
Ashingdon Parish Council

Internal Audit Report 2019-20

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Background and Scope

Statute requires all town and parish councils to arrange for an independent internal audit examination of their accounting records and system of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The Council implemented the process at its outset using a local person and appointed us, at Auditing Solutions Ltd, subsequently to provide the service to the Council from 2006-07.

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have undertaken our review for the year remotely: we wish to thank the Clerk for assisting in the process, providing all necessary documentation in electronic format to facilitate completion of our review for the year and sign off of the Internal Audit Certificate in the year's AGAR. We may have, in the circumstances, reduced the volume of transactions examined, whilst still ensuring governance and financial controls remain effective.

This report records detail of the work undertaken in respect of the 2019-20 financial year and which took place in our office on 16th June 2020.

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-end Statement of Accounts/Annual Return. Our programme of cover has again been designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems remain 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' as part of the Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) process, which requires independent assurance over several internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, on the basis of the programme of work undertaken during our audit this year, the Council continues to maintain more than adequate and effective internal control arrangements. We are pleased to acknowledge the quality of records maintained by the Clerk and thank her for her assistance, which has ensured the smooth progress of our review process.

We have completed and signed the 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the year's AGAR, having concluded that, in all significant respects, 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

Accounting Records and Bank Reconciliations

The Clerk has continued to maintain the accounts using the bespoke Alpha accounting software as used in the previous year.

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 maintains two bank accounts with the Metro Bank. We have:

- Checked and agreed the opening balance with the 2019-20 closing Statement of Accounts as per the Alpha accounting software and the certified Annual Return detail;
- Ensured that a full and effective cost centre and nominal account coding structure is in place and is appropriate for purpose;
- Ensured that the accounts remain 'in balance' at the end of the period under review;
- Checked and agreed details of all transactions in the Metro Bank account cashbooks to bank statement detail for the year, noting that all were complete and accurate and had been prepared in a timely manner;
- Checked that bank reconciliations are prepared routinely each month utilising the appropriate software facility; and
- Verified the accuracy of detail in the bank reconciliations for both cash books as at 31st March 2019 ensuring that no long-standing uncleared cheques or other anomalous entries exist.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation. We have ensured the accuracy of the closing balances declared 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 and that, as far as we are able to ascertain (as we do not attend Council or Committee meetings), no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation. We have in this regard:-

- Noted that Standing Orders were reviewed and adopted at the Council meeting held on 13th May 2019 (minute 19/46 (a) refers);
- Further noted that Financial regulations reviewed and adopted at the Council meeting on 7th October 2019 (minute 19/179 refers);

- Examined the minutes of meetings of the Full Council for the year to identify whether or not any issues exist that may have an adverse effect on the Council's future financial stability with no obvious issues arising; and,
- Confirmed that the Council has correctly provided the proper opportunity for the exercise of public rights following the last audit

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Payments

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and budgets;
- 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;
- Members have met their fiduciary duties approving release of each payment in accordance with extant legislation;
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount;
- The current expense codes have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified for periodic recovery.

Due to the sound controls in place we have examined the months of June, July and December 2019 and the month of March 2020 in full to ensure compliance with the above criteria and are pleased to record that no issues have been identified with all the criteria duly met.

We are pleased to note that the Clerk continues to submit VAT reclaims to HMR&C on a quarterly basis and have checked and agreed the June, September and December 2019 submissions to the underlying cashbooks and control account balance with no issues arising.

We do note however that the VAT Return for the quarter to 31st March 2019 has not been submitted. We have discussed this with the Clerk and understand that this outstanding Return will be submitted without delay.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Assessment and Management of Risk

Our aim here is to ensure that the Council has put in place appropriate arrangements to identify all potential areas of risk of both a financial and health and safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage those risks identified and to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition. We have:

- Noted that a comprehensive review of the risk register was undertaken and approved by Council at its meeting on 13th May 2019 (minute 19/46 e) refers;
- Examined the Council's current insurance policy with Axa Insurance, with cover being provided for the year under review to 31st May 2020 as part of a three year long term agreement, to ensure that appropriate cover is in place, noting that Public and Employers Liability cover stands at £10m with Fidelity Guarantee cover at £150,000; and
- Noted that the Council Play Area is inspected on a regular basis by the Clerk with an annual inspection being carried out by a RoSPA certified company.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Budgetary Control and Reserves

We aim in this area of our work to ensure that the Council has appropriate procedures in place to determine its future financial requirements leading to the adoption of an approved budget and formal determination of the amount to be precepted on the District Council, that effective arrangements are in place to monitor budgetary performance throughout the financial year and that the Council has identified and retains appropriate reserve funds to meet future spending plans. To meet this objective, we have:

- Noted from our review of the minutes that members continue to be provided with regular management accounting information, based on reports generated from the Alpha accounting system;
- Noted that a detailed budget exercise was undertaken and approved by Council at their meeting on 6th January 2020 (minute 19/266 refers);
- Further noted that the precept has been agreed by Council at their meeting on 6th January 2020 at £102,614 with no Council Tax Support Grant being received (minute 19/266 refers);
- Considered the appropriateness of the level of general reserves to meet the Council's ongoing revenue spending requirements noting that reserves at the year-end total £112,723 of which £46,249 are earmarked reserves; the balance of general reserves at £66,474 equates to between nine and ten months average revenue expenditure which is above the generally accepted guideline of between three and six months' average revenue expenditure; and
- Reviewed the year-end budget outturn for any significant unexplained variances with none in evidence.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Income

The Council has only limited sources of income being the Precept, the Council Tax Support Grant, VAT repayments and sundry other grants none of which require additional internal audit examination, other than agreement to bank statements and supporting documentation, which has been undertaken accordingly.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that 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 formal petty cash account, any “out-of-pocket expenses” incurred by the Clerk or members being reimbursed each month through the routine payment process, samples of which we have checked and agreed for the year as noted earlier in this report.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that, in view of the above, there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Salaries and Wages

In examining the Council’s payroll function, we aim to confirm that existing legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) with regard to the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions. To meet this objective, we have:

- Reviewed the Council’s payroll preparation procedures noting that this is outsourced to an independent payroll provider;
- Checked to ensure that the Council has reviewed and approved appropriate pay scales for staff;
- Checked and agreed the amounts paid to individuals by reference to the approved pay rates, examining payments made in March 2020;
- Ensured that PAYE & NIC deductions have been made accurately by reference to the HMRC Basic PAYE Tools software; and
- Ensured that the appropriate month’s deductions and contributions have been paid over to HMRC in a timely manner;

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Asset Registers

The Governance and Accountability Manual requires that all Councils 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 a formal asset register is in place and has been approved by Council. We further note that the Asset Register has been prepared using purchase cost uplifted or decreased to reflect the acquisition or disposal of any assets during the financial year.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation. We have ensured the accurate disclosure of Assets in the AGAR.

Investments and Loans

Our objectives here are to ensure that the Council is “investing” surplus funds, be they held temporarily or on a longer term basis in appropriate banking and investment accounts; that an appropriate investment policy is in place; that the Council is obtaining the best rate of return on any such investments made; that interest earned is brought to account correctly and appropriately in the accounting records and that any loan repayments due to or payable by the Council are transacted in accordance with appropriate loan agreements.

We have confirmed that the Council holds no long-term investments requiring disclosure in the Statement of Accounts, nor are there any loans with external bodies in existence repayable by or to it.

We do note, however, that total funds held by the Council exceed £100,000 and we draw Members’ attention to the requirement that where “investments” are held in excess of £100,000 an investment policy should be in place. We suggest this be addressed.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no issues arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Statement of Account and Annual Return

The 1996 Accounts and Audit Regulations required all Councils to prepare annually a detailed Statement of Accounts, together with supporting statements identifying other aspects of the Council’s financial affairs.

We have reviewed the AGAR detail prepared by the Clerk, as generated from the accounting software with no obvious errors or anomalies in the detailed content

Conclusions

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

On the basis of our detailed work during the course of 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.