

BPC Responses in BLUE and my questions in RED and comments in GREEN below

From: [Objector]
Sent: 15 July 2022 14:36
To: BPC Chair
Cc: All BPC Councillors, Bleadon Parish Clerk
Subject: AGAR 2021-22 and request for meeting

Dear [BPC Chair],

Firstly, belated congratulations on becoming the new BPC Chair. As you have been a BPC councillor since May 2018 you will have an understanding of the issues surrounding lack of openness and transparency, and Right of Access to information, that have been raised over the years. Also, the outstanding and ongoing AGAR challenge/queries to Audit.

As you will be aware, Tuesday 12 JUL 22 10am-12pm was my, and (Cllr)Mrs Clarke's, fourth attempt to see Bleadon Parish Council's full AGAR documentation, and the fourth time that I, and interested councillors, have been unable to view associated documentation e.g. signed contracts, leases, audit reports, appendices, etc. As you are also aware, the RFO, who would have been able to quickly and easily answer queries, was again absent from the viewing. Unfortunately, we are now back to a laborious email process, which leads to unnecessary miscommunication and frustration for all of us.

Please confirm, with minuted references, whether the four AGAR viewings, and subsequent queries, have been raised and minuted at Full Council, as I can't seem to find them. BPC doesn't publish audited information, please confirm whether BPC's Internal Auditor is aware of the current AGAR challenge and the previous three AGAR viewings and associated queries?

Time is short, but over the last three days I've done the best I can to note queries and requests arising from this year's AGAR. Therefore I'm hoping that you will take the time to meet with me before the AGAR process ends, to discuss the queries raised in this email, as it would be so much easier and quicker in person, and may enable us to avoid any mis-communication. After four years of AGAR viewings, I'd like all concerned residents and councillors to be able to move forward with a clear understanding of the finances, and associated processes and procedures. I'm happy to meet you, the RFO, and interested councillors, at any time in the next week (rescheduling permitting) in order to make this happen. If you're unable to meet me, please ensure that the RFO and/or knowledgeable councillors meet with me to answer queries, or reply via email before end of day 21 July. This proposed deadline will be giving you/council four clear days to respond, and give me at least one clear day before the AGAR deadline.

To ensure openness and transparency, and as previous AGAR submissions are currently under review by External Audit, I will also send a copy of this email to them.

Below is a summary of requests to view or receive financial documentation, along with queries arising from the AGAR process.

DOCUMENTATION

[BPC Official response to July AGAR queries noted in BLUE

From: [Clerk]
Sent: 25 July 2022 20:20
To: [Objector]
Cc: All BPC Councillors
Subject: AGAR RESPONSE TO [Objector]
My additional comments in GREEN]

For your information, I took a laptop to the AGAR viewing, so that I, and attending Cllrs Sheppard and Clarke, could check whether any missing AGAR related information was on the BPC website. This was also to help avoid the need for any subsequent unnecessary email requests to the RFO for additional information. Unfortunately, the Wi-Fi was intermittent but did assist discussions and understanding.

As you are aware, during the stated six week AGAR period, "Any person interested has the **right to inspect and make copies of the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records must be made available for inspection by any person interested.**"

- As you know, the original **AGAR notice** was posted on the BPC website for 3 weeks with incorrect dates. This was later corrected but still not posted on the village noticeboards, which has been usual practice for many years. The AGAR notice at the viewing had the correct dates as seen [online](#), but the additional two pages that are helpful to the public to understand the process and their full rights, that were included by the previous clerks, were again missing (see Rights2019 attached). **Please can you include them in all subsequent AGAR notices.**
- [Yes](#)
- [Public Rights were attached to BPC's fourth AGAR Notice](#)
- Only one page of the six page **AGAR Part 3** was filled in (See AGARPart3Viewing attached). This form is not on the BPC [website](#) as usual practice, nor on the village noticeboards. **Please send me a copy of the completed and signed AGAR Part 3.**
- [Attached](#)
- [Later published on the BPC website](#)
- **No internal or External Audit reports** as referenced in minutes and expenditure were at the viewing. **Please send me copies of the current and previous three year's Internal and External Audit reports**
- [Please note that I will only be responding to this year's AGAR. The internal auditor's two reports were duly presented to the parish council.](#)
- [formed part of the AGAR as attached. The external auditor's report for this current year will be available some-time after the 30th September.](#)
- [As part of the AGAR viewing I believe that it is my/public right to see the full Auditors' reports. When is the next biannual Internal Audit report due?](#)
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- **No signed contractual documents** were available at the viewing. All that is asked is financial transparency for residents and councillors. I see no reason why the public/Cllrs can't see the final signed contractual documents, especially as there are three unsigned/draft contracts at the bottom of the website's [Policies](#) page. Please explain why the Newsletter Editor contract is missing from the BPC website. The reason I would like to see them is there appear to be discrepancies between what is said, agreed and/or done. **Please send me copies of all signed contracts.**
- [Other than that Village Editor contract which is attached the other three are on the village website. When I am able I will see that the signatures are also shown on the website](#)
- [Three of the four contracts now on the website are signed, the Editor contract is still unsigned](#)
- For many, many years residents have been led to believe that the **newsletter** advertising income should cover the cost of the newsletter. During last year's AGAR the RFO/clerk sent me a copy of the unsigned/draft Editor's contract (as attached). He wrote in the accompanying email (23July21), "The printing budget was increased to (a) cover the printing of four editions per annum and (b) the Editor's agreed per issue payment. The agreement is that she should secure in revenue not less each issue that her issue payment." [sic] I can find no Full Council minuted reference to her agreed 'issue payment', nor to this agreement, **please tell me the Minute references that confirm this agreement and the Editor's agreed salary?**
- [That would have been my comment when we discussed the matter at budget time](#)
- [My question is not fully answered, where was this agreed at full council? Is this saying that the advertng, job spec and appointment were agreed via a budget setting meeting, not through various full council minuted meetings? This was not the process used for the other three contracts awarded, which went to tender and through full council, why is the editor contract process different?](#)
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- BPC do not publish working group minutes/agreements, nor any that were held with the Editor, and there is no reference in the draft contract, is this 'agreement' in the signed version, **please send me a copy?**
- BPC would if any working group minutes were produced.
- My query is unanswered, where was this 'agreement' agreed by full council as it's not in the unsigned contract on the website/sent to me?
- The previous BPC Corporate Policy contained a more open and transparent approach via its 'Delegated' policy. This policy included Working Groups taking notes, this seems to have been removed from the current Delegated Powers policy. If notes existed, and were published, residents wouldn't have to send emails requesting information and/or clarification
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- The draft Editor contract also states, "*Advertising: Contractor to sell advertising space with maximum discretion when negotiating "packages"*", so it has been mentioned that if the Editor only has to cover her agreed per edition costs (seemingly £400) then there appears to be more incentive to do a cheap 'package' than to ensure the costs of the newsletter are covered, especially as printing costs have risen dramatically, with BPC also looking to print and distribute the newsletter outside the parish, which they did for the Mar 22 edition - **Please confirm that Bleadon precept/tax can be used in this way, especially as the income does not cover the expenditure for these non-parish precept tax payers.**
- The Bleadon Village News was for many years produced by volunteer(s) however it did involve printing costs. Despite attempts to continue on that basis it proved to be impossible. The Parish Council have always accepted that such a production is a further provision being provided like the Allotments which cost more per annum than the received income. Some £2,850 was raised in revenue with £1,600 being the cost of Editorship. The difference in stated income from that which was billed was due to some late paying.
- The allotments are being underwritten for the benefit of a limited number of residents. The newsletter is now independent/private from BPC as stated by the Editor herself, when she states "*... the magazine is entirely my own...*"
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- The contract continues, "*Advertising prices to be reviewed by the parish council annually.*" **Please send me the minuted reference relating to when these prices were last reviewed, agreed and published to residents.**
- This process should happen in May of each year but it clearly didn't take place.
- The prices were not sent to me nor published on the BPC website.
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- The Editor has previously emailed, "*I must state that the magazine is entirely my own...*", but the contract continues, "*Invoice circulation and payments together with paying the printer rests with the parish clerk*" - **Please confirm that this a legally acceptable use of parish accounts, clerk, precept, etc. by an independent person/company.**
- Please see my previous answer as to why an outside editor was appointed.
- The Editor states that newsletter is her own, independent, not managed by BPC
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- Especially as BPC requests for entries into their own newsletter seem to incur additional costs, such as the Jubilee edition for an additional £100 on top of the £6.6K BPC has already budgeted. The newsletter is perceived to belong to BPC, but it states that it doesn't produce or QA its content before publication and distribution. If there is an issue in the community with its content, e.g. Mar 22 [Letter to Editor pg3](#), then BPC publicly state the disclaimer, "*Bleadon Village News is published independently on behalf of Bleadon Parish Council. The views and comments are those of the Editor and contributors and not necessarily of the Parish Council.*" **Please clarify BPC's role in this newsletter that is distributed in its name and paid for by residents precept.**
- Hill who look primarily to Bleadon rather than Weston-Super-Mare should be included in the distribution.
- My question is not clearly answered, what is BPC's role? Is to financially underwrite and financially administrate an independent/private newsletter, and financially accommodate members of the public including those outside of the parish, using Bleadon public funds/taxes?
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- In May22 (Min 353.13.12) Cllrs "Resolved that in future the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting (Annual Report) would be produced as a **booklet** and to be included in the Bleadon Village News', in this year's Autumn edition. Please confirm whether the cost of this booklet is included in the £6,600 (£2K + £4.6K see Q3 info) budget or whether this will incur an additional cost.
- That will be a decision in due course for the Parish Council to make.
- I suppose that will depend on whether the newsletter belongs to BPC or the independent Editor who has full editorial rights as repeatedly stated. The minutes of the Apr 2022 APM have not been published on the BPC website, nor printed in a booklet
- As you are aware the APM minutes will be Draft Minutes to be approved by residents, not by councillors, next year. NB BPC's Annual Report is not the same as the APM minutes. The Annual Report to BPC councillor presentation updates at the resident meeting, the Minutes document residents' raised queries, comments, etc., although the two have become intertwined as BPC now lead and dominate the meeting rather than chair it.
- Thank you but I am fully aware of the process between the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council. Yes of course the 2022 APM Minutes will be presented for signing at the 2023 APM
- Is this saying that Full Council has not yet received, "... the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting and note any actions required as a result." (May 22 353.13.12) as "... due to one [Cllr] report being unavailable it had not been possible to produce the Minutes for confirmation." These still have not been made publicly available
- When contracts were [awarded Nov20](#) (Min 337.7), two councillors abstained from voting due to lack of information. The **Ranger** was contracted for £6,720 yet has been paid £8,883.27 this AGAR, the **Grass Cutter** contracted for £4,000 but paid £5,271, both presumably undertook tasks that were/should be paid from related project EMRs (see Reserves below). The **Toilet Cleaner** was tasked, "The toilets will be cleaned twice weekly from April to October and weekly from November to March in each year of the three year contract. The Contractor will pay for all products and equipment used in the operation". The contract was for £1,674, but seems to have been paid £2,600 (£216.66 per mth). Please explain the individual discrepancies, as no further tenders went out as far as I'm aware. Please also send me the advertised job specifications for all the contracts relating to the last four AGARs as they were not available at any viewings despite my requests.
- In each case it has been extra work that has become necessary such as vandalism removing of Elderberry trees etc all of which were separately listed for payment due to their being out the agreed budget line.
- It has not been explained why the toilet contract was for £1,674 but has been paid a consistent £216.66 per month not ad hoc payments, totalling an extra £926. If additional duties were to be added then surely the original tender was incorrect and therefore possibly should have gone out to tender again? The tender specification is needed to compare to the final contract duties.
- NB two councillors abstained because the clerk refused to give them the duties/contract/job description that they were voting on, for all three contracts (See Min 337.7.11)
- As part of the AGAR viewing I believe that it is my/public right to see the individual income, expenditure, invoices and receipts under each agreed budget line, this still hasn't been provided (Locking style).
- **No signed lease documents** were available at the viewing. Despite the AGAR attending councillors being members of the Personnel Committee, both confirmed that they also had not seen the final signed Youth Club lease document since the one presented at council needed amendments. The same response was given by attending councillors last year's AGAR. Please send me a copy of the signed Youth Club Lease.
- Did the attending councillors provide you with a response? They were both able to do so. If they had responded they would have repeated what I have been saying for some while now I do not currently have a copy.
- This was eventually published on the BPC website. This did not explain how BPC did not have a copy of the signed Lease when this was on the agenda in DEC20 Min 338.7.9 "To resolve to note the final draft of the Youth Club Lease and to proceed with the formal

engrossment. Resolved to instruct the Council's solicitor to proceed with the engrossment of the Youth Club lease."?

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- No **Asset Register** was present at the viewing. I can find no minuted reference to the register being updated and completed this year. The [online version](#) is dated 2020. **Please send me a copy of the submitted Asset Register for this year's AGAR.**
- The Asset Register has just been updated following the receipt of the June renewable papers. See attached. Once brought formally to the Parish Council a copy will be placed on the website
- This didn't explain how Box H was ticked on the AGAR Form 3 page 3, i.e. "*Asset and investment registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained*" if the Asset Register wasn't updated until June and not gone through council yet?
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- As the AGAR Part 3 was not at the viewing, I can't tell if the 2020 version as seen online has been updated, e.g. AGAR pg 3 section H.
- Yes it was - copy attached
- No, it was not. Eventually published on the BPC website.
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- The online Asset Register indicates that the Halls are in BPC ownership and not as a **Custodial Trustee** (see Protocol2010 attached), with the Playground and Youth Centre Land unlisted, despite BPCs [published responsibilities](#). **Please confirm whether all assets, owned or in trust should be listed, and whether Custodial Trustee assets should be listed as nil value (as previously advised by BPC) or have a value**
- The Halls are in the ownership of the Parish albeit as a Custodial Trustee.
- My question was not answered, i.e. whether all assets should all be listed, stating owned or in trust, and whether they should have a nil value, as the Halls have a value of £1,033,009.52 on the 2020 online version, Parcel of Land no value, no mention of the Playground or land under the Youth Club or car park, and no note of Trustee/Custodial Trustee?
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- The **Playground** is now indicated as a [Charity](#), with no income or expenditure for the five years listed, yet there have been 'Playground Inspections' and 'Playground Equipment' budget items, expenditure and invoices, such as the current monthly GB Sports & Leisure ([Invoice #204](#)) this year. There is also general maintenance throughout the year such as grass cutting, trees, picnic tables, bins, bark, sand, fencing, etc. Therefore, is the charity's published financial history correctly submitted and transparent to the public? (see also Grants below)
- The Children's Play Area has consistently over many years declared in its Annual Charity Report that there is no income or expenditure. The Parish Council undertakes this responsibility. All of the income and expenditure is therefore reflected in the accounts.
- I am confused by this opaque approach, as the [Halls Management Committee charity](#) is quite clear on its income and expenditure. As part of the AGAR viewing I believe that it is the public's right to see the individual income, expenditure, invoices and receipts under each budget line item, please make the information for the playground available.
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- In Dec21 ([Min 347.10](#)) it was minuted "*Correspondence (1) Charity Commission Bleadon Children's Playground BP. The Clerk advised the meeting that the required formal **annual meeting of the Playground Charity** would be held immediately prior to the January Council Meeting*" There has been no update in subsequent minutes but a verbal update at the Full Council meeting stated that the meeting was over quickly, in about 10-15 minutes. Usual process is for the clerk to publish minutes a week before the next meeting, which I presume is next year, but **please send me a copy of the Playground Charity minutes for this AGAR process.**
- Attached
- Park AGM minutes do not accept previous year's AGM minutes? There is no financial information discussed at the AGM and no appendix detailing the income and expenditure as provided by any BPC grant? No discussion of work carried out during the financial year? Nor any proposed plans for the coming year? E.g. Solomon and £5K NSC grant matching and new equipment?
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- The **Budget by Cost Centre** at the AGAR viewing was dated 01Apr20-31Dec21, but relevant items for the Playground can be seen (see Q3BudgetByCostCentre image). Q4 information is not on the website, perhaps because it is assumed to be referenced in the Q1 2022-3 information. However, it should be noted that the [current Q1 online information](#) has now been reduced even further, removing breakdowns of income and expenditure that were available for many years previously. For example, Q1 2022-23 format doesn't indicate **Newsletter** income or expenditure. However, for 2021-22 it indicates the Village News Advertising income to be £0 instead of at least £1,755 (compared to Q3). There is no indication of how much for the Editorship, which should be at least £1,200, nor printing costs that should be at least £2,370. For 2022-23 these are now 'hidden' within a top-level Administration value, so even the precept between years is unavailable and is obscured. Online, freely accessible financial information seems to have been removed. Therefore, **please send me Q4 2021-22 in the original detailed format.**
- Sorry I am not sure what you are referring too
- I'm confused at the reply. Q1, Q2 and Q3 were published on the BPC website, but not Q4. All previous quarterly reports are removed from the BPC website.
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- **Also, please send me Q1 2022-23 in the original detailed format.**
- Neither this question.
- The format of financial information for Q1 2022-23, was is in a different less detailed format than previous years, i.e. not the same format as Q1-Q3/4, making comparisons impossible
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- **Please continue to publish all future quarterly information in the original detailed format.**
- I will always publish the original information that was sent previously to Councillors
- Was this saying that the clerk/RFO no longer published detailed quarterly/monthly information to councillors at this time?
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- NB Three councillors abstained from voting on the 2021-22 budget due to lack of clear information (Dec 2020 [Min 338.7.4](#))
- That of course is within their prerogative. However it is interesting to note that none of them sought and answers from prior to the meeting taking place. As you will be aware irrespective of the size of a majority a majority of one is the decision of the Corporate Bodyt.,
- I find this reply confusing and gives financial concern to me. Do councillors have budget 'working groups' to discuss the finances, or do they only meet to discuss the finances in full council? I believe that they have only met once since Jan 22 budget setting meeting as reconvened in Oct 2022 full council meeting.
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- **Please tell me why the figures in the published Q3 and the Q3 available at the AGAR viewing are different, even though they both end 31 Dec 21.** E.g. Village News Income differs between image and PDF versions and doesn't match AGAR income tables, yet all refer to information ending 31 Dec 21 (see attached files)
- **Again I am not clear as to what you are asking**
- Compare the files to see the discrepancies Q3 vs 22 03 31 Budget vs Q1 2022/23 online vs '22 03 31 - I&E - Year-end'. From the public's perspective this is the only overview information published by BPC and it seems to differ every time. Surely, once the budget is set it should appear as a line item and not change unless agreed and minuted at full council?
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- In the Q1 2022-23 information the **Platinum Jubilee** item indicates that in 2021-22 there was a budget of £7,780 and expenditure of £4,429. **Please tell me whether the Platinum Jubilee project is a BPC managed or a community managed project.**
- **The Parish Council**
- **So where is the project information published for this 'parish-wide' project so that all residents and councillors are aware of what is being undertaken and potentially become engaged?**
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- I couldn't find any reference to this agreed level of expenditure in the minutes and/or associated receipts directly relating to the Platinum Jubilee budget. I can't find reference to this budget in the Q3 2021-22 information, nor in the Apr21-Mar22 minutes, and there are no clerk reports or project/working group minutes/actions/decisions published? **Please tell me the**

Full Council meeting minuted references where the Platinum Jubilee budget was discussed, agreed, publicly documented and accessible for 2021-22 and 2022-23. Please also tell me how expenditure on this specific project is publicly identified in the minutes. If this is a community managed project, not managed by BPC, shouldn't there be a grant application? (see Grants below.)

- It was a village project heading and managed by Councillor Williams. In 2020-21 and in 2021-22 the Council placed a sum of £500.00 into reserves. From the attached you will see that to date the council has spent the sum of £688. This figure will be higher when all the invoices have been received. In preparation for that action I have recently transferred the sum of £1,000 from the ERM to the General Account.
- My questions are not clearly answered re: minuted references. From the public's perspective this Platinum Jubilee project information is not clearly published. In the Q1-Q4 financial information only VE celebrations is noted. There is no detailed information in Q1 for this year (which is why I've asked for a copy in the original format). I've also been told by a member of the public there is no budget noted for the Platinum Jubilee (in a detailed version of the May22 financial information that you provided to them), yet an expenditure of £688?
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- From the minutes relating to this AGAR period 2021-22, BPC paid **WebGlu**, their internet provider, for two websites, i.e. £298 for the [main BPC website](#), and £252 for the 'independent' Neighbourhood Development Plan group's website (last [minuted meeting was August 2019](#)). There has also been additional payments of £780 for website maintenance/document updates, which was a task included in the [previous clerk's duties](#), dated 2020 for an 18-hour week. **Please send me a copy of the Clerk's current responsibilities, duties and advertised job specification, and WebGlu's contract/TOR.**
Despite my personal protestations you were given illegally a copy of my contract and Job Specification the contents of either has not changed other than an increase 1 hours. From 12 per week to 18.
I have not been given a copy of your agreed signed contract, only an incomplete draft model contract version and a specimen Job Description. I understand that councillors who are members of the Personnel Committee also have not received a signed copy.
- Yes you are correct Webglu currently manage both the Parish Council and the Neighbourhood the latter being funded from the received grant.
- BPC has not clearly answered by questions. There seems to have been a change in duties, hours and pay scale resulting in a change in public expenditure. FYI, I've attached a copy 2019 and 2020 BPC clerk's job adverts, along with the 2019 job specification. The latter clearly states "*To maintain the Council's website and manage its content*", yet BPC currently appears to be paying Webglu for updates.
- I assume that the website expenditure is contained in the IT budget line item, but not itemised account has been made available.
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BUDGETS AND RESERVES

There is a continued lack of clarity for councillors and members of the public regarding budgets, and the purpose and use of the Reserves, as indicated at Monday's meeting. This is compounded by the fact that the public quarterly Finance Committee meetings were disbanded after 2019, without a documented public explanation.

If there is a perceived lack of understanding by Councillors then they do not help themselves when they do not seek clarification. Councillors are provided with the movement of reserves every month and a copy of the three monthly position is presented to the parish council meeting and then subsequently included in the minutes and the website.

The public don't see what level of quarterly information is given to councillors as they don't get to see the appendices, but if the Q1 summary information, as published on the website, is the only information that is available to the councillors and if they don't seek clarification as you state, then I have great concerns about BPC finances, especially with minuted comments re: 'current perilous level' of reserves, deficit budgets and what appears to be budget overspends.

In 2015, when over half of the councillors resigned, and the clerk of 26 years (Bruce Poole) retired, there was stated to be £82K in the Reserves. BPC then went through several years of actively spending the Reserves, e.g. Four years later, the "Reserves at 1.4.19 = £66,518.09" with "TARGET reserves 1 April 2020: £44,100" ([July19 Min 324.14](#)). There was no public/Full Council discussion or explanation, this decision was only "NOTED".

I am not in a position to provide a response. Perhaps you should be asking the two councillors who were present when you viewed the accounts

We asked the council at the time in 2019, and it refused to answer, that is presumably why the two attending councillors were unable to answer at the viewing earlier this month. This information should have also been available at the associated 2020 AGAR viewing, where related reserves information/documentation was not present/available.

as they were the only councillors then of those currently on the council.

This is incorrect and misleading in this statement, Cllrs Hemingway and Williams were also on the council at the time, as seen in the linked minutes re: attendees ([July19 Min 324.14](#))

As you will recall BPC had publicly-held Finance & Personnel Committee meetings up until 2019-20, which had been [in operation since at least 2006](#) as the current clerk can confirm as he attended the meetings (along with publicly held Planning and Open Spaces committees). Some previous F&P Agenda and Minutes are also on the BPC website ([select Personnel Committee](#), all years and all documents). Following my Sept 21 meeting with the Personnel Committee, the four attending councillors (the majority of 8 at the time as it included the BPC Chair) unanimously put forward four of their (not my) agreed recommendations, to improve internal and public financial communications. It was minuted ([Min 345.7.7](#)),

"a) Reinstate the three Committees, i.e. **Finance (& Personnel), Planning and Open Spaces.** (b) Release minutes as soon as possible. (c) Release an agenda pack with the Agenda (d) **State value of the current Reserves in each monthly minutes in the finance section.**

This was a private meeting and should never have taken place and the outcome of that meeting had no standing

Four councillors took a proposal forward to full council, not the Personnel Committee. BPC has never properly answered why this agenda item was 'struck' from the meeting. Is this response saying that no councillor(s) is allowed to have private meetings/conversations with any resident/group of residents, and then choose to subsequently propose a full council agenda item following that conversation/meeting? How do councillors represent residents if not via 'private' conversations/meetings? How are any of the undocumented BPC projects functioning in relation to residents?

*By a majority decision [BPC Chair changed her mind] it was: Resolved that the foregoing recommendations be struck from the Council's Agenda and discussion not therefore proceeded with. **The Clerk emphasised that in respect to (b) and (d) those actions were already in place and had been since the 1st March 2020. As to (c) he would only circulate agenda packs to parish council members as per his report (Appendix D)***

Your recollection or indeed recording is correct.

NB this is not a recollection or recording, it is a copy of the minuted item

Again, no publicly documented explanation was given for (a), even though the previous [F&P Terms of Reference](#) stated, "To meet quarterly in public in a properly convened meeting as required by law"?

The last documented solely financially related meeting was the precept and budget setting [Jan2022 extraordinary meeting](#) (NB The detail of the budget was to be confirmed later but was not published. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to identify where budgets were agreed, e.g. 2021-22 Platinum Jubilee £7K budget didn't seem to appear as a line item until [Q1 2022-23](#) retrospectively, and Bleadon in Bloom financial visibility was removed when compared to Q3 2021-22 (see attached Q3-2021-22Published)? The precept rose 8% not 5.9% as stated in the approved minutes i.e. £50K to £54K. **Please send me a copy of the agreed individual budgets for 2021-22 (Also, agreed budgets 2022-23 e.g. arising from the January budget and precept setting meeting.** The 2022-23 precept increase was as stated correct at 5.9% not as you indicate 8%. See [Attachment](#).

As minuted in Jan22, the council's total precept increase/requirement, the money it wanted to raise by taxing residents as a whole, rose from £50K to £54K which is 8% (£50,000 * 1.08 = £54,000).

However, I feel that stating Band D individual precept is misleading, which indeed rose from £92 to £97.39, approx 5.9% ($£92 * 1.0585 = £97.38$).

BPC hasn't fully answered my query, the full council agreed budgets arising from the council budget setting meetings for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were never published. E.g. there appears to be no budget indicated for the Platinum Jubilee on any currently published public information

The ToR for the F&GP now just the Personnel Committee has been duly amended. The Council is at liberty to have whatever committees it wishes too constitute. Currently other than the full council it has one other convened committee name the Personnel Committee. Not unusual for a council of this size to have a small number of committees. There is no specific requirement other than a Council to have committees however legislation s says "it may".

Please tell me why BPC no longer hold quarterly publicly minuted Finance meetings, despite repeated councillor requests in Full Council. Item (b), BPC do not release minutes to the councillors or the public until a few days before the next meeting, limiting both councillor and resident understanding and interaction in decision making. This can be from a month up to year, or more, e.g. resident's Annual Parish Meeting. Item (c), BPC doesn't publish agenda or minute appendices to the public, which makes the minutes misleading as the public have no access to the information that is referred to, or being used to make decisions. Working group meetings and related decisions and expenditure are also undocumented. The clerks monthly progress update reports are also therefore 'secret', despite multiple requests to publish all non-confidential appendices to enable councillor's decision-making information transparent. Item (d) not correct, as can be seen by viewing any of the monthly minutes, the Reserve values are not stated, nor are the purposes or values of the individual EMRs. Please explain how BPCs current approach conforms to [Openness Regulations 2014](#) as stated on the front page of every BPC [Agenda](#). The above simple changes requested by the Personnel Committee would make a significant difference to both councillors and the public understanding of BPC finances.

You are being somewhat disingenuous here by throwing out comments that have on many occasions been answered. To get matters into some form of perspective. You are the only member of the public except for this past two weeks who has ever asked questions about the accounts. Having spoken to some residents, they haven't asked about the AGAR because they weren't aware of what they could ask for and when, which seem to have been proven when I posted it recently and more residents came forward. Is BPC saying that no member of the public has ever asked questions about how BPC is spending its money, whether inside or outside of the AGAR period?

The agenda of each meeting is published within six days as prescribed by legislation. BPC has never published a link to this legislation. BPC published the December Agenda on its website on the Wednesday before the Monday meeting, and on the noticeboards on the Friday before. Neither are within 6 days?

Minutes are placed on the website within 30 days again as prescribed. I have already explained the problem with regard to lateness of this year's APM Minutes. See question re: council above, surely the last report is in by now, nearly 9 months on?

I am of the view that the appendices are only sent to councillors so as to aid them in their decision making.

It is precisely because the appendices are used by councillors for their decision making that they should be available to the public, in a clear and transparent manner.

Clearly I am not suggesting in way that members of the public should not have the right to inspect the accounts.

The full accounts and associated documents were not available at any AGAR viewing.

Your questions are completely disproportionate to my available time

I truly believe that if BPC published its appendices and reports, and that my queries had been answered at any of the 2 hour AGAR viewings, or a subsequent clarification meeting, then then these follow-up time consuming emails would not be required.

and totally unfair when you openly from your own website encourage – incite others to ask questions other than one none of whom have shown any interest in the councils affairs previously.
Is BPC saying that it is disappointed that residents are taking an active interest in the council's affairs, and accounts, bearing in mind that I understand that the council only undertakes actions and expenditure on behalf of those residents?

The **Summary Receipts & Payments** ending 31MAR22, that lists the Ear Marked Reserves (EMR) was at the viewing (see attached ReceiptPaymentMar22) but it is not available online, **please send me a copy of the Summary Receipts & Payments.**

Attached

Again, this is an unsigned. No itemised/individual incoming and outgoing payments for each of the EMR reserves, their purpose, and the individual Operating Income items have been published.

Over many years I, and various councillors, have asked for clarity on the Reserves. Monday's 12Jul22 Full Council [Agenda item 355.7](#) states, "*Resolutions 1. To resolve to move the following EMRs into General Reserves*" There was no other public information available with the Agenda. If usual practice is undertaken, the minutes of yesterday's meeting will not be publicly available until the week before the next meeting, i.e. September, so **please correct me if I've misunderstood anything:**

No that is correct and the decisions made were those made quite correctly by the members.

It has not been explained how this is clear and transparent accounting for councillors or residents if the '*following EMRs*' are not stated in the Agenda or any appendix?

- Over the course of this year there have been various concerning financial statements e.g. "**General Reserves were seriously depleted. Steps should be taken to reduce some of the unused Ear Marked Reserves.**" ([May 2022 Min 353.13.1](#)) "*The Clerk advised the members of the current perilous level - not considering the ERMs of the General Reserve showing a deficit figure of £450.00. When asked what immediate positive steps need to be taken. The response was to formally resolve what ERMs are not required and as a result transfer them back to the General Reserve.*" ([Jun 2022 Min 354.7.3](#))
- Yes due in the main to choosing to set a deficit budget two years following. General reserves separate from the ERMs should still be retained at a recommended level. In the case of Bleadon a minimum equivalent to 4 Months of the annual precept. ie £18,000.
- I thought BPC were not allowed to set a deficit budget? BPC's Newsletter [BVN#117pg7](#) states, "**Local authorities are banned from producing a deficit budget...**",
-
- As you will recall, it was publicly stated that there was no reference as to the purpose of the **Special Reserve EMR**. FYI, this reserve has been around since at least 2011 when Bruce Poole was the RFO, and it has appeared to have continued to date (see attached [BVN93pg7](#)). This EMR may have a defined purpose, but as it has existed since 2011, without any knowledge, investigation or concern as to its purpose, then it could be seen that the resident's precept taxes have been nearly £8K too high for the last 11 years. This is precisely the reason why I, and other residents and cllrs, have been asking questions for many years. This is why the public/residents/cllrs have the Right to view and scrutinise the accounts, can undertake FOI's, attend public meetings, request associated information whether Agenda, Minutes, Appendices, Reports, legal documentation, etc.; it is also because it is residents who councillors are taxing, directly demanding and spending resident's money.
- Again you could have asked the two councillors who were present when you inspected the accounts if they had any background.
- As stated in full council, none of the four long standing councillors, nor any of those who have joined and set the budget in the last four years, nor the clerk/RFO seem to know what this 'Special Reserve' is for, so how did it get agreed to be in the accounts at the last budget setting? What is it held for now?
-
- After years of BPC publicly stating there's plenty of money to spend on all sorts of projects, on Monday Councillors proposed and stated that the £7.6K deficit budget to be taken from this Special Reserve as agreed at the Feb 22 ([Min 350.7.5](#)). **Please confirm that the Churchyard**

wall fund, that previous BPC Chairs have been concerned about for many years, is still covered in the remaining EMRs.

- Yes and now currently standing at £5,500
- No EMRs were declared at the budget setting meeting in December 2022?
-
- It was proposed and agreed for £10K to be taken from the **Contingency EMR** to cover any shortfall of the clock renovation. NB July 21 (Min 344.7.3) states that "... *expected in-situ charge of £12,000. However in the event that insufficient funds were realised any shortfall would be underwritten by the balance of the Covid-Grant*" (I'm assuming this refers to the Business Grant EMR as the COVID EMR has been stated not to belong to BPC).
- As you are aware, the **Business Grant EMR** came from a £10K North Somerset Council Business grant for the Toilets. BPC's newsletter [BVN#117pg7](#) states states, "**Local authorities are banned from producing a deficit budget...**", yet minutes Jan 22 ExMeeting (Min 349.3) state, "*To Resolve a Budget for the Financial Period 1st April 2022 to the 31st March 2023. Resolved unanimously that the the Budget for the Financial Period 1st April 2022 to the 31st March 2023 should be £64,158. Members were reminded by the Clerk that this figure reflected a potential deficit of £7.697 and as such would have to be made up from Reserves.*" . BVN17 continues "...*The council earlier this year applied for a Small Business Grant on the basis that it owned a rateable asset in the village i.e the public toilets and was successful in securing the sum of £10,000.*" please tell me whether there were any conditions attached to expenditure.
- None
- Neither the grant application nor its signed agreement have been published
- Part of this money will/has been used to provide IT equipment for each Councillor so that they might fully participate in now needed Zoom Meetings." BPC also stated that £1K went to the COVID19 group, so please explain how there is still £9K listed in the Summary Receipts & Payments EMR.
- The money spent on the iPads originally came out of the general fund and not from the Business Grant
- Is this saying that the ipads didn't get paid for out of the Business Grant as indicated in the newsletter, and that the only payment from this Grant was £1K to the COVID19 Group? Again, if this was a grant to the COVID19 Group, why wasn't a Grant application process followed? No itemised account of the income and expenditure for this line item has been given and now seem completed spent?
-
- On Monday it was proposed and agreed to reallocate this grant to the Coronation Halls costs. Please can you confirm which are internal or external hall costs,
- Again I am aware of the different relationships,
- BPC has not clearly answered my query, no individual expenditure listing has been produced
-
- as it has previously been stated that the [Halls is an independent charity](#) that is responsible for internal costs, BPC being responsible for structural and external costs Please confirm where this agreement is documented (see May 22 [Min 353.14](#) "*The Clerk suggested that when future works were required by the Hall Management Committee that it provides the Parish Council (Custodial Trustee) with a proposed works schedule prior to the Council seeking quotations.*")
- If you are referring to the said protocol then yes but as to any other document(s) that might be in existence I reserve e my comments.
-
- It was also stated at Monday's meeting that the **toilets still need major renovation**, potentially new urinals and drains. Please tell me where the toilet renovation expenditure would come from if the toilet related Business Grant has been spent on the Halls.
- Clearly that is for the members to decide. My recommendation will be that it forms part o the 2022-23 Budget proposals.
- There was a £10K business grant from NSC, based on BPC's ownership of the toilets and it was spent on the Halls (internally or externally not yet known) and that the clerk/RFO propose residents' precept is potentially raised again next year to cover the cost of the toilet renovations?

-
- (NB: These are the same toilets that were agreed to be renovated last AGAR, July20 ([Min 334.7.7](#)) then unagreed in Sept ([Min 335.4.i](#)), and ended up being painted instead this AGAR year ([invoices #222 and #223](#)).
- Please send me a copy of the original July tender/specification for the toilets as agreed by Council it has never been published.
- The toilets were painted by the Village Ranger. As there was a need to have a quick turnaround as was the case with the exterior decorating of the halls it was decided to proceed on that basis.
- My original query has not been clearly answered, the agenda item stated "To receive quotations for the deep cleaning and refurbishment of the men's toilets." Why were the toilets painted by the Village Ranger, presumably at additional cost? What refurbishment was expected via the tender process/specification, then removed? What were the additional duties that increased the annual payment, via monthly installments, by £926? Where was this agreed, minute referenced, by Full council?
-
- As you are aware, at Monday's Full Council, Cllr Clarke voiced her concern over the level of spending and sought reassurance, especially as, in her opinion, there was a high level of spending on 'nice to have' activities rather than ensuring that existing responsibilities, including maintenance and health and safety, took priority and/or were catered for, e.g. toilets, trees, etc.
- I am not sure what Councillor ID is referring too when she mentions 'nice to have activities' where in the same sentence she indicated that the toilets require major refurbishment and tree in the car park needs attention.
- This public discussion around Cllr Clarke's concerns were not noted in the publication of the July minutes published in September.
-
- Please tell me who is ultimately accountable for the precept/budget spending, i.e. all councillors as they approve the minutes each month; only those councillors that authorised the payment/budget; and/or the RFO.
- As I have pointed on many previous occasions the Council is termed legally as being a Corporate Body therefore whatever the voting outcome is it at the time is the Council's decision.
- If the majority of councillors pass an agenda item with associated expenditure, and any disagreement or concern is unnoted, it will then be perceived by the public to be the agreement of the majority/all councillors, regardless of whether this results in an overspend, deficit budget, increase in precept, etc.
-
- There is no longer a Finance sub-committee, but at Monday's meeting, and the budget setting meeting in January, it was clear some councillors are more aware of the BPC finances than others. From the authorisations noted in the minutes, only four of the current nine councillors have mainly been responsible for authorising expenditure in the current AGAR period, less than half of all councillors. At Monday's full Council Meeting Cllr Davies was asking for other councillors to become more financially aware, perhaps if all councillors took part, and the F&P meetings were re-instated, then maybe it would raise awareness and understanding for all councillors (I'm assuming that all councillors have been made aware of the NALC [Good Councillor Guides](#) especially on Finance & Transparency).
- Simple answer – Not all Councillors made an attempt to attend the Budget setting working group. The re-setting of a Finance Committee just make more administration work which the council knows I am not in favour of.
- When was this group convened and documented at full council as I can't find it in the minutes.
- How can all councillors can be invited and expected to attend to a budget setting working group, yet it is not labelled and minuted as a full council meeting, with or without public attendance?
- Please explain me why all councillors have not participated in the authorisation of payments NB on the recent May and June minutes some named councillor authorisations and approvals are missing.

- Of the current nine councillors only five are permitted to approve just because time has not been found to initiate new mandates.
- May 21 (Min 342.13.3) "*To review the Parish Council's Banking arrangements Resolved any two Councillors for the current seven designated signatories plus the Parish Clerk for access and administrative reasons.*"? At the Dec 22 meeting it was noted that the new signatories still had not been added, but would now be left until after the elections in Apr/May 2023

PROJECTS

Each year I/residents try to ascertain total spending per project and EMR and associated individual expenditure, but we can never get a simple, clear answer. This year [2022-23 Budget by Centre](#) I am not sure the word residents in this context is very accurate other than yourself I do not receive any questions.

Is this saying that no residents have asked at any time to clarify the expenditure of a project, e.g. Bleadon in Bloom, as I believe this to be incorrect?

for the Platinum Jubilee project states a £7,780 Budget with £4,429 spent in this 2021-22 AGAR period. **Please send me itemised spending for each project and EMR** (as indicated in the attached ReceiptPaymentsMar22) for this AGAR accounting period.
[Please see attached](#)

I still haven't received any clarity on how projects are budgeted, funded or managed by BPC as associated project group meetings are generally undocumented. (Bleadon in Bloom, Jubilee Project, etc.) For example 18JAN21 the clerk wrote, "***The Bleadon in Bloom group does receive a grant from the council but other than that it is not run by the council. A representative from the council keeps us up to date with the Bleadon in Bloom group but it is independent of the council. However they are happy for us to share their budget on the Parish Council web site as it was submitted to the Parish Council.***" At the April 22 APM BPC stated that it was not a grant but 'a budget line item', with you and the clerk reiterating that the project wasn't managed by BPC. (NB All the contact information on the website refers to you/Kirsten, not Cllr/Chair Hemingway, ensuring no link to BPC). **If the project is independent from BPC and is not managed by BPC, why wasn't there a Grant application made through the council (see Grants below)?**

Again I have answered this question from you previously. Bleadon in Bloom come to the Parish Council with a requested budget the council consider it at budget setting time. The same group oversee their budget throughout the year

So, this should be a grant application then, as it is not a BPC project? Declarations of interest should be made?

GRANTS

Transparency of public spending and funding is the key issue, not necessarily that money is given, nor the amount.

Again it makes me think I am not aware of such a statement

The public cannot clearly see the decision making, income, expenditure, etc.

The [Halls Committee](#) (3 former Cllr trustees), [Youth Club](#) (2 former Cllr trustees) and [Playground](#) (all current Cllrs) are all independent charities, with BPC also a Custodial Trustee of the Halls, car park, land, etc. Each of these entities have current and former councillors involved in their associated committees. It has become increasingly difficult to understand who is requesting money/grants/finance and how these subsequently get tabled and awarded. Any other organisation or group requesting money, donations, etc. would be asked to fill in a BPC Grant application form that states, "*Only registered charities, voluntary groups or community organisations are eligible to apply for a grant. National or regional charities are not eligible, nor are individuals.*"

The Parish Council leaves by arrangement the day to day management to the Hall Committee. Currently the Parish Council pays the Annual Insurance and makes a contribution to the electricity used by the PC. The PC does not pay any rent as such. The youth club also receives an annual contribution towards the electricity costs. I am not aware of any Grants be directly paid to either village organisations.

As stated, these are village organisations, not BPC projects. BPC appears to be giving public money to organisations without any clear visible process such as the grant process. Is BPC saying that any

organisation can ask the council for money, without going through a grant process? If so, where is this stated? What is the purpose of the grant budget line item, as this implies this is the only budget available for village organisations/non-BPC projects, currently set at £500 last year and £0 this year? BPC's accounts state that it hires the Halls so why would BPC then need to give an electricity contribution?

The official total Grant available for each year has been listed as £500 for many years, nowhere near the levels of money given to the charities and community groups above. The last 'outside' request for a grant that I recall was in Aug 2018 ([Min 312.14](#)) by ContactUs. The request was deferred to Sept ([Min 313.22](#)) as the Grant Application process/form had not been completed or submitted in time. A "... grant of up to £100, reimbursed on production of receipts" was subsequently approved. **Please can you explain why, in recent years, payments are made to the Youth Club e.g. Inv #24 Lighting Donation, Halls e.g. Inv #81 Wifi Contribution, BIB Budgets £1,500, £8,466, etc. Platinum Jubilee Budget £7,780, all. without an official Grant application or subsequent publicly identifiable and accessible expenditure listing, prior and post spending?**

If you check what answers I have given previously you will readily see that some of the foregoing statements you make are inaccurate. Of course the Council is entitled to decide if it wishes to set aside a sum of money to support an event such as the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations. I would perceive the Jubilee Celebrations as being a council prompted event

At the time of the July 22 AGAR viewing only Q3-2021/22 was available (which had been removed and replaced with Q1-2022/23. There is £0 budget set for the Jubilee celebrations.

The [BPC Grants policy](#) states, "*The Parish Council requires that any individual or group requesting funding from the Parish Council should if possible be represented at the meeting where their application is to be considered in order to give background and information at the request of the Chairman*" If this process was undertaken, with any involved councillors declaring a financial interest for their project, then the request and expenditure would be more transparent, with the associated grant form becoming part of the legal minutes and documentation.

I'm aware, and grateful, that the independent Bleadon in Bloom (BIB) transparently post their expenditure on the BPC website. The Grants policy states, "*If an organisation is unable to use all or any part of the award for the stated purpose then all or any monies not used for the stated purpose are to be returned to the Council.*" BPC Q3 Budget by Centre publicly indicates a 2021-22 BIB budget of £8,466. Yet the [BIB budget](#) publicly states a 2021-22 budget of £10,127.50, with a 2019 '**carry forward**' of £1,411.00, and "**Grant needed for 2021 BiB £8,466.50**". I believe that the BPC publicly stated BIB budget of £8,466K is misleading as it has actually budgeted a minimum of £9,877 of resident/public money for 2021-22. **Please explain how this independent group is allowed to use BPC accounting, clerk, invoicing, etc. similar to the independent newsletter, and possibly the Platinum Jubilee group, with no overriding BPC financial or project management or documented working group decision making and expenditure.**

In simple terms these "projects" that you mention are in my view typical provisions that a council makes for its community. If we did not have BIB the Coronation Hall Management Committee and the Youth Club Management Committee then the council would have to employ maintenance staff to undertake the work. It would also be a poorer community to live in without many hard working people. Frankly whilst you have every right to question these matters the village would be worse off if people didn't go beyond the call of duty i.e Councillor in this case. I cannot imagine you run your "village website" entirely as a volunteering project.

The question is not necessarily what is being done but how it is done. BPC is accountable for public expenditure, how that is requested, documented, etc. should be in the public domain in a clear, transparent manner, so that all individuals/groups can have equal access to BPC funding

INVOICES

Some of the following invoices were not authorised in the minutes, as verified by the officially signed versions present at the viewing. **Please confirm whether/how they were authorised, when and by whom:**

BPC has not answered my query, I assume all these items have now been paid, how were they authorised, when and by whom:

Jun21 Min 343.8

#32 is missing from the Jun 21 minutes (should be Opus Energy £14.11 which is listed as #34)

#34 invoice is Opus Energy £12.22 (£11.64+£0.58) (and should be #32?)

Thank you for pointing out the mis-numbering

#47-#47A? Unnumbered Postage charge (£15.85) not found at viewing, please explain

There were two invoices for postage one forming part of 47 and one being invoice 39 both involving the internal auditor in respect of the sending and receiving of the documentation.

#54 Green Waste - please explain who/what this is for

Green Waste charge

For hall, park, car park, shared use? Park grass cutting?

Jul21 Min 344.8.1

My AGAR viewing notes indicate a #62A Youth Club £208.79 - please explain and send me a copy

I will have to come back to you on this one when I have done so more investigating.

Never explained

Sep21 Min 345.8.2

#115 missing from Sep 21 minutes (£40 Adrian Project Services - Toilet seats)

Error noted

Additional #226 Ellie Young missing from May 22 minutes (£400)

Noted

How did the Editor invoice make last year's accounts, which is not on the minutes, but the associated printing costs did not, i.e for Taylor Thorne, BVN#121?

May22 Min 353.14

#227? missing from May 22 minutes - Church Rooms Bleadon Help Network Craft & Chat - states duplicate of Chq#951 - was one or no payment made for the Church Rooms? If so, please tell me what BPC activity/project was it for?

The Village Covid Group met in the church rooms which was a rental payment subsequently offset by donations.

Where are these donations and expenditure itemised, as comparison between Q4-2021/22, Q1-2022/3 and the Summary Receipts/EMR is confusing? Why is the COVID Group using/noted in BPC's accounts?

#228 Bruce Poole Homeworking missing from May 22 minutes (£26)

Noted

So how did it authorised and paid?

INCOME

Please can you explain why BPC Income, is no longer recorded in the monthly minutes, as was standard practice for the two previous clerks up until Sept 2019 ([Min 326.24](#) - document missing on BPC website)

Not able to explain why income is not recorded in the minutes.

The clerk repeated states that the minutes belong to be the clerk's before publication not the councillors?

Newsletter Advertising Income

As seen below it seems that the newsletter income is based on an average of 8 advertisers a month, and clearly doesn't cover its costs, with 'packages' negotiated as indicated in the Editor contract attached..

Edition #118 - Mark Howe invoiced £40 but listed as £55 (See attached AdvertTable image)? Please explain

Query not fully answered

Edition #117 - 7 items in table only 2 invoices? David Plaister Full invoice price not listed? **Please explain**

Obviously because I haven't printed off all of the copies. However the grid 7 invoices issued **Incomplete information at the AGAR viewings**

Edition #117 Full £500. Total £580 * missing info

Edition #118 Full £867, Total £750

Because the editor has negotiated a reduction to secure the advert

Where is this agreement contractually noted? How does an independent Editor have control over BPC's income?

Edition #119 Full £690, Total £610

Ditto

Edition #120 Full £690, Total £610

Ditto

The total for 2021-22 should therefore be £2,550? **Please can you explain why the value on the Q3 Annual Budget by Centre Dec 21 at the AGAR states it to be £2,250.** See attached BudgetByCostCenter and AdvertTable image re: Dec 21.as taken at the AGAR viewing.

Due to a refund of £55.00 some payments (117) made in 2020-21/

Then why are they in 2021/22 accounts if payments are made in 2020/21?

Financial Regulations & Risk Register?