

Berkhamsted Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2020-21 (Final)

Sally King

*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 Return. Auditing Solutions Ltd has provided this service to the Council since 2008-09.

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2020-21 financial year, during the course of our visits to the Council, which took place on 3rd December 2020 and 11th May 2021.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our review for the year to date, 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' in the Council's Annual 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 undertaken this year to date, the Council has maintained more than adequate and effective internal control arrangements. We thank the Clerk and his staff for their assistance, which has ensured the smooth progress of our review.

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.

Detailed Report

Maintenance of Accounting Records & 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. We note that RBS accounting software is now being used and the Council continues to operating bank accounts at NatWest supplemented by savings accounts with Santander, Cambridge Building Society and Shawbrook. We also note that there is also a Corporate savings account with the Saffron Waldon Building Society. DCK accounting provide support with the year-end close-down and accounts.

We have:

- Ensured that an appropriate nominal coding structure remains in place;
- Verified the opening trial balance detail with the closing balances disclosed in the 2019-20 Statement of Accounts and Annual Return;
- Ensured that the financial ledger remains in balance at the present date;
- Checked and agreed three months' transactions in the Council's NatWest Current and Interest Bearing Accounts for the month of April, August 2020 & March 2021. Agreeing detail to the relevant bank statements, including all inter account transactions;
- Reviewed the detail on bank reconciliations as at 31st March 2021 to ensure that no long-standing cheques or other anomalous reconciling entries are apparent. We note that there is one out of date cheque outstanding for £75.00, this payment will be reissued.
- Verified the year-end bank balances for all bank accounts, ensuring the accurate disclosure of the combined balance in the year-end Accounts & AGAR.
- The Council changed from Cheques to online banking in November 2020. We are pleased to note that robust approval and payment procedures have been implemented. The Finance Officer posts the payments to Nat West, they are then approved by 2 Councillors on a rota basis and finally they are released by Clerk or Deputy Clerk.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen in this area of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation; we have ensured the accuracy of the year-end balances reported in the detailed Statement of Accounts and 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 have: -

- We have completed examination of the minutes of the Full Council and its Standing Committees (with the exception of Planning) for the current year. 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;

- Noted that Financial Regulations were reviewed and amended to remove the temporary use of DCK by Council at their meeting on 23rd November 2020 (minute ref FC 160/20).
- Further noted that Standing Orders were reviewed and re-adopted by Council at their meeting on 18th May 2020 (minute ref FC 45/20).
- Reviewed the external auditor's report, issued since our last visit, to confirm they are raising no matters regarding the Councils accounts and governance.

Conclusions

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

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 payments are being reported to Council;
- VAT has been calculated correctly for periodic recovery;
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount; and
- That all payments have been coded appropriately.

To confirm compliance with the above criteria, we have selected a sample of 47 payments processed to 31st March 2021 including all those individually in excess of £1,500, together with a more random selection of every 25th payment irrespective of value. Our test sample totals £124,954.46 in value and equates to 78.6% of all non-pay related payments in the financial year.

We note that Council continues to receive a copy of details of all payments made in excess of £500 which details, to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, are also published on the Town Council website. The Finance & Policy Committee continues to receive a full list of receipts and payments at each meeting and this is also published on the Town Council website as an addendum to the publishing of the agendas for those meetings.

We further note that VAT Returns have been submitted electronically to HMR&C to March 2021.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified 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 those risks identified in order to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

- We have noted that the Risk Assessment was reviewed, approved and adopted approved by Full Council at their meeting on 29th March 2021 minute Ref FC 40/21 (ii).
- 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 to 31st May 2021 and consider that appropriate cover is in place regarding Employer's and Public Liability both set at £10 million; Fidelity Guarantee cover has been increased to £800k, which we now consider adequate in view of the amount of reserves held.

Conclusions

We consider that the Council has effective risk management processes in place.

Review of Income

In considering the Council's income streams, we aim to ensure that robust systems are in place to ensure the identification of all income due to the Council from its various sources, to ensure that income is invoiced in a timely manner and that effective procedures are in place to pursue recovery of any outstanding monies due to the Council.

We note that, in addition to the precept and concurrent service payments from Dacorum Borough Council, the Council receives income from their allotments.

The Council currently operates four allotment sites and the allotment year commences on 1st September each year. Allotment records are kept on bespoke allotment software and allotment rental invoices are issued on Colony Enterprise Allotment System and the income is posted to RBS accounting software.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen in this area of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Petty Cash Account & Fuel Cards

A limited petty cash account is in operation at the Council's office which holds a main petty cash float and also has a supplementary petty cash float both of which are on a "topped up as and when" required. A physical check of the cash held was undertaken at our final visit.

The Council holds a fuel card, we are pleased to note the receipts are attached the invoice when received.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen in this area of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Salaries and Wages

We note that the Council outsources production of its monthly payroll for all its employees to Messrs David Lindon & Co. In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) legislation and the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme, as most recently further amended as regards employee contribution bandings. To meet this objective, we have examined the April 2020 and August 2020 salary documentation as below:

- Checking that staff gross pay is calculated accordingly by reference to the approved pay scales;
- Checking to ensure that the correct Income Tax codes and National Insurance Tables are being applied correctly, the latter dependent on whether or not the employee is contributing to the LGPS;
- Checking to ensure that the appropriate percentage superannuation deductions have been applied in accord with the updated salary bandings where applicable; and
- Reconciling the net pay and employer's "on costs" to that recharged by the bureau provider.

Conclusions

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

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 the relevant loan agreements.

We have previously noted that the Council has invested the balances of its "surplus" funds in varying banking institutions currently Santander Bank, Shawbrook Bank, Cambridge Building Society and Saffron Waldon Building Society. We are pleased to note Council has an investment strategy in place.

The Council currently has no loans outstanding either from or with third parties.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area of our review process 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. We have;

- Confirmed that the precept of £294,069 was approved by Council at their meeting held on 11th January 2021, minute FC 12/21 (ii). This was after consideration of paper submitted from F & P Committee outlining the budget for 2021-22. It's represents a 0% increase on the previous financial year.
- Noted from our review of the minutes that members continue to be provided with regular management accounting information;

Finally, we note that, as at 31st March 2021, The balance of general reserves is £200,103 this equates to nearly just over 8 months expenditure and is over the guidelines of between three and six months revenue spending.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no matters have arisen in this area of our review process warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Asset Register

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 note that the Council maintains an asset register on an excel spreadsheet, we are pleased to note that the Council has updated the register to include additions and disposals in 2020/21.

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.

Statement of Accounts and Annual Return

The Accounts and Audit Regulations require all Councils to prepare annually a Statement of Accounts in the AGAR, which now forms the statutory Accounts subject to external audit scrutiny and certification.

We have checked and agreed entries in the Statement of Accounts generated by the accounting software to the underlying Trial Balance and other documentation provided by DCK. 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.

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.