

Congleton Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2022-23: Final Update

Adrian Shepherd-Roberts

*For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background

All town and parish councils are required by statute to make arrangements 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 which was completed by the 28th September 2022, 14th February and 5th May 2023. We have undertaken our reviews for the year and we wish to thank the Responsible Finance Officer in assisting the process, providing all necessary documentation to facilitate completion of our review for the year to date.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our reviews for this financial 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 employed a combination of selective sampling techniques (where appropriate) and 100% detailed checks in a number of key areas in order to gain sufficient assurance that the Council's financial and regulatory systems and controls are appropriate and fit for the purposes intended.

Our programme of cover has been 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 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return, which requires independent assurance over a number of internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, on the basis of the programme of work we have currently undertaken, the Council has maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements during the year to date.

We ask that members consider the content of this report and acknowledge that the report has been reviewed by Council.

We have completed and signed the 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the year's Annual Governance and Accountability Return, 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

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 that end, we have: -

- Ensured that the ledger remains in balance at the present date;
- Verified the opening trial balance for 2022-23 to the Statement of Accounts and AGAR for 2021-22 to ensure that the closing balances have been brought forward accurately and completely;
- Checked and agreed transactions in the Council's main bank account cashbooks to the relevant RBS Bank statements for April & August 2022 and January and March 2023;
- Checked and agreed for the same months, inter account "sweep" transfers between the current and high interest bank account; and
- Examined and verified the accuracy of transactions in the Council's mayoral charity bank account cashbooks and bank accounts as at July/August 2022 and January and March 2023 to ensure that no long-standing payments or other anomalous entries exist.

Conclusions

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

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective is to ensure that the Council has robust 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 are able to ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation. We noted previously that an updated Corporate Business Plan had been prepared and have examined the content accordingly.

We note that the Standing Orders were reviewed and adopted in October 2021 and the Finance regulations were reviewed in June 2022.

We have completed our review of the minutes of the Full Council and Standing Committees, excluding Planning, to ensure that no actions of an ultra vires nature are being either considered or have been actioned, whilst also ensuring that the Council's finances remain at a healthy level to provide appropriate funds for future planned development and current revenue spending plans. We also note that, as previously, various grants have been approved for payment during the current year.

appropriately with Employer's liability set at £10 million and Public Liability cover set at £15 million and Fidelity Guarantee cover at £1.0 million.

Conclusions

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

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 of the precept placed on the Unitary Authority, 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 are pleased to note that members continue to receive regular budget monitoring reports with over/under-spends and the level of earmarked reserves the subject of regular review.

We also note that the Council approved a precept of £1,068,179 for 2023-24 at its December 2022 meeting.

Conclusions

There are no matters requiring formal comment or recommendation in this area of our review process.

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 is identified and invoiced in a timely manner and that effective procedures are in place to pursue recovery of any outstanding monies. We have: -

- At the interim audit we reviewed the income generated in respect of the Tourist Information Centre from the accounts data. We are pleased to report that the process is well managed and that records are maintained in a very satisfactory manner.
- At the interim update audit, we have reviewed the management controls and income from the Town Hall bookings and are satisfied that the records and the accounts are operated in a satisfactory manner.
- Examined the "Aged debtors schedule" generated by the accounting software and have confirmed with the RFO regarding the records that there are no significant issues arising with regard to long-standing debts of which officers and members are unaware.

We have also reviewed the nominal ledger detailed transaction reports for income items for the year to March 2023 to ensure that no obvious coding errors or other anomalous entries are apparent and are pleased to record that none are in evidence.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that there are no significant issues in this area.

Petty Cash Account

Our aim in this area is to ensure that appropriate controls are in place; that all expenditure incurred is adequately supported by trade invoices or till receipts; that the expenditure is appropriate for the Council's requirements; that VAT has been separately identified for periodic recovery and that cheque encashments from the main cashbooks are properly recorded.

We have not checked the cash but have reviewed the holding from the information that we have been provided. As we are working remotely, we suggested that where possible an independent check is undertaken to confirm that the cash has been checked and the account balances. We note that this continues to be reviewed.

We have reviewed the vehicle fuel nominal ledger and a sample statement and we are satisfied that this is controlled effectively.

Conclusions

There are no matters requiring formal comment or recommendation in this area of our review process.

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 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, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme, as further revised from 1st April 2020 in relation to employee percentage bandings. To meet that objective, we have: -

- Ensured that the Council has approved staff pay rates for the financial year, based upon the approved NJC rates:
- Checked and agreed the computation of staff gross and net pay and salary deductions for July 2022, noting the continued use of a local, third party bureau service provider;
- Checked to ensure that appropriate tax codes and national insurance tables are being applied in the year and that the correct deductions / contributions have been deducted and paid over to HMRC in a timely manner; and
- Ensured that the appropriate revised superannuation contribution rates have been applied, also ensuring that the deductions have been paid over to the County Council in a timely manner.

We have also examined the Council's procedures and data in relation to the preparation of the year-end detailed accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return data and are satisfied that there are no issues arising.

Conclusions

No issues have arisen in this review area to date and on the basis of work undertaken during the year, we have duly signed off the Internal Audit Report of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, assigning positive assurances in each relevant area.

Should our report require amendments following the issuing of the accounts from DCK Accounting Solutions we will issue an addendum to our report.