

25 April 2022

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Internal Audit Report for Padbury Parish Council

From Jane Olds – Internal Auditor

I reviewed the documents provided and met with the Clerk, Pam Molloy, on 25 April via Zoom and finalised the information the same day.

BASIS OF REPORT

This internal audit report is based upon the JPAG (Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance) Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England 2021 publication.

The scope of this internal audit is focused on assessing the effectiveness of the Council's internal controls and was outlined in the original Letter of Engagement. Where any such controls are found to be deficient, the internal audit will help lead to improvement in those processes.

By applying the principles of internal auditing, outlined in the current Accounts and Audit Regulations and applying the approach to internal audit testing outlined above, every effort is made to ensure that all internal audits are conducted with due professional care, integrity and independence. All conclusions derived from the audit are based upon objective and traceable evidence.

Please note: it would be incorrect to view internal audit as the detailed inspection of all records and transactions of the Council in order to detect error or fraud. It is the periodic independent review of a Council's internal controls resulting in an assurance report designed to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the activities and operating procedures under the Council's control. Managing the Council's internal controls should be a day-to-day function of the staff and Councillors and not left for internal audit. (Source: Governance and Accountability for Smaller Councils - A Practitioners' Guide 2021 – Section 4).

Annual Return Section	Process	Findings	Recommendations and actions
A	Bookkeeping Arrangements	Appropriate books of account have been kept properly throughout the year and are well maintained with sound audit trails.	No further recommendations.

Annual Return Section	Process	Findings	Recommendations and actions
B	Council's Financial Regulations have been met with regard to expenditure	The Council's Financial Regulations have been met in that appropriate authorisations have been given for each level of expenditure. Payments were supported by invoices, and expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.	No further recommendations.
C	Review of Internal Controls	I have noted that the Risk Assessment was last reviewed in February 2021 and was therefore not reviewed during the financial year 21/22.	As recommended last year, the Council should review and update it annually using the JPAG recommendations (2021 version - starting at 5.89 and criteria 5.91) and publish it on the website. Further recommendations are included below.
D	Budgetary Controls (Precept requirement)	The annual Precept requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process.	No further recommendations.
D	Budgetary Controls (Budget monitoring)	Progress against the budget was monitored and minuted regularly.	No further recommendations.
D	The final Outturn is in line with expectations.	The final outturn was materially in line with expectations.	No further recommendations.
E	Income controls	Expected income was fully received and properly recorded.	No further recommendations.
F	Petty cash controls	Petty cash is not operated by the Council.	No further recommendations.
G	Payroll controls	Salaries to employees were paid in accordance with Council approvals.	No further recommendations.
H	Asset Controls - the register has correctly recorded all material assets?	The current asset register has correctly recorded all material Assets. The correct basis of valuation has been applied.	No further recommendations.

Annual Return Section	Process	Findings	Recommendations and actions
H	Asset Controls - all additions correctly recorded?	Additions in the year have been correctly recorded within the Cash Book and Register.	No further recommendations.
H	Asset Controls - all Deeds and Titles established and shown on register?	Deeds and Titles are yet to be fully established and shown on the Register.	Ensure that the reference number is shown on the Asset Register.
I	Bank Reconciliations	Periodic and year-end reconciliations were properly carried out.	No further recommendations.
J	Accounting Statements	The Accounting Statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis and were supported by an adequate audit trail.	No further recommendations.
K	Limited Assurance Review Exemption	The Council does not meet the exemption criteria.	No further recommendations.
L	Information published on website	The information is available.	No further recommendations.
M	Exercise of Public Rights	The Parish Council published the exercise of public rights on the noticeboard.	I recommend that the notice is posted on the noticeboard, published in the Finance section of the website, and that the dates are noted and Minuted prior to publication. Note that the earliest date for 21/22 is 1 June due to the Jubilee bank holiday.
N	AGAR Publication Requirements	The Parish Council complied with the publication requirements for the 2020/21 AGAR.	No further recommendations.
O	Trust Funds (If applicable)	The Parish Council does not operate as a Trustee.	No further recommendations.

Transparency Compliance

Process	Criteria	Findings	Recommendations and actions
Review of Internal audit action plan has been considered and actioned?	Good Practice	The Internal Audit had been reviewed the previous year.	No further recommendations.
External Audit recommendations have been considered and actioned.	Good Practice	The Conclusion of Audit report had been received for 20/21 and had been published on the website. Findings: None	No further recommendations.
Accounting Statements agreed and reconciled to the Annual Return	Section 1 of the Annual Return Part 1 of the Annual return is complete and accurate and reconciles to the statement of accounts.	The accounting statements in this annual return present fairly the financial position of the Council and its income and expenditure.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	While the Parish Council does not fall in to the criteria for Councils below the £25k threshold, it is good practise for Parish Councils above the threshold to comply.		
Compliance with the Transparency Act	1) Expenditure over £100 is recorded on the Council Web-Site and with all information requirements	Available on the website.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	2) Annual Return published on the Web-Site	Available on the website.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	3) Explanation of significant variances	Available on the website.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	4) Explanation of difference between Box 7 & 8 if applicable	Not applicable.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	5) Annual Governance Statement recorded	Available on the website.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	6) Internal Audit Report Published	AGAR Available on the website.	Include the full report.

Process	Criteria	Findings	Recommendations and actions
Compliance with the Transparency Act	7) A List of Councillors' responsibilities	Available on the website.	No further recommendations.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	8) Details of Public Land and Building Assets	Available on the website.	Ensure that the Land Registry reference number is included on the Asset Register.
Compliance with the Transparency Act	9) Minutes & Agenda	Available on the website.	No further recommendations.

Further Recommendations:

Following the completion of the Internal Audit, the Council should undertake a review of effectiveness as per Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. A blank form can be supplied.

Training

The Clerk and the Councillors should be encouraged to take up the training offered by the local County Association and SLCC to increase their knowledge and expand the Clerk's professional development. The Clerk may like to consider ILCA or CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) in the future.

Debit Card

As mentioned last year, the Council may like to consider the provision of a debit card or charge card in order that items such as Office365, anti-virus software or website domain names can be bought in the Parish's name without the need to resort to the Clerk or another Councillor having to use their personal accounts. It does not necessarily need to be a card attached to the current account. With the appropriate safeguards and procedures this would be acceptable.

Payments

I noted that some of the invoices I reviewed did not have formal minute references because they were described as 'long term agreements' which had been agreed prior to the Clerk's employment. I recommend that long term agreements – such as the Pump printing and paying for securing the playing field gate – should be reviewed at least every three years, particularly to ensure that it is still appropriate and that the Council is obtaining best value for money.

I recommend that other payments such as the annual subscriptions should be included in a list of regular expenditure which should be agreed at the April meeting for the new financial year.

Risk Assessment

As mentioned in Point C. above, the Council must assess the significant risks to achieving its objectives annually. The document must cover the financial aspects / impact of Council business; for instance, the impact of a delay in receiving the first tranche of precept or even the loss of Councillors making the Council inquorate. The Joint Practitioner's Guide gives comprehensive advice. The Council must consider and assist in completing the document as soon as possible as it is the Council which must take responsibility for this – with the Clerk's guidance.

The Council will also need to consider Question 5 of the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1 of the AGAR) carefully.

Reserves

The 'operating reserve' for the Council is more than the current Precept requirement. I strongly recommend that the advice in JPAG is followed and that the values in the other earmarked reserves are considered.

Document Management

As mentioned last year, I note that the Clerk is in possession of many of the Parish Council Minute books. As these books are the only record of the meetings and should be kept in perpetuity, I strongly recommend that just the last five years or so are kept with the Clerk, with the rest being deposited with the County Archive for safety. A review of other documents, both paper and electronic, should also be undertaken following adoption of a Document Retention policy.

Councillor Email Accounts

As part of General Data Protection Regulation compliance, it is recommended that all Councillors should have email addresses provided by the Council using the formal padburyparishcouncil.com domain name. This would ensure that the Clerk is able to manage the email accounts, particularly when Councillors resign.

Website Documents

All documents published by the Parish Council must be easily accessible, and therefore they should be prepared in PDF format in order that proprietary software is not needed to read the documents. Having to download documents can negatively impact community engagement as many people do not want to clutter up their computers with unnecessary documents.

As mentioned in my previous report, I understand that advice had been given on an SLCC course about the use of Word and Excel for documents on websites, but I believe that the advice was incorrect as it should not be necessary to have to download any document in order to read it. I recommend moving forward that all documents are saved as PDFs – advice on how to convert documents from Word to PDF can be provided.

Conclusion

The above are recommendations to help the Council improve its processes and in no way detract from the work it, and the Clerk, has already done.

I have noted that many of the actions which I recommended last year have been completed; the Clerk and Council should be commended for this.

Padbury Parish Council has an electorate in the region of 697 and the Precept for the year 21/22 was set at £24,104.

In general, I believe that the Council has competent arrangements in place to satisfy itself that its systems of internal financial control are transparent and effective. There are approval and

authorisation controls to minimise risk. The audit and management trail for financial transactions is good.

This report should be noted and taken to the next meeting of the Council for minuting to inform them of the Internal Audit work carried out.

I hope that this report is of help to the Council. If you would like any further assistance or clarification, please do contact me.

Jane Olds

Jane Olds
Internal Auditor