

Wednesday 20 January 2016 at 10am
Notes of Meeting in Church Meeting Room
Ian Gibson, Steve Hartree, Chris Butler, Jo Gower-Crane

Chris – thanks to Ian for being the first PC chair to offer to meet and discuss issues.

Ian – indicated that there may have been problems between BOB and the previous clerk.

Chris – clarified the situation, the failed costly QC scheme was main issue but feeling that there was a mutual respect built on each of their professional skills, especially as previous clerk couldn't really argue against the government legal and best practice advice to publish certain information with his training and qualification.

Ian – We're all volunteers, views expressed by village ranger were not that of PC

Clerk

Ian – Appointment of clerk undertaken by Bruce Poole, advertised on SLCC clerk website and North Somerset Council website. Put faith in Bruce who also offered to mentor successful applicant (which did not happen).

Steve – would have thought it could have been advertised in Mercury.

Chris – or via BOB for potential residents to apply

Jo - especially as a non-qualified clerk was appointed.

Ian/Steve – no qualified clerks in the area, some PCs without a clerk, so didn't want one forced on the PC.

Ian – clerk is keen and ambitious, but has not been mentored. Clerk has no previous parish council meeting experience. Clerk taking advice from new East Huntspill Clerk who is a qualified solicitor, learn together

Chris – Gave clerk advice regarding Word/PDF documents in first month but she then changed communication process of key documents.

PC meetings

Ian - in favour of giving people a chance to talk during public meetings rather than limited opportunity. Hoped public had seen positive changes so far.

Chris – agreed, feedback he'd received from various sources says meeting interaction greatly improved, also the ability to be able to hear councillors speak.

Ian – aiming for honesty, openness and transparency. Would like anyone to politely come and talk to the council.

Jo - asked for polite feedback to the public also, e.g. acknowledge and respond to emails, not cut off without explanation.

Steve – open sessions throughout the meetings have now been introduced, although limited time to speak due to time constraints

Chris/Jo - understandable

Parish Plan

Chris/Jo –parishioners on working groups views seemingly ignored, plan was only created for Quality Council Status, only reviewed briefly for reaccreditation. Groups of residents came together to review feedback for different aspects of village life e.g. Lifelong Learning & Leisure, Transport, Business, etc. No comprehensive output by PC at the end.

Ian – unaware of the Parish Plan process.

Chris/Jo – Involved with first BPC website company who processed the questionnaire data, then published on BOB to avoid it's loss.

Chris - to send Ian a link to the plan information on BOB .

Steve - current council has moved on from Quality Status, poor decision to keep the same chair for 13 years, deprived council of sharing chair skills.

BOB

Ian – it is perceived by some that BOB is just Chris' views, not that of the public.

Jo – Many approach BOB with views and requests for help.

Chris – the purpose of BOB is to link people together, to be a hub, engage the public in community issues and be a resource of information. People do ask BOB to post things, it is not just his/our views and people comment on BOB themselves. Feedback to us is that some people have given up contacting the PC as they were often ignored by the previous council, requests not responded to or addressed. Villagers want to be involved e.g. Parish Plan process.

Ian - disappointed that the public is not approaching the council, he's trying to be fair and include everyone. Some people think that there is animosity from the council towards BOB. Ian feels, not so, BOB is of benefit to the public, e.g. assistance with consultations, groups, etc. and has no desire to intrude [After meeting note: The newly launched PC website appears to indicate otherwise with it's headings (e.g. Businesses, Clubs & Societies, etc) with information stating 'This section is undergoing maintenance'. We feel that a clear indication of who is doing what, openness and transparency, is needed at this point i.e. what is public money being spent on over and above the PC statutory information. Refer to ICO model publication scheme information]

Chris – the new PC may be suffering from a lot of historical poor communications between the PC and the public. Will take time to change this perception but heading in right direction.

PC Website

Ian - The PC want to retain control of their own website

Chris – rightly so, try to reduce duplication of information and effort across sites within the village and associated maintenance/effort/time needed by clerk to keep the site current. Design of versions 1,2 and 3 of the PC website has sought to duplicate and not maintain information. That's why Chris sends correspondence to clerk/councillors to refer to e.g. Localism Act, Transparency Code, ICO, etc. to assist informed decision making. PC needs to choose the best web provider to suit their needs, for the provision of core data.

Chris – previously offered skills to the PC in a public meeting but never followed up, with the PC choosing to train Cllr Morris, which didn't work out,

Ian – confirmed that he had previously looked at the PC website and that it hadn't been updated since 2013/4.

Chris - Having a .gov.uk and/or public sector facing website brings added responsibility for government standard compliance that needed resolution if not already achieved (see previous links).

Chris/Jo – happy to be involved and offer their professional information management experience, but, due to personal circumstance, can't commit to being a councillor.

Ian – new website should be basic core PC information. Increase communication with the public.

Steve – the councillors agreed to get a website up and running ASAP instead of waiting any longer, with the note that at least one is there. The new clerk worked in IT and is in consultation with WebGlu.

Jo – Asked various questions regarding processes and procedures relating to the website: Who is managing/manages the current website development, the PC has assigned councillors to the playground, PROW, etc? It was written in the minutes that the current domain ends in March, who is rewriting the new website? What will happen in April when the current website is switched off, how will the public access the information?

Ian – Didn't know the answer at this point.

Chris – referred to meeting in October with Cllr Gutsell when suggestion of Freeola (low cost product, used by BOB and Church) was made. However the decision to proceed with WebGlu was taken so a 4th development would need further evaluation and discussion.

Jo – it would not be a good idea to promote a website that's not there or doesn't have the current information as this would reduce public confidence in the PC site. E.g. recently someone asked for the January Agenda, Chris pointed them at the new PC website, the agenda wasn't there, so Chris directed them to BOB. [Post meeting note: January agenda still not on BPC website this afternoon and November minutes still state draft although approved. See also comments regarding duplication in BOB section above]

New Councillors

Ian – 2 potential new councillors, 1 hopefully positive, 1 maybe.

Vexacious Issue

Ian – the clerk felt harassed and bullied by BOB, although Ian acknowledged that bullying is subjective and that a public facing job comes with some level of stress. Lack of support from previous clerk has not helped with workload pressures.

Jo – ignoring public emails, blocked from information, spoken about by councillors in public meetings with no feedback could also be considered bullying.

Chris – BOB being removed from clerk mailing list and ignoring requests was why the recent PC issue escalated. If the clerk re-read the emails (in a supportive frame of mind) then she may see that we were/are trying to help by pointing her in the right direction with links, information, the effect of process changes on the public, etc. especially in the light of being new to the job and an untrained clerk which must be a source of stress.

Ian - not sure why BOB was removed from mailing list

Steve – explained electronic information is sent to NALC, Press, Town Councillors and now agenda/minutes on new website so no need to include individuals. No preferential treatment for BOB, feels the clerk needs to prioritise her time and not send to individual members of the public. If many people requested information then she'd be inundated with requests.

Chris - That's why the PC has a website, to reduce the number of information requests, that's why BOB posts and informs 100s of Bleadon residents in the absence of a PC maintained website. Electronic information should be sent to Bleadon residents who the information affects. The process just stopped without consultation.

Steve – the fact that the PC has received very few complaints, and few people turn up at PC meetings, is an indication that the PC is doing very well.

Jo – it could be seen that way, but also another

Chris – Public had historically been disenfranchised by PC during QC process and this would take time to change. Also a lot of people now use social media to keep up to date rather than attend. If there is an issue then the public do respond in greater numbers.

Ian – Noticed that meeting numbers had increased.

Steve – Felt that 100+ turnout at housing development meeting wasn't significant compared to population of Bleadon.

Chris – turnout was good in the context of national politics, e.g. election turnout, engaging public was a challenge for government localism initiatives.

Ian – Ian took the role to make a difference in the village. There were some parties hoping to see current PC constitution fail, how can BPC improve relationships with the public, work in harmony, knowing that we'll not agree about everything, either within the PC, with BOB or the public? The fact that the precept has not been increased this year should be commended, although next year who knows e.g. churchyard wall. Chris – Agreed re: cost cutting and precept austerity, (see also BVN discussion).

Chris – BOB happy to support PC and if all is going well then BOB has nothing contentious to write about, important for democracy that there is independent scrutiny of all public sector.

Chris - referred to the parishioners views in the Parish Plan and will send it to Ian as this is should be the core of village thoughts, that to date have been perceived to be ignored. A Parish Plan should be the backbone to what the PC does, accepting that priorities may change along the way.

Steve – implementing everything parishioners want, identified in the questionnaire, would cost money. People may not be willing to pay that.

Ian – it's OK if it is communicated why something is or isn't done.

Chris/Jo – agreed.

Jo – explained BOB general scale of communication escalation: firstly try to resolve issue one-to-one, then include councillors, then BOB Blog, e.g. ignored by clerk/council for 3 months re: electronic documentation. Recent website/development email was only sent to Bleadon councillors, not to all included in the original email from the clerk, so as to keep the issue in house (i.e. we did not include villagers, district councillors or the press), yet adverse personal comments were made against BOB/Chris made by councillor in January meeting.

Ian – clerk new to job

Chris/Jo – this is an admin/process issue, surely if new to a job you'd research what was needed ASAP, not change things without consideration of the effects. Also concerned that the issue of

the clerk's potential stress was aired in open PC meeting and personal comments against BOB made.

Ian – With hindsight would have done differently and has been discussed.

Chris – asked who manages the clerk and directs workload

Ian – As chair of Finance & Personnel, Steve manages the clerk, the clerk manages the ranger, no probational period. Worried about being left without a clerk like some other councils.

Village News

Chris - BVN is glossy and expensive, why? Simply view, or download and print from the website, or ask neighbour to print,

Jo - or if necessary do a small print run for those who do not want to be involved in technology.

Steve – said the format of the BVN was also raised and questioned in the past and councillors were told that it was for Quality Council status.

Ian – due to the timing of the BVN it could often be out of date re: events, key issues. Keith now no longer doing. Ian approached Weston College to produce magazine/publish.

Jo – asked why not village teenagers/youth.

Ian – related to the printing cost and process of publication

Potential Way forward

Chris – email Ian Parish Plan link on BOB

Ian/Steve - to include BOB on the clerk's electronic information mailing list (not as a privilege or favour by BPC but because as a resident of Bleadon we're legally entitled to a copy; and when posted on BOB website it benefits 100s of Bleadon BOB readers, and any other parishioner who wants to look at the documents on the BOB website). [Post meeting note – There has always been a weblink from the BOB site to the PC website, but not vice versa]

Ian/Steve – arrange a meeting between BOB (Chris/Jo) and the clerk to help improve communications.

Ian/Steve – to confirm, and communicate, who's responsible for current and future website development and content;

Ian/Steve – confirm, and communicate, what will be happening to access to information in April when the current website is potentially switched off?

Ian/Steve – Arrange a website meeting with BOB if the PC would like assistance in the way forward with the current or future website.

Related Email Correspondence

From: bleadon@live.co.uk

To: igibson6@sky.com; stevenshartree194@btinternet.com

Subject: Meeting and notes

Date: Thu, 21 Jan 2016 11:59:23 +0000

Dear Ian and Steve,

Many thanks for arranging the meeting and venue yesterday. Jo and I both felt that it was productive and may lead to future progress on improving the efficiency and currency of Bleadon parish communications and information, we hope you did too.

Please find attached a copy of 'rough notes' taken by Jo at the meeting for our future reference and actions, hopefully you agree they reflect our discussions but please advise if not or if they require further amplification and we will amend accordingly.

We look forward to hearing from you soon on the further way forward.

Kind regards,

Chris Butler
email: bob@bleadon.org.uk
web: www.bleadon.org.uk
twitter: @bleadon
facebook: BleadonBOB

Date: Fri, 22 Jan 2016 11:47:02 +0000

From: steventhartree194@btinternet.com

To: bleadon@live.co.uk

CC: igibson6@sky.com

Subject: Re: Meeting and notes

Dear Chris,

Thanks for the most helpful notes of our meeting - appreciated by Ian and myself.

There is only one specific point Ian and I would wish you to amend: under the final heading "Potential Way Forward", 2nd point:

we cannot recall agreeing, at this stage, to include BOB on the Clerk's electronic information mailing list as the information BOB may well require will be on the Parish Council web site. Perhaps you would be good enough to amend your meeting notes - thanks.

I'm sure that this matter will be discussed further by the Parish Council, and will form a part of the future discussions with the Clerk.

Best wishes,
Steve

From: bleadon@live.co.uk

To: steventhartree194@btinternet.com

CC: igibson6@sky.com

Subject: RE: Meeting and notes

Date: Sat, 23 Jan 2016 13:31:25 +0000

Hi Steve/Ian,

I'm sorry to say that we are disappointed with your reply in light of the meeting being about increased communication/common ground between the PC and BOB; and also the PC and Bleadon public. We therefore thought that the notes reflected this discussion and hence the 'Potential Way Forward' as opposed to definitive agreed actions. So in good faith we have produced these notes and forwarded Ian the Parish Plan information as discussed.

To avoid lengthy email communication we feel that there are four main, PC to public communication, questions:

1. How do members of the public know when items have been posted on the PC website to look at? Even if the website has every document to date on it as of today, how will the public know that new agenda/minutes/etc. have been posted in the future?
2. When the clerk tells councillors, North Somerset, Mercury and Police that new documentation (agenda/minutes) is available why not also tell BOB at the same time, so that we can inform residents to go look at the PC website? This was the original process which worked for over two years with no problems i.e. when there was and wasn't a PC website. This would assist Ian's aim of more public engagement at meetings and point people at the source of PC information as we did before.

3. Is it a full council decision that the clerk is NOT allowed to send members of the public notification when electronic information is available and that they have to guess? If so, why? If there is a public notification process similar to the one above in point 2., please can you let us know what it is?

4. If it has been resolved/minuted by the PC that the .gov.uk domain stops and the council is moving to Freeola this implies a new website development is planned. When is this planned?

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Chris and Jo
email: bob@bleadon.org.uk
web: www.bleadon.org.uk
twitter: @bleadon
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Date: Mon, 25 Jan 2016 10:25:32 +0000

From: stevenhartree194@btinternet.com

To: bleadon@live.co.uk

CC: igibson6@sky.com

Subject: Re: Meeting and notes

Dear Chris

Thanks for your email. I am sure that you will appreciate from my previous email that there was only ONE point in your note on which there was a difference of opinion!

As I indicated, the Council will consider the outcome of our meeting, and I am sure that the points raised in your latest email will be addressed.

Best wishes,

Steve

From: bleadon@live.co.uk

To: stevenhartree194@btinternet.com

CC: igibson6@sky.com

Subject: RE: Meeting and notes

Date: Mon, 25 Jan 2016 10:54:27 +0000

Dear Steve/Ian,

Thank you for prompt reply, for the benefit of Bleadon we look forward to hearing from you/Council asap.

Kind regards,

Chris and Jo

email: bob@bleadon.org.uk
web: www.bleadon.org.uk
twitter: @bleadon
facebook: BleadonBOB

Date: Mon, 25 Jan 2016 12:00:40 +0000
Subject: Re: Meeting and notes
From: bleadon@live.co.uk
To: stevenhartree194@btinternet.com
CC: igibson6@sky.com

Dear Steve, Apologies for any offence that may have been taken, but that one point was/is a key one first raised back in october!. After our positive meeting I hope it can now be resolved soon. Regards Chris

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone on the EE network.