

Upton by Chester Parish Council

Independent Examination Report 2020-2021

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 2020-2021 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 2020-2021

Maintenance and Accounting Records

The clerk has maintained the Council's accounting records using Script software. 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 the Clerk has possession of the chequebooks but is not a signatory on the cheques. All cheques have to be signed by two signatories. BACS payments are now being made and are scheduled and agreed at each meeting.

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

Conclusion:

No further action required at this time.

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 2020-2021, approving formally at the January 2020 Council meeting a precept of £11,2260. 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 7.45 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 were less than budgeted due to Covid 19.

Conclusion:

No further action required.

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

Last year we were not provided with any information on petty cash and did not include it in last year's Accounting Report. To balance this year's bank and the cash transferred, the clerk should add last year's excess petty cash to other receipts this year.

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.

Conclusion:

No further action required.

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 2020-2021 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.