

Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council

Internal Audit Report 2023-24

Chris Hall

*Consultant
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background

Statute requires all town and parish councils to arrange for an independent internal audit examination of their accounting records and systems of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2023-24 financial year. We have again undertaken the year's review remotely: we wish to thank the Clerk in assisting the process, providing all necessary documentation in electronic format to facilitate completion of our review and sign off of the Internal Audit Certificate in the year's AGAR. We have undertaken sufficient testing to ensure that governance and financial controls remain effective.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our review for the year, we have again had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential misrecording or misrepresentation in the year's AGAR. Our programme of cover, as applied to all clients, is designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems are robust and operate in a manner to ensure effective probity of transactions and to afford a reasonable probability of identifying any material errors or possible abuse of the Council's own and the national statutory regulatory framework. The programme is also designed to facilitate our completion of the 'Internal Audit Report' in the Council's AGAR, which requires independent assurance over several internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, based on our programme of cover for the year, the Council has continued to maintain adequate and effective internal control arrangements. Detail of the work undertaken on the Council's accounting and other records is set out in the following detailed report. Again, we have not seen the need to make any formal recommendations.

We have duly completed and signed the 'Internal Audit Report' as part of the AGAR process, having concluded that the control objectives set out in that Report were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the Council.

Detailed Report

Review of Accounting Records and Bank Reconciliations

The Clerk maintains the Council's accounting records using an Excel spreadsheet, which we consider to be more than adequate given the annual level of transactions. Two bank accounts are in use with Barclays (Community and Business Premium). The cashbook contains appropriate columnar analysis to provide information for inclusion in the statutory Accounts as set out in the AGAR.

We have test-checked a sample of financial transactions to the relevant bank statement, with no issues arising.

We also note that bank reconciliations are signed off at each Council meeting, with a level of internal check sufficient to meet the requirements of Financial Regulation 2.2.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective in this area is to ensure that the Council is complying with best practice and has put in place appropriate arrangements to ensure that good governance is practiced and observed.

We note that the Council has revised both its Standing Orders (SO's) and Financial Regulations (FR's) during the year, which accord with the latest NALC Model Forms.

We have reviewed the Council's Minutes for the year to ensure that, as far as we may reasonably be expected to ascertain, no issues exist or are developing that may have an adverse affect on the Council's financial stability either currently or in the foreseeable future and are pleased to note that no such issues have been identified.

We note that the Council's new website continues to meet the publishing requirements of both the Accounts and Audit Regulations and the Transparency Code.

The Exercise of Public Rights with regard to the 2022-23 Accounts was not properly undertaken in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations, as it did not cover the first 10 working days of July. This was due to a delay by the Council due to Member absences. However, we feel that the imposition of a limited assurance review by the appointed External Auditor (Moore) was inappropriate, and should be challenged by the Council.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation, other than the failure to undertake the Exercise of Public Rights correctly, and the unnecessary External Audit review.

Review of Expenditure

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Payments are supported by appropriate documentation, either in the form of an original trade invoice or other appropriate form of document confirming the payment as due and/or an acknowledgement of receipt, where no other form of invoice is available;
- All payments are approved by members and recorded in the Minutes of the relevant Council meetings
- Relevant Standing Orders and Financial Regulations have been met in relation to formal tendering processes;
- The correct expenditure analysis has been applied to payments when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified for periodic recovery.

We have reviewed a sample of 2023-24 transactions, with no issues arising.

We note that the VAT balance as at 31 March 2023 was properly reclaimed during the year, with a balance of £70 outstanding at 31 March 2024.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Assessment and Management of Risk

We note that the Council reviewed its Risk Register at its May 2023 meeting, which has been published on its website. This meets the requirement of Financial Regulations for at least an annual review.

The Council insures its assets and procedures via Zurich Municipal. We have examined the insurance schedule and consider that it is in line with the Council's needs with Public and Employer's Liability cover set at £12 million and £10 million respectively, Fidelity Guarantee at £250,000 and sufficient cover for the Council's assets.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Budgetary Control and Reserves

We note that the Council approved and adopted a budget and Precept for 2024-25 of £6,844 at its meeting in January 2024. Budget Monitoring is a Standing Item at each Council meeting.

The Council has established Earmarked Reserves totalling £5,480, mainly relating to the Village Hall, Village Plan and Traffic Calming. Therefore, allowing for the cash balance of £11,696 at 31 March 2024, the General Reserve is £6,216, which represents 90% of the agreed Precept. While high, this is relatively normal for a Council of this size.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Income

The Council has very limited sources of income comprising the annual Precept together with bank interest and VAT refunds. We have checked and agreed the cashbook income entries to bank statements with no issues arising.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Petty Cash Account

The Council does not operate a petty cash account, Therefore, there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Staff Salaries

In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions.

We note that the Clerk is paid on a timesheet basis (in accordance with the established Policy which is detailed on the Council's website), and paid on NJC hourly rates. We also note that a PAYE record has been set up with HMRC, and that resulting tax payments have been properly made. We have test-checked a sample of transactions through the year with no issues arising.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Fixed Asset Registers

The Governance and Accountability Manual requires all councils to maintain a record of all assets owned. The Asset Register shown in the Council's website is for a relatively low value, unchanged since 2019-20, and meets the requirements of Government Accounting.

Conclusion

There are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Investments and Loans

The Council holds no specific investments or loans requiring separate disclosure.

Statement of Accounts and AGAR

The Accounts and Audit Regulations, as amended periodically, require all councils to prepare annually a Statement of Accounts, which is now set out in the AGAR at Section 2: this, together with the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1, is subject to independent external audit examination and certification. However, as the Council's annual turnover is below £25,000 it can exempt itself from the "Limited Assurance" regime in 2023-24.

Based on the overall status of the Council's operative controls we have duly signed off the Internal Audit Certificate in the year's AGAR assigning appropriate assurances in each area.

| Rec. No. | Recommendation | Response |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| <hr/> No Recommendations made | | |