

West Swindon Parish Council

Internal Audit Report 2019-20 (Final)

Prepared by Nigel Archer

*For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background and Scope

The Accounts and Audit Arrangements introduced from 1st April 2001 require all Town and Parish Councils to implement an independent internal audit examination of their Accounts and accounting processes annually. The Council has complied with the requirements in terms of independence from the Council decision making process from its inception and, following a re-tendering exercise, we at Auditing Solutions Ltd were appointed to provide the function to the Council from 2018-19.

This report sets out those areas examined during the course of our interim visit to the Council, which took place on 10th October 2019, and has been supplemented by the final review work which has been undertaken remotely in our offices in early August 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We wish to thank the Clerk is assisting the process, providing all necessary additional (to that examined at the interim stage) documentation both electronically and physically in person to facilitate completion of our review for the year and sign off of the Internal Audit Certificate in the year's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR in short).

Internal Audit Approach

In concluding our review for 2019-20 we have continued to pay due regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential mis-recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts / Annual Governance Return utilising either sample testing or more substantive works where considered appropriate

As the Council's Internal Auditor and under the current audit arrangements, we have a duty to complete the internal audit certificate in the Council's AGAR (which now forms the Council's Statutory Accounts) and covers the ten basic financial systems and requires assurances, or otherwise, accordingly.

Overall Conclusion

We are pleased to conclude that, in all the areas examined for the year, the Council continues to operate effective control systems to ensure that transactions are effected in accordance with the Council's approved working practice and were reported accurately in the year's AGAR with no matters arising requiring formal comment or recommendation. Consequently, we have signed off the Internal Audit Report at Page 3 of the AGAR, assigning positive assurances in all relevant categories.

This report has been prepared for the sole use of West Swindon Parish Council. To the fullest extent permitted by law, no responsibility or liability is accepted by Auditing Solutions Ltd to any third party who purports to use or rely on, for any reason whatsoever, this report, its content or conclusions.

Detailed Report

Review of Accounting Arrangements & Bank Reconciliations

Our objective here is to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers to date. The Council currently operates a current bank account at Barclays Bank, supplemented by deposit accounts at Nationwide Building Society and Yorkshire Bank, and continues to utilise the bespoke Rialtas software for its transaction processing. To meet the above objective we have: -

- Agreed the opening trial balance detail in the software for 2019-20 with that in the verified closing Statement of Accounts for 2018-19;
- Ensured that the ledger remains in balance at the date of our interim visit;
- Ensured that an appropriate cost centre and accounting structure remains in place;
- Checked and agreed all transactions (both receipts and payments) in the Council's bank account cashbooks to the relevant bank statements in full (due to the low volumes of transactions) for the year to 31st March 2020; and
- Checked detail on the bank reconciliations as at 30th September 2019 and 31st March 2020 for all accounts to ensure that no long-standing uncleared cheques or anomalous entries exist: no such items were identified and we are pleased to note that the Parish Manager is duly reporting detail of the monthly reconciliations to members at each Finance and Staffing Committee, minutes of which are subsequently approved at Full Council meetings.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective is to ensure that the Council has a robust series of corporate governance documentation in place; that Council and Committee meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders and that, as far as we can reasonably be expected to ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation. We have: -

- Reviewed minutes of the Full Council and its extant Standing Committee meetings (except Planning) to early March 2020 (the late March meeting being cancelled due to Covid-19) to identify whether or not any issues exist that may have an adverse effect, through litigation or other causes, on the Council's future financial stability, also ensuring that the Council has neither considered nor is considering any actions that may result in ultra vires expenditure;
- We are pleased to note that both Standing Orders (SOs) and Financial Regulations (FRs) were subject to appropriate review and re-adoption in accord with current NALC models at the Full Council meeting in May 2019; and
- We are pleased to note that Full Council re-affirmed that the General Powers of Competence were still applicable for the Parish Council at its annual meeting in May 2019.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Review of Expenditure

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and approved 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 codes have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and coded to the control account for periodic recovery.

We have examined all payments (due to low volume of transactions) for the year to 31st March 2020 to ensure compliance with the above criteria with no matters of note being identified.

We note that periodic, manual VAT recovery claims continue to be submitted and have checked and agreed that for the periods ending July and December 2019 to the relevant cashbooks, credit card schedules and subsequent receipt from HMRC.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

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 in order to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

- We note that appropriate Health and Safety play area site inspections are currently undertaken by Swindon Borough Council's Street Smart contractor and that the Parish is currently not responsible for maintaining assessment reports and so on. However, we note from minutes that relevant remedial actions are discussed and agreed to quotes where approved; and
- We have examined the insurance policy for the current year (to March 2020), cover continuing to be provided by Aviva and consider that the detail therein remains "fit for purpose" with both Public and Employer's Liability retained at £10 million whilst Fidelity Guarantee cover stands at £1 million and Loss of Revenue is not considered applicable at present.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Precept Determination and Budgetary Control

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 Borough 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. Consequently, we have:

- Noted that the Precept for 2020-21 was formally approved and adopted at the Full Council meeting in December 2019 and was and properly recorded in the minutes of the meeting at £873,661;
- Noted that members continue to be provided with regular management accounting information, including schedules of all payments and bank reconciliations at each Finance Committee meeting, and we have examined the March 2020 outturn with no unexplained variances arising to warrant further enquiry by officers; and
- Noted that Total Reserves as at 31st March 2020 stood at £805,500, which equated to approximately 12 months expenditure at current levels: from the closing trial balance for the year it would appear that the Council has yet to establish any specific, committed Earmarked balances and would suggest this be considered for future years. Whilst there is no formal guidance on the levels of General Funds, it is generally accepted that 3 to 6 months expenditure is more than acceptable and we shall consider this again in future years.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Review of Income

In considering the Council's income streams, we aim to ensure that robust systems are in place to ensure that all income due to the Council from its various sources is identified and invoiced in a timely manner and effective procedures are in place to pursue of any outstanding monies due to the Council. Other than the funds received from the Borough Council by way of the Precept and Council Tax Support Grant payments, the Parish receives very limited incomes at present (basically VAT recoveries, allotment rentals and bank deposit interest).

- As noted earlier in this report we have checked and agreed all receipts from cashbooks to bank statements for all three accounts for the year with no concerns noted; and
- Additionally, we note from our examination of minutes that members have considered the allotment rents payable, approving a limited increase for 2020 after a number of years of level fees charged previously by Swindon Borough Council.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Petty Cash Account and Debit Card Usage

The Council does not operate a petty cash account but we have identified that the Council operates a commercial Barclaycard, which is retained in secure conditions “on-site”, for urgent / internet purchases with an overall credit limit of £5,000. Settlement is currently in full by monthly Bacs transfer, approved in the same manner as all other supplier payments, and we have checked and agreed all payment transactions with the card for the six months ending September 2019 to supporting invoices, ensuring that each was appropriate for the Council’s activities and that any relevant VAT was separated for periodic recovery.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Salaries and Wages

In examining the Council’s payroll function, we aim 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 NI contributions. To meet this objective, by reference to September 2019 detail for both employees, we have:

- Ensured that the Council has approved staff pay rates for the financial year, where appropriate, and that these have been duly and accurately applied throughout the year;
- Checked the computation of staff members’ gross and net pay and salary deductions, noting that the HMRC’s free software (PAYE Tools) is utilised “in house” for this purpose;
- Checked to ensure that the appropriate tax code and NIC table has been applied with tax and NI deductions / Council contributions calculated correctly and paid over to HMRC in a timely manner; and
- Similarly, checked and agreed the LGPS deduction scales being applied and the settlements paid over to Wiltshire Council.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

Asset Register

Our objective in this area is to ensure that the Council is complying with the Accounts and Audit Regulations (as amended periodically) and maintaining a complete and accurate register of the assets owned and is also observing best practice in managing its stock of assets.

We have previously noted that an appropriate, formal fixed asset register was developed in 2018-19 and, subsequently, we note the addition of newly acquired assets in 2019-20, particularly play area equipment : we have reviewed its content and consider that it fully meets the needs of a Council the size of West Swindon and have verified the summary total disclosed at Box 9, Page 5 of the AGAR.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.

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 institutions, 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.

Conclusions

The Council has no specific investments, surplus funds continuing to be held in Nationwide Building Society and Yorkshire Bank deposit accounts with all interest receipts arising in the year ending March 2020 being verified as part of the cashbook testing recorded earlier in this report.

Similarly, the Council has no loans either repayable by, or to, it.

Statement of Accounts and AGAR

Our objective here is to ensure that the Statement of Accounts (prepared “in-house” by the Parish Manager) and the AGAR data at Page 5 is consistent with the accounting records maintained by the Council and complies with current legislation on local government accounting as it applies to a Council of this size. As noted earlier in this report, we have agreed the detail disclosed in the year’s AGAR to the underlying financial and other records and have duly signed off the Internal Audit Report at Page 3, assigning positive assurances in all relevant categories.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising to warrant formal recommendation in this area currently.