**Upton by Chester Parish Council**

**Independent Examination Report 2017-2018**

**Background and Scope**

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and Accounts and Audit Regulation 2015 require all Parish Councils to implement an independent internal audit examination of their accounts and accounting processes annually.

Our work has focused on the Council’s financial and management arrangements during 2017-2018 including sample transaction testing of transactions throughout the year in order to gain sufficient assurance to sign off the Internal Audit Certificate in the Annual Return.

**Internal Audit Approach**

In undertaking our review, we have had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential misrecording or misrepresentation in the year end Statement of Accounts. We have employed sample transaction testing to gain an appropriate level of assurance. The Clerk and Council will need to be mindful that variances in excess of 15% in Section 1 of the Annual Return will require explanation in a covering note to be provided to the external auditor.

Where issues and recommendation have been highlighted, the Council should take appropriate steps to remedy any weaknesses or concerns identified.

This report is available for presentation to the Council’s external auditors, who may also have access to our working paper file on request.

**Overall Conclusion**

We have concluded that, overall, the Council has effective systems in place to ensure that transactions are accurately reflected in the Statement of Accounts.

On the basis of the work undertaken on the Council’s systems of financial control and content of the detailed Statement of Accounts and that summarised detail set out in Section 1 of the Annual Return, we have signed off the internal audit certificate at Section 4 of the Return assigning positive reassurances in each area.

**Upton by Chester Parish Council**

**Detailed Report 2017-2018**

**Maintenance and Accounting Records**

The clerk has maintained the Council’s accounting records using an Excel spreadsheet for bank transactions which is then broken down on a separate spreadsheet for different elements. The clerk may find it easier to have a separate spreadsheet for receipts and payments, each containing appropriate analysis columns to provide detailed information for inclusion in the Council’s annual Statement of Accounts and the statutory Annual Return. We consider the current system to be more than adequate for the Council’s needs given the level of annual transactions.

Transaction testing was carried out and proved positive.

We note that a formal bank reconciliation has been prepared at the financial year end, and monthly bank reconciliations are presented at the Parish Council meetings.

**Conclusion:**

No further action required.

**Review of Corporate Governance**

The Council has adopted Standing Orders based on an outline of the NALC model document, together with supplementary Financial Regulations.

We have reviewed the Council’s minutes during the financial year to determine whether any issues exist that may have a financial impact on the Council and its future financial stability.

**Conclusion:**

No further action required.

**Review of Payments**

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

* Council resources are released in accordance with the Council’s approved procedures
* Funds are expensed in accordance with approved budgets
* Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure compliance with the Council’s Standing Orders and Financial Regulations with regard to tendering and quotation action
* 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
* The correct analysis has been applied in the cashbook to invoices when processed
* VAT has been appropriately identified and coded to the control account for periodic recovery

Transaction testing was carried out on a sample basis, of all of which proved positive.

**Conclusion:**

All transactions were found to be traced right through the audit trail.

It was also noted that VAT appears to be accounted for properly on all relevant expenses and claimed back correctly.

**Assessment and Management of Risk**

The Council has a formal risk assessment in place which covers financial and management risks.

Controls are in place with regard to payments in that all payments are signed off by two signatories against the invoices with the clerk then making the BACS payment through online banking. This is all approved at council meetings. This does leave a small element of risk in that only one person is paying online (even through they’ve been approved prior to the payment being made).

It appears that the Council has adequate insurance cover in place.

**Conclusion:**

The Council should consider whether they need an extra layer of security with regard to online banking, for instance, a payer and an approver who both log in and authorise payments.

**Budgetary Control and Reserves**

We aim in this area to ensure that the Council is affording an appropriate level of consideration to its budgetary requirements given its current and future development aspirations and that it also undertakes effective monitoring of its financial position during the course of the year.

We are pleased to note that members have again considered in some detail their financial requirements for 2017-2018, approving formally at the January 2017 Council meeting a precept of £103,086. This is not adequate to cover the Council’s budgetary spend, however there is other income in the form of rental of the pavilion etc.

The Council’s minutes show that a budget review is carried out every 6 months. The clerk also provides detail at each meeting of the cheques due for payment and all moneys received since the last meeting, which affords a small degree of financial control.

We have reviewed the year-end balance, noting that it equates to approximately 7.7 month’s normal revenue spending, which we consider less than adequate for the future planned level of spend. A recommended reserves level would be between 9 and 18 months spending.

Many expense items this year have come in well over budget. This has been offset by planned projects not taking place this year.

**Conclusion:**

The Council may wish to consider increasing the spend on the budget for the next year. They may also wish to consider raising the precept or cutting back on spending in order to increase the reserves to a recommended level.

**Review of Income**

The Council receives income by way of the annual precept and other revenue streams such as the pavilion etc.

**Conclusion:**

The Council should keep in mind whether all of this income will be received in the future when setting the precept and determining budgets.

**Petty Cash Account**

The Council operates a small petty cash account which is kept at the pavilion. This is monitored by way of a simple spreadsheet which is more than adequate given the level of petty cash spending. Any out of pocket expenses incurred by the clerk or other staff in connection with their work for the Council is reclaimed monthly and paid with their salaries or by separate cheque.

**Salaries and Wages**

The clerk is paid a monthly salary in accordance with the rate approved by the Council. The pavilion staff and amenity cleaner also receive payment each month based on contracted hours at a set hourly rate determined by CWAC.

We note that employment contracts are in existence for the clerk, the pavilion staff and amenity cleaner and have checked and verified, on a sample basis, the amounts paid monthly to both employees, with the tax and any NI contributions that may arise being deducted and paid over to HMRC quarterly.

There is also a NEST pension scheme in place which appears to be being operated correctly.

**Conclusion:**

No further action required.

**Asset Registers**

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and Accounts and Audit Regulation 2015 require all Councils to maintain a record of all assets owned.

A formal asset register has been put in place which lists the current assets and their values.

There was some discrepancy between the fixed asset register and that which was reported last year. This has been investigated by the clerk and it was found that the value of the pavilion building was changed as per a recommendation by BDO that the build cost value, rather than the valuation value, was used.

**Conclusion:**

We would recommend that the asset register be kept in three columns – what the value was at the end of the prior year, any changes and then what the value is now. Any changes will need a description as to why the value has changed, for instance if an asset has been damaged and scrapped.

**Statement of Accounts and Annual Return**

The clerk has prepared a financial statement containing comparative figures and notes explaining reasons for increases and decreases in both income and expenditure. We have examined the content of the financial statement for 2017-2018 agreeing detail to the underlying cashbook record.

We have also verified the detailed entries to be recorded in Section 1 of the Annual Return as being consistent with the cashbook data for the year.

**Conclusion:**

On the basis of our independent examination, we have signed off the internal audit certificate at Section 4 of the Annual Return assigning positive assurances in each relevant area.