

Leighton-Linslade Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2021-22: First Interim

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 2021-22 financial year to date, which was completed by 9th October 2021. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have again undertaken our review for the year remotely: we wish to thank the Finance Manager in assisting the process, providing all necessary documentation in electronic format to facilitate completion of our review for the year to date ensuring governance and financial controls remain effective.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our review for the year to date, 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 AGAR, which requires independent assurance over a number of internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We are pleased to conclude that, in the areas examined to date, the Council continues to have effective systems in place to help ensure that transactions are free from material misstatement and will be reported accurately in the AGAR and detailed Statement of Accounts for the financial year.

We are also pleased to record that Council members and officers continue to operate a sound, pro-active approach to risk management and corporate governance issues, together with the development and management of effective internal controls and procedural documentation.

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: -

- Checked and ensured that the closing balances have been correctly rolled forward as opening balances for 2021-22 in the Omega software;
- Checked to ensure that a comprehensive, meaningful and appropriate nominal ledger coding schedule remains in place;
- Checked and agreed transactions in the Council's main combined Current and Reserve account cashbook to the relevant NatWest bank account statements for April and August 2021 including the daily "sweep" transfers;
- Similarly, checked and agreed all transactions in the Council's supplementary NatWest Special Interest-Bearing account cashbook to the relevant bank statements for April and August 2021; and
- Checked detail on bank reconciliations for all accounts as at 31st August 2021 to ensure that no long-standing uncleared cheques or other anomalous entries exist.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues worthy of formal note have been identified in this area. We will undertake further work at future visits.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective is to ensure that the Council has robust corporate governance documentation and processes 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 an "ultra vires" nature have been or are being considered for implementation. We have: -

- Examined the minutes of the Full Town Council and its Standing Committee meetings (except Planning) for the year to August 2021 to ensure that no issues affecting the Council's financial stability either in the short, medium or long term exist;
- Noted that minor amendments have been approved by Council to both the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations in May 2021.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting further comment. We will undertake further work at future visits.

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;
- An official order has been raised for all purchases and service delivery where one would be expected;
- 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 cash books for nine months to August 2021 and selected a sample of payments processed during the year to date to ensure compliance with the above criteria.

We note that the submission of the VAT Returns to June 2021 have been undertaken in a timely manner utilising HMRC's "on-line" facility and have we verified the details therein to the ledger control account.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no significant control issues have been identified from our testing in this area, with all criteria met. We will undertake further work at future visits.

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 the Council:

- Completed an interim Risk Management and Internal Control Statement for 2021-22; and
- Maintain their insurance with Zurich: We have examined the current year's policies schedule to June 2022, noting that Public and Employer's Liability stand at £15 million and £10 million respectively, with Fidelity Guarantee cover at £5 million for any one loss.

Conclusions

No issues arise in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation.

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.

The Council will commence consideration of the 2022-23 budgetary requirements later this year and we shall consider the action taken and outcomes, together with the approved level of precept at a future visit.

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.

Conclusions

We have been advised that the Council are to formally consider and finalise its budget and precept requirements for 2022-23 later in the financial year. Consequently, we shall review this area further at our final visit, also examining the year's budget outturn, following up any significant variances and obtaining appropriate explanations: we shall also consider the appropriateness of retained reserves to meet the Council's ongoing revenue spending requirements and any development aspirations.

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 the income is invoiced (where applicable) in a timely manner and that effective procedures are in place to pursue recovery of any outstanding monies due to the Council. We have: -

- We have inspected a sample of the limited number of nominal ledger entries posted to the Omega control account to ensure their completeness;
- Cashbook receipts from Omega records to relevant bank statements for two sample months April and August 2021 and have checked and agreed all interest arising on periodic Term Deposits; and
- Examined the "Aged debtors schedule" generated by the accounting software and are pleased to record that there are no significant long-standing debts exist of which officers and members are unaware

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues have been identified in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation. We will undertake a more comprehensive review of income streams at our second interim review.

Review of Petty Cash

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.

Petty cash accounts are operated at several locations: We have not physically checked the cash but have reviewed the holding from the information that we have been provided and we consider that it continues to operate effectively. As we are working remotely, we suggest that where possible an independent check is undertaken to confirm that the cash has been checked and the account balances. This should be minuted accordingly.

We have also reviewed a sample of fuel card statements and forecourt receipts and note that there is a procedure in place for the utilisation of these facilities by the relevant personnel. We consider that the checking process and the procedures are satisfactory and usage monitored 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) in relation to the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions and LGPS pensions. To meet these objectives, we have examined the payroll procedures in place and the physical payments made to staff in 2020-21 by reference to the September 2021 payroll. Our work included: -

- Ensuring that the Council had approved employee pay rates for the financial year and that these have been duly and accurately applied;
- Checking to ensure that appropriate PAYE tax codes are being applied in 2021-22;
- Checking to ensure that national insurance deductions have been computed accurately depending on whether the employee was a member of the pension scheme or not;
- Checking that the correct scales of superannuation deductions, based on the revised LGPS arrangements, were being applied where appropriate;

- Ensuring that appropriately signed and approved timesheets and mileage claims are submitted by all employees in support of any flexible hours worked or claimed as overtime or for expenditure re-imburement;
- Verifying detail of the net salary payments made by comparison with the summary reports and payslips to the monthly BACS settlement; and
- Ensuring that payment to third parties of Tax, National Insurance and Pension deductions are made in a timely and accurate manner;

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues arise from our testing in this area 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 and that the Council is obtaining the best rate of return on any such investments made and that interest earned is brought to account correctly and appropriately in the accounting records.

- We have, checked the detail of the interest bearing accounts and agreed all relevant maturities, re-investments and interest arising to August 2021 to their third party advice notes, bank statements, nominal ledgers and other appropriate correspondence; and
- We have also checked and agreed the instalment repayments of the existing PWLB loans from the cashbook payments to their third party, direct debit advice notes.

Conclusions

No issues have currently arisen in this area to warrant any formal recommendations. We will undertake further work at our future reviews.