

Thornborough Parish Council

Internal Audit Report 2022-23

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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 system 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 2022-23 financial year.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking the 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 and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). Our programme of cover is designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council has appropriate and robust financial systems in place that 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 process which requires independent assurance over several internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, based on the programme of work undertaken this year, the Council has again maintained more than adequate and effective internal control arrangements. We thank the Clerk for her assistance during our audit, which has ensured the smooth progress of our review process.

We have completed and signed the 'Internal Audit Report', having concluded that the control objectives set out in that Report have been achieved within the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the Council.

Detailed Report

Maintenance of Accounting Records & Bank Reconciliations

The Council has again used a spreadsheet to record detail of transactions during the year, which we consider appropriate given their relatively low volume. Two bank accounts continue in use with NatWest Bank plc.

- Reviewed the 2022-23 opening balance detail with that in the certified 2021-22 Statement of Accounts and Annual Return.
- We are pleased to note that the cashbook is routinely reconciled to bank statements and have checked and agreed the closing reconciliation as of 31st March 2022 to the bank statements.
- Noted that bank reconciliations are completed monthly.
- Checked and tested detail in the cashbook against bank statements in respect of the Nat West Current and Business Reserve Accounts for the month of August 2022 and March 2023.

Conclusions

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 robust corporate governance documentation and processes in place, and that, as far as we may reasonably be expected to ascertain (as we do not attend Council or Committee meetings) all meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders and no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation.

We are pleased to note that both Standing Orders (SOs) and Financial Regulations (FRs) were reviewed and readopted at Council meeting held on 8th June 2022 (minute refs. 8.1 & 8.2 respectively).

We have examined the Council's minutes for the year to ensure that no legal or financial issues exist or are developing that may have an adverse effect on the Council's financial stability either currently or in the foreseeable future and are pleased to record that no such matters were identified.

We have reviewed the Council's website and are pleased to acknowledge compliance with the disclosure requirements of the Transparency Code. We also note that the external auditor's report, issued since our last visit, had no matters regarding the Council's accounts and governance.

We thank the Chairman for completing our "Corporate Governance Questionnaire", which aims to afford us further assurance as to the soundness of the Council's overall governance arrangements.

Conclusions

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

Review of Expenditure

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, where no other form of invoice is available;
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount;
- The correct expense analysis have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and recorded in such a manner to allow for its periodic recovery.

We have considered the Council's arrangements for the review, approval and authorisation of the release of funds in the year, noting that each online payment is subject to appropriate authorisation, scrutiny and approval by members at the monthly Council meetings. All approved payments are recorded in the minutes.

To ensure compliance with the above criteria, we have examined a sample of payments processed in the financial year. Our test sample provides a broad cross section of expenditure and traders' invoices totalling £27,281 representing 82% of non-pay expenditure.

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.

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 any risks identified to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

An appropriate Risk Register is in place, which was reviewed at the Council meeting held on 8th June 2022 (minute ref. 8.3).

We further note that the Council's insurance cover has been provided by Hiscox: we have examined the current year's policy schedule which is effective from 1st October 2022. Employer and Public Liability cover are both set at £10 million and Fidelity Guarantee cover has been set at £150k, which we consider adequate.

We are pleased to note that a full inspection of the new playground equipment was completed when it was installed. An annual inspection is now undertaken by The Play Inspection Company.

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 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 of the precept to be submitted to the parent Council and 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.

We note that members have again duly considered and agreed the budgetary and precept requirements for 2023-24, approving the latter at £24,500 at the Full Council meeting held on 18th January 2023 (minute refs 6.2), this represents an increase of £2.66 to £78.96 per annum for a Band D household.

We are again pleased to note that detailed lists of all receipts and payments continue to be provided to the monthly Council meetings with detail recorded in the minutes, together with the agreed presentation of periodic bank reconciliations.

Finally, we note that, as of 31st March 2023, total reserves stood at £16.537.

Conclusions

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

Review of Income

The Council has relatively limited sources of income, primarily the annual precept and recovered VAT, supplemented by nominal allotment rentals, sports field lettings to local clubs and hire of the hall by Thornborough Pre-school.

Due to the low levels of income generated by the allotments and sports field, we have verified the detail in the cashbook to bank statements and third party documentation in relation to the allotments with no issues arising.

We are pleased to note that the allotment plots and other rents were reviewed as part of the budgeting process at the Council meeting held on 18th January 2023 (minute ref. 8).

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.

Petty Cash Account

The Council does not operate a petty cash account: the clerk reclaiming any out-of-pocket expenses as and when they are incurred.

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).

- The Clerk is the only employee, and the payroll is now outsourced to Reid & Co.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no matters arise in this area of our review process warranting 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 in 2022-23 to include a heritage streetlight for the pond and 13LED lanterns.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation; we have ensured that the correct value of fixed assets has been recorded 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 AGAR now forms the Council's statutory Accounts subject to external audit scrutiny and certification. We have reviewed and verified the accuracy of detail contained in the AGAR Section 2 by reference to the financial information set out in the spreadsheet cashbook.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report no issues have been identified in this areas of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation and, on the basis of our review work, we have completed the Annual Internal Audit Report of the year's AGAR assigning positive assurances in each relevant area and would ask that we be provided with detail of the completed Sections 1 & 2 once they have been adopted by Council and been signed off by the Chairman and Clerk/RFO.