

Llanharry Community Council

Internal Audit Report (Interim) 2022-23

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Consultant Auditor

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 Return.

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the Internal Audit process for the 2022-23 financial year; the Interim audit took place, onsite, on the 21st October 2022.

Internal Audit Approach

In conducting our 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 / Annual Return. Our programme of cover is designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council has 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' as part of the Council's Annual Return process, which requires independent assurance over a number of internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusions

We acknowledge that the Members have formally Noted and Accepted both the prior year's Internal Audit reports, and note that the council has noted both recommendations made during the financial year, and has continued to make business process and performance improvements.

We have noted that the Council continues to maintain a consistently high standard of service provision. Resultantly, we have made the same two recommendations in relation to Best Practice improvements which are detailed in the main body of this report and the appended action plan.

We commend the Clerk/RFO for her continued professional management and administration of the Council's finance and governance functions. We thank the Clerk/RFO for the professional manner in which the Council's finance and governance records were presented for audit, making the onsite interim review a relatively straightforward process.

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

Review 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 the Council uses Microsoft Excel software to maintain the accounting records, also noting the existence of two bank accounts with Lloyds Bank plc (Treasury and Business) and a debit card used to take advantage of internet procurements. We have: -

- Noted that the Council has not yet received its 2021-22 financial year Audit report and Audit Certificate from the External Auditors;
- Noted that the Council correctly published the Notice for the Exercise of Public Rights subsequent to the approval of the Annual Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement;
- Noted that the Council has taken reasonable steps to ensure that it continues to comply with the General Data Protection Legislation;
- Ensured that the opening trial balance detail for 2022-23 agrees with that in the 2021-22 Statement of Accounts and certified Annual Return;
- Verified that the spreadsheet cashbooks remain “in balance” as at the 30th September 2022;
- Ensured that the spreadsheet analysis structure remains appropriate for purpose;
- Checked detail of all transactions in the Lloyds current and treasury account cashbooks to the supporting bank statements for the financial year from the 1st April 2022 to the 30th September 2022;
- Checked and agreed detail on all bank reconciliations on the Lloyds current and treasury accounts for the financial year from the 1st April 2022 to the 30th September 2022; and,
- Considered the appropriateness and security of the controls over software systems back-up with no issues arising.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has a robust regulatory framework 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 reasonably ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation. Consequently, we have:

- Noted that during the financial year to 31st March 2022, the Council has undertaken Meetings both via Zoom and face to face, in compliance with devolved government public health directives;
- Noted that the Council has taken all reasonable steps to ensure ongoing compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- Noted that the Council’s Standing Orders (SOs) and Financial Regulations (FRs) are based on the model documents published by One Voice Wales, and were most recently re-adopted, unamended at the Annual Meeting of the Full Council in May 2022 under Minute reference 10; and,

- Commenced our review of Council and Standing Committee minutes for the year to the 30th September 2022, in order to determine whether any issues exist that may have an adverse effect, through litigation or other causes, on the Council's future financial stability with no issues arising.

Conclusion

There are no matters arising in this area of our review 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 suitable 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 heading 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 processing payments. We have noted that all payment documents are being subjected to robust scrutiny, with a coding and authorisation stamp being affixed to each payment document and being properly completed, ensuring continued compliance with its Financial Regulations.

We have examined, checked and verified all non-pay related payment documents from the 1st April to the 30th September 2022, for compliance with the above criteria with no issues arising.

We are again pleased to note that VAT returns continue to be prepared and submitted to HMRC quarterly. We have checked and verified the first two of the four annual VAT reclaims prepared and submitted during the 2022-23 financial year to the 30th September 2022 to the underlying spreadsheet cashbook accounting records with no issues arising.

Conclusion

There are no matters arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of 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 confirm the appropriateness of the financial risk assessment, which is reviewed bi-annually, in March and September each year, updated where necessary and re-adopted annually. We note that the amended Risk Register was most recently reviewed by Members on the 18th October 2022 and, as at the date of the interim audit, was scheduled to be presented to Members for scrutiny and onward approval at the November meeting of the Full Community Council.

The Council has placed its Insurance Cover with Hiscox Insurance, Policy Number: 8187980 from the 1st April 2022 under a 'run until cancelled' policy. The new policy schedule identifies Employers', Public and Products Liability cover at £10 million, Officers & Trustees Indemnity at £500,000, Commercial & Legal Protection at £100,000; Personal Accident at £100,000 and Crisis containment at £25,000. We consider these levels appropriate for the Council's present requirements.

We also have examined the Council's arrangements for the regular inspection of playgrounds and play areas noting that the Council has a single play area: 'Ty Isaf' at Llanharry, which contains a playground, team shelter and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). A weekly visual inspection of the playground continues to be undertaken by the Clerk. Urban Recreation Ltd conducts comprehensive monthly inspections, and RoSPA conducts the Independent Annual inspections of the playground and recreation area.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Precept Determination & Budgetary Control

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- The Council has undertaken a budget determination exercise, which forms the basis of the annual precept request from the parent Council;
- The Council has received monthly reports identifying the budget position throughout the year, the accuracy of these are also reviewed during the Audit Committee meeting;
- The Council has formally approved the establishment of specific reserves; and,
- The utilisation of reserves and the return of unused balances to the General Fund are reported to the Council on a monthly basis.

We note that Council Members continue to be provided with regular budget performance reports generated from the account's spreadsheet detail at each meeting where the Clerk & RFO gives a verbal explanation of the budget to date and any variances that may have arisen.

As at the date of the Interim Review we noted that the council was, once again, in the process of conducting a detailed and robust Budget setting and Precept determination process, in respect of the requirements for the 2023-24 financial year. The draft budget and precept is scheduled to be reviewed and approved at the January meeting of the Full Community Council.

We note the council has continued to make appropriate use of its Earmarked Reserves (EMR), with surplus funds being returned to the General Reserve when an EMR is no longer required. The level of the Council's General and Earmarked Reserves has been given full consideration during the Council's Budget setting process, ensuring the Council financial stability and its ability to deliver against medium and longer term project plans.

Conclusions

There are no matters arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Income

In this area of our review, we aim to ensure that income due to the Council is identified, invoiced (where applicable) 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. We are pleased to note that the Council will be reviewing its fees and charges for the 2023-24 financial year during the Budget setting and Precept determination process. We note that the fees and charges for the 2022-23 financial year were confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the Full Council in May 2022.

We have examined the procedures in place in relation to the collection and banking of fees received from non-Precept income, noting that this remains unchanged from the prior year, checking the detail for the financial year from the 1st the 30 September 2022 from the cashbook with no issues arising.

Finally, in this area, we have examined the detailed income reports for the year to the 30th September 2022 ensuring that, as far as we are able to reasonably ascertain, all income due to the Council has been received and recorded appropriately. We note and appreciate that banking does not always take place on the day on which funds are received due to the relatively low value of transactions which does not make it financially viable to travel daily to the nearest bank to make a deposit. Consequently, we consider that banking is undertaken within a reasonable time-frame, when sufficient funds have been accumulated to warrant the expense of travelling to the bank.

Conclusion

There are no matters arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

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 HMRC legislation as regards the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions. To meet that objective, we have:

- Noted that the Clerk's last pay award to NJC SCP 23, became effective from the 1st April 2022, was confirmed and Resolved at the Annual Meeting of the Community Council of the 11th May 2022, under Minute reference 13;
- Noted that the Clerk continues to work 20 hours per week;
- Checked the amounts paid to the Clerk, being the sole employee, in September 2022 by reference to the Council's approved pay scale on the NJC annual schedule of rates payable, noting formal approval for implementation of the 2021-22 backdated national pay award paid in the month of April 2022;
- Ensured that tax and NI deductions have been made applying the appropriate tax code and NI Table by reference to the HMRC website Basic PAYE Tools tables; and,

- Ensured that the clerk’s net pay and payments to HMRC have been processed accurately and in a timely manner.

Conclusion

There are no matters arising in this area of our review warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Investments & 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.

We noted that the Council does not have a formal Investment Policy in place.

The Council holds its funds in a Lloyds Bank Treasury (current) Account and a Lloyds Bank Business (reserve) on which monthly interest is received: as indicated earlier in this report, we have verified the appropriate receipt of that interest and the 30th September 2022 account balances with reference to electronic copies of the prime supporting documentation and cross-checking the disclosed balances in the corresponding account reconciliations.

The Council has no long-term investments: with “surplus” funds continue to be held in the Lloyds Bank Treasury Account

As at the 30th September 2022, the Community Council held public funds on deposit as follows:

Account	Cashbook Number	Reconciled Value as at 30-09-22
Lloyds Bank Business account		£500.00
Lloyds Bank Treasury account		£206,446.23
		Total £206,946.23

We have noted that Members have been reviewing the Council’s investments regularly, therefore we take this opportunity to remind the Community Council that it is obliged to protect, as far as is reasonably possible to do so, the public funds under its management.

Currently the Government’s Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) provides protection for to £85,000 invested in one institution. Resultantly, as of the 30th September 2022, approximately £121,946 of funds under the Council’s management were not fully protected by the FSCS,

The Council has no loans, either owed, or let by it.

Conclusion & recommendation

Given the volatility in the market and future uncertainty due to the ongoing and dynamic global public health situation, we strongly recommend that the Community Council take steps to ensure that the public funds under its management are protected to the extent that it is possible to do so,

with the objective of ensuring that each of the Community Council's deposits is covered by the Government's FSCS. To this end, we strongly recommend that the Council reviews its current investment holdings and develops a formal Investment Policy.

R1 The Clerk/RFO & Members should consider developing and adopting a formal Investment Strategy.

R2 The Clerk/RFO & Members should expediently consider the level of funds it has invested in its accounts with the Lloyds Bank and consider how the Council can best protect the public funds under its management, seeking independent financial advice in this matter, if Members deem such action appropriate.

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NOTE TO REPORT

We confirm that all confidential & sensitive information, supplied for the purposes of this audit including, Personnel Minutes, Payroll and Employment data have been permanently deleted from Auditing Solutions Ltd.'s servers and any printouts made for the purposes of this audit have been destroyed in accordance with the Company's data and document retention policies and with the prevailing General Data Protection Legislation.

Rec. No.	Recommendation	Response
Review of Investments & Loans		
R1	The Clerk/RFO & Members should consider developing and adopting a formal Investment Strategy.	
R2	The Clerk/RFO & Members should expediently consider the level of funds it has invested in its accounts with the Lloyds Bank and consider how the Council can best protect the public funds under its management, seeking independent financial advice in this matter, if Members deem such action appropriate.	