

Chipperfield Parish Council

Internal Audit Report 2024-25

Sally King

*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 year end Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). Auditing Solutions Ltd has provided this service to the Council since 2013-14.

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2024-25 financial year at our visit on 16th April 2025.

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 commend the Clerk for the excellent records kept by her and thank her for her assistance, which has ensured the smooth progress of our review process.

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, which we note continue to be maintained using the RBS Rialtas accounting software. We have: -

- Reviewed the 2024-25 opening balances with that in the certified 2023-24 Statement of Accounts and Annual Return.
- Ensured that the cost and expenditure coding structure is appropriate for purpose.
- Confirmed that bank accounts are reconciled monthly.
- Checked and tested detail in the cashbook against bank statements in respect of the Unity Bank for March 2025.
- Checked and agreed detail for the year end in respect of the Deposit Account held with the Scottish Widows Bank.
- Verified the year-end bank balances for all bank accounts, ensuring the accurate disclosure of the combined balance in the year-end Accounts & AGAR.
- Noted that the accounting system is backed up to drop box and one drive.

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 have noted: -

- Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were both formally reviewed and approved by the Council Meeting held on 14th May 2024, minute refs. 11/24 k.(xviii) & (viii) respectively.
- Reviewed the external auditor's report, issued since our last visit; to confirm they are raising no matters regarding the Councils accounts and governance.

We have also reviewed minutes of the Full Council for the year to 31st March 2025 to identify whether there are any salient financial or other issues that may affect the Council's future performance and financial stability and are pleased to report that no such issues were identified.

We are pleased to note that payments listings are submitted to Council on a regular basis and that grants, and donations are approved by the Council.

We further note that The Parish Council is entitled to use General Power of Competence as set out in the Parish Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012. The Parish Council has two thirds electoral mandate, and The Clerk is qualified to Level 6 Community Governance.

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 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 reviewed the procedures in place for the receipt, processing, and approval of payments for work undertaken on behalf of the Council and supplies received and have examined a sample of non-payroll payments totalling £11,518.07 representing throughout the year for compliance with the above criteria, with no issues arising.

We note that members review payments and with the two signatories signing. A summary of payments is presented to Council on a regular basis. A schedule of direct debit and standing order payments is prepared by the Clerk each financial year and authorised by two council members.

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 those risks to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition. We have: -

- We have reviewed the Risk Register readopted at the Annual Council meeting held on 14th May 2024 minute ref. 11/24 (xvii).

- Noted that the Council's general insurance coverage is provided by Hiscox through the auspices of Gallaghers and that the commercial vehicle insurance cover is provided by Ageas. We have examined the former's policy schedule for the current year ending 31st May 2025 and both Public and Employer's Liability cover remain at £10 million, and Fidelity Guarantee at £500,000 all of which are considered adequate for a Council of this size.
- Further noted that the Council does not own any play spaces or playing fields.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report there are no issues arising 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 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.

The Clerk prepares the management report for F&GP every month and reports on any adverse variance, management report is produced for the full council meeting on quarterly basis.

We are pleased to note that, the Council agreed the detailed budget and set the precept for 2025-26 at the meeting held on 3rd December 2024 the latter being set at £67,400 minute ref. 54/24 (d).

Finally, we note that, as of 31st March 2025 total reserves stood at £135,180, with £89,564 being Earmarked.

Conclusions

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

Review of Income

Other than the Precept and other contributions from Dacorum BC, the Council receives income from grants, allotment fees, tennis club rents, filming income and bank interest. In examining the Council's sources of income, we aim to ensure that all such income is identified and recovered at the appropriate rate and within a reasonable time scale, also that it is banked promptly in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

The allotments are managed on RBS software. Invoices are emailed to the plot holders and payment is made directly into the bank.

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 & Fuel Cards

The Council does not operate a petty cash account: the clerk reclaiming any out-of-pocket expenses as and when they are incurred. The Warden has a fuel card, receipts are checked attached to the invoice when provided.

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 requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMR&C) legislation in respect of the deduction and payment of income tax and NI contributions, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme in relation to employee contribution bandings and the application of actual salaries paid instead of whole time equivalent scales of pay. To meet the above objective, we have: -

- Reviewed the Council's payroll process for the two members of staff and note that the payroll is outsourced to Community Action Dacorum.
- Checked and agreed the application of accurate PAYE codes and NIC tables.
- Noted that the appropriate payments have been made in respect of Pension contributions by both the employee and employer.
- Confirmed that staff net pay, Tax / NI and Superannuation totals have been properly paid to Employees and relevant agencies accurately and in a timely manner.

Conclusions

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

Investments and Loans

The Council "invests" surplus funds in both Scottish Widows Business Deposit Account. We have reviewed and verified detail of these accounts, together with accumulated gross interest for the year to date with no issues arising.

The Council has no loans either repayable to, or by, it. We are pleased to note that The Parish Council has an Investment Policy which was formally adopted at the meeting held on 14th May 2024 minute ref. 11/24 (xiii).

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that there are no significant issues arising in this area of our review process warrant 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 a detailed asset register, which has been updated in 2024-25.

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 AGAR

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 (as amended periodically) required councils to prepare a formal Statement of Accounts and supplementary Supporting Notes. With effect from March 2011, the AGAR now forms the only statutory Accounts of the Council that are subject to external audit review 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. 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.

Based on our detailed work during 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.