

Kim Squires Internal Audit Services

52 HANDSACRE COURT
CANON LANE
RUGELEY
STAFFORDSHIRE
WS15 1PQ

The Chairman,
Weston with Gayton Parish Council,
244, Sandon Road,
Stafford,
ST16 3HL.

24th April 2024

Dear Councillor

Conclusion of Internal Audit of your Parish Council for the year ended 31st March 2024

Following the completion of my work for the above year we are writing to inform the Council that having carried out the year-end review I have been able to sign the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Form 3 (AGAR) without any qualification.

The independent internal examination of the Councils governance, financial affairs and certification of the 2023-24 AGAR to the External Auditor was carried out in accordance with the standards laid out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations, 2015 and embodied in the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide March 2023.

In summary, we covered the following areas in our examination:

- Proper Bookkeeping
- Financial Regulations, Standing Orders and Payment Controls
- Risk Management and Insurance arrangements
- Budgetary Controls
- Income Controls
- Payroll Controls
- Asset Control
- Bank Accounts and Reconciliation
- Year End Procedures.
- Charitable Trusts (when appropriate)

We have carried out a review of your web site to evaluate its conformance to the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 which is to be viewed as a minimum standard. We confirm your web site meets this requirement.

We carried out two reviews during the fiscal year and were accorded with full co-operation by your Clerk. Any issues which we raised with the Clerk during the conduct of our work have either been satisfactorily rectified or are noted below.

A copy of our Annual Internal Audit certification (page 3 of the AGAR) for 2023-24 is attached.

We would wish to draw your attention to the "Publication Requirements" on page 1 of the AGAR.

We would also wish to draw your council's attention to the following:

1. We note that your general reserves cover (after the exclusion of properly voted earmarked funds of £36,400) is 0.69 years. We consider this to be an adequate level of general reserves balance at the year end. You will appreciate I am not allowed to instruct you on this matter but we have taken the liberty of attaching page 38 of the Practitioners Guide 2023 which in para 5.33 gives guidance on General Reserves;
2. We note that the Council has not published to its website a Publication Scheme as required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A model Publication Scheme has now been produced by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and a copy of this has been sent to the Clerk by email. After adoption by the Council, this should be published to the website and regularly reviewed.
3. We understand that Councillors prefer to use personal, instead of dedicated and official, email addresses. Again, I am not allowed to instruct you on this but draw your attention to the document from The Information Commissioner's Office which has been sent to the Clerk via email. I recommend that when next reviewing the Council's Risk Assessment, the risk associated with the use of personal emails is included and any actions to mitigate against this are included on the assessment.

In respect of the new Council year we make the following additional observations and recommendations for your consideration:

1. We recommend that during the fiscal year your council should review the Risk Assessment to ensure that it still reflects the current environment. Your council should then minute its ratification;
2. During the fiscal year your council should review your Standing Orders and Financial Regulations to ensure that they still reflect the current environment. Your council should then minute that ratification. Please note that it is important that your Financial Regulations meet the standard set by those published by NALC in July 2019. The Model Financial Regulations templates were produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in July 2019 and contain a number of important legal changes;
3. Copies of your current Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Risk Assessment and Publication Scheme should be displayed on your councils web site and must show the latest date of revision and ratification;
4. You are reminded that when the council discusses, amends or ratifies significant documents copies should be made available on your web site for members of the public to view. These documents should be either appendices to published minutes and agenda papers or as separate documents on the web site (preferably with a hypertext link to facilitate ease of searching):

5. You must discuss the appointment of your internal auditor and ratify and minute the appointment during the current financial year. We were pleased to have been your internal auditor during 2023/24 and offer ourselves for re-appointment. You may use either our company name (Kim Squires Internal Audit Services) or refer to Kim Squires by name in the minutes;
6. If your council wishes to carry forward earmarked funds at the year-end these must have been ratified by your council. This is best done at the time you draw up the next budget or at final meeting of the fiscal year.

It is your Council's responsibility to note these comments and to consider what action should be taken.

We would take this opportunity to remind you that when the AGAR comes back from the External Auditor you do have a duty to display the accompanying notice of Completion of Audit on each of your usual notice boards and on your council's website.

The complete AGAR and any auditor's comments or qualifications should also be displayed on your website to allow electors to see the complete card and read the External Auditors comments if they wish to do so.

In accordance with Regulation 13 (of the Audit and Accounts Regulations), after the conclusion of the period for the exercise of public rights, the authority must publish (including on its website) the annual governance statements, statement of accounts, and the external auditor's certificate and report – Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. Authorities must keep copies of these documents for purchase by a person at a reasonable sum and ensure that they remain available for public access for 5 years

Please do remember to retain a copy of the notice on file as proof that you have followed the requirements of the Local Government Act. You should also minute the External Auditors approval of the AGAR and any qualification or comments made and resolve to take action where necessary.

We will make our next visit in October/November but please do not hesitate to contact me should you require advice in the meantime.

Yours sincerely,



Enc.
IA report
Invoice
JPAG p 38