

**From:** Objector  
**Sent:** 06 January 2023 13:36  
**To:** [All Cllrs]  
**Cc:** Bleadon Parish Clerk  
**Subject:** Urgent AGAR meeting requested

Dear Councillors,

As you will be aware the External Auditor is looking to conclude Mr Coleman's 2021-22 and my outstanding 2020-21 and 2021-22 AGAR challenges, in the next couple of months. On Wednesday I received an email from the External Auditor that stated,

*"I would be very grateful if you would let me know **by the end of next week** whether the Council's responses to you have enabled you to withdraw any or all of them before I complete Step 2 of the objection process and email you and the Council our acceptance decisions. I'm very conscious of the large costs involved in our additional work so do not want to carry out any unnecessary work."*

This reflects the concerns that I, and other residents, have had about BPC's approach to these potentially large costs over the years. Yesterday, I spoke with the **External Auditor who confirmed that 10 hours of work have been undertaken to date, i.e. £3,550**. If more than 14 hours are required, which there will be to investigate and complete Mr Coleman's and start to fully investigate my challenge, then SAAA will need to be informed of the significant costs that will be incurred. What we/residents are finding hard to understand is, why would councillors want to spend £5K+ engaging an External Auditor rather than speak directly to residents to fully answer their concerns?

- Please can you confirm when all councillors were asked whether the External Auditor should be engaged at £355 p/hr rather than address residents directly, and that a majority of councillors agreed that action?
- Considering the large costs of engaging the External Auditor, please can you tell me why this was not openly and transparently discussed and voted upon in Full Council?

In Dec 22 Full Council Mr Coleman raised his concerns about the AGAR process and associated costs, with council indicating that it was not concerned (although it should be noted that Cllr Clarke and Cllr Shepperd have raised their financial and AGAR related concerns on numerous occasions, although not always minuted). You also will recall that on 01 Sept 22 I asked all councillors whether BPC's 'hands off' AGAR approach, with no RFO attending AGAR viewing meetings and ultimately engaging the External Auditor at £355 p/hr, was agreed and approved by Full Council, but I've yet to receive a direct reply to this question. However, in the Oct 22 minutes it is noted, *"Agreed that no further correspondence would be entered into until the Council were advised by the External Auditor of the objections if any they were upholding"*, **please tell me who agreed this action?** As councillors are aware, the External Auditor has accepted to investigate over 20 eligible resident queries over the next few months, this will incur significant additional hours and costs. I have already raised my continuing concerns for the next 2022-23 AGAR process with the External Auditor, as indicated in the attached annotated Proposed Budget produced by BPC in Dec 22.

External Audit has asked whether I am able to withdraw any of my queries, but seeing as I've not received the information requested, I'm not currently in a position to do so. It is now four months since the AGAR process closed on 07 Sept 22. I believe that more than sufficient time has passed for all councillors to understand the issues and know the answers to my/residents outstanding financial queries and concerns. The External Auditor has asked that I respond to them by 13 Jan 23. In order to potentially reduce or eliminate the number of questions that they may need to investigate, and to reduce additional hours and public costs that will inevitably be incurred, **I request that we meet before next Friday to resolve these issues as far as possible.**

To reiterate, due to BPC's continued 'hands off' AGAR approach, it was councillors' decision to engage the External Auditor at £355 p/hr. It will also be councillors' majority decision whether to incur additional public costs, as I and other residents have repeatedly asked to meet, discuss and resolve these queries for many years. It should also be noted that a minority of councillors also tried to resolve these types of issues in Sep 21, but their recommendations were inexplicably 'struck' from the record.

I look forward to your prompt response in order to amicably and finally close this situation, and to hopefully improve BPC openness and transparency with regard to its future internal and public financial practices.

Kind regards,

[Objector]