023/24 financial year there will be a review of the earmarked reserves.

I can confirm that this response was approved by Council on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 (Minute 362.14 which will be available on our website by the end of the week)

Kind Regards

[xxx]

Locum Parish Clerk