

Little Brickhill Parish Council

Internal Audit Report 2023-24

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*for and on behalf of
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).

We have undertaken our review for the year remotely: we wish to thank the Clerk for assisting in the process, providing all necessary documentation to facilitate completion of our review for the year and sign off the Internal Audit Certificate in the year's AGAR.

This report records detail of the work undertaken in respect of the 2023-24 financial year and which was concluded at our office on 17th May 2024.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our review for the year, we have had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential mis-recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts / AGAR. We have again employed a combination of selective sampling techniques (where appropriate) and 100% detailed checks in the required key areas to gain sufficient assurance that the Council's financial and regulatory systems and controls are appropriate and fit for the purposes intended.

Our programme is also designed to facilitate our completion of the 'Internal Audit Report' in the Council's AGAR process which requires independent assurance over several internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, based on the programme of work undertaken, the Council has maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements during the year. Consequently, we have completed and signed the 'Internal Audit Report' as part of the year's AGAR process having concluded that, in all significant respects, the internal control objectives set out in that report were achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the Council. We are pleased to acknowledge the quality of records maintained by the Clerk and thank him for his assistance.

Detailed Report

Maintenance of Accounting Records & Bank Reconciliations

Our objective has been to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers.

The Council now uses the Scribe accounting package to manage its accounts, reporting on a receipts and payments basis, it holds one current account with Barclays Bank PLC.

To ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the recording of transactions, we have:

- Confirmed the accurate carry-forward of prior year closing balances.
- Ensured that an appropriate coding structure is in place within the Scribe software.
- Checked the current account bank statements to the list of transactions provided for the whole of the financial year.
- Verified the combined bank reconciliation detail as of 31st March 2024 within Scribe.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that there are no issues in this area of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation. We have verified the accurate disclosure of year-end balances in the AGAR.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective is to ensure that the Council has a robust regulatory framework in place; that Council meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders (SOs) and that, as far as we are reasonably able to ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation.

We have reviewed minutes of Council meetings held during 2023-24, the principal aim being to consider whether any issues exist that may have an adverse effect on the Council's financial stability in the short, medium or longer term, also that, as far as we may reasonably be expected to ensure no indication exists that the Council may either be considering or have taken decisions that might result in ultra vires expenditure being incurred.

We are pleased to note that the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders were reviewed at the meeting held on 4th September 2023 (minute ref 16).

Finally, we also note that the Council certified itself exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022-23 and has again certified itself in 2023-24.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen from this review area requiring formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Payments

We have reviewed the procedures in place for receiving invoices, checking their authenticity, accurate detail recording, processing by the Clerk and formal approval for payment by Members. Our objective is to ensure that:

- Payments have been made in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and budget for the financial year.
- Payments are supported by a trade invoice or acknowledgement of receipt.
- VAT has been calculated correctly and is recovered at appropriate intervals.
- The Council has formally approved each payment.
- Payments have been correctly analysed in the cashbook and year-end Statement of Accounts prepared for members; and
- Noted that no Section 137 payments have been made during 2023-24 financial year.

As part of our payment review, we have examined a sample of non-salary cashbook transactions.

We note that a VAT return totalling £1,440.40 has been submitted on 4th May 2024 for 2023-24 financial year, we have verified that the total reclaimed agrees to the accounting records.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen from this review area requiring formal comment or recommendation.

Assessment and Management of Risk

Our objective is to confirm that the Council has put in place appropriate arrangements to identify all potential areas of risk of both a financial and operational / health and safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage those risks to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition. We are pleased to note that:

- The Risk Register was updated by the Clerk and sent to the Councillors on 5th February 2024 for review.
- The Council's insurance cover is provided by Local Councils: we have examined the current policy schedule and consider that it meets the present needs of the Council with both Public and Employer's Liability at £10 million and Fidelity Guarantee cover of £50k.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen from this review area requiring formal comment or recommendation.

Budgetary Control and Reserves

We are pleased to note that the Council considered and agreed the budget and precept for 2024-25 at its meeting held on 5th February 2024 adopting the latter at £16,490 (minute ref 15), this represents a 10.01% increase on 2023-24 for a Band D household.

Members continue to receive regular updates of the financial position at each council meeting, with details of the bank balances, income received and payments either made or due for approval. Each quarter a budget review is presented to the council.

At the year end, total reserves stood at £23,254.51, which is over the generally recognised guidance of between 3 & 12 months' revenue spending.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Income

The Council receives income by way of the annual precept, grants, and recoverable VAT. We have checked and agreed in full the cashbook transactions to bank statements and other underlying supporting documentation for the financial year.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen from this area of our review that require a formal comment or recommendation.

Petty Cash

The Council no longer operates a petty cash account, with any out-of-pocket expenses incurred by the clerk reimbursed routinely throughout the year.

Review of Staff Salaries

In examining the Council's payroll function, our objective is to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the Employee Rights Act 1998 and the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) legislation as regards the deduction and payment over of income tax and National Insurance Contributions (NIC).

- Noted that the payroll is processed by the Clerk using the HMR&C Basic PAYE Tools software.
- Payments are then made to the Clerk and HMRC by standing order and cheques respectively.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen from this area of our review that require a formal comment or recommendation.

Asset Registers

The Governance and Accountability Manual requires all councils to develop and maintain a register of assets identifying detail of all land, buildings, vehicles, furniture, and equipment owned by the Council.

We are pleased to note that the Clerk had prepared an asset register on an excel spreadsheet which has been updated to include additions of a bench and dog bin in 2023-24.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no significant issues arising in this area of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation. We have ensured the appropriate recording of these assets in the AGAR.

Investments and Loans

The Council has no loans repayable either to or by it, nor are any funds held in long-term investments.

Statement of Accounts and AGAR

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 (as amended periodically) required councils to prepare a formal Statement of Accounts and supplementary Supporting Notes. With effect from March 2011, the AGAR now forms the only statutory Accounts of the Council that are subject to external audit review and certification.

We have checked and agreed entries in the Statement of Accounts generated to the accounting software reports and other documentation provided. Similarly, we have checked and agreed the financial data reported to the AGAR.

Conclusions

No issues have been identified in relation to the verification of detail in the Statement of Accounts and AGAR this year.

Based on our detailed work during the year on the Council's systems of financial control and content of the detailed Statement of Accounts and that summarised detail set out in the AGAR, we have signed off the Internal Audit Report of the AGAR assigning positive assurances, in each relevant area.