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Our Ref: MARK/EAS006

Mrs S Tate
East Wittering & Bracklesham Parish Council
Bracklesham Barn
Beech Avenue
Bracklesham Bay
PO20 8HU

28 April 2021

Dear Sam

Re: East Wittering & Bracklesham Parish Council
Internal Audit Year Ended 31 March 2021

Executive summary

Following completion of our interim internal audit on 20 November 2020 and final audit on 28 April 2021 we enclose our report for your kind attention and presentation to the council. The audit was conducted in accordance with current practices and guidelines and testing was risk based. Whilst we have not tested all transactions, our samples have where appropriate covered the entire year to date. **Testing requirements are shown in red** and where appropriate **recommendations for future action are shown in bold text and summarised in the tables at the end of the report.**

Our report is presented in the same order as the assertions on the internal auditor report within the published AGAR. The start of each section details the nature of the assertion to be verified, followed by recommended minimum testing requirements. Each section is then concluded with an opinion as to whether the assertion has been met or not.

Our sample testing did not uncover any errors or misstatements that require reporting to the external auditor, nor did we identify any significant weaknesses in the internal controls such that public money would be put at risk.

It is clear the council takes governance, policies and procedures very seriously and I am pleased to report that overall, the systems and procedures you have in place are fit for purpose and whilst my report may contain recommendations to change these are not indicative of any significant failings, but rather are pointers to improving upon an already well-ordered system.

It is therefore our opinion that the systems and internal procedures at East Wittering & Bracklesham Parish Council are well established and followed.

Regulation

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require smaller authorities, each financial year, to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts. In addition to this, a smaller authority is required by Regulation 5(1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to "undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance."

Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance activity designed to improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. The purpose of internal audit is to review and report to the authority on whether its systems of financial and other internal controls over its activities and operating procedures are effective.

Internal audit's function is to test and report to the authority on whether its specific system of internal control is adequate and working satisfactorily. The internal audit reports should therefore be made available to all members to support and inform them when they considering the authority's approval of the annual governance statement.

Independence and competence

Your audit was conducted by Andy Beams of Mulberry & Co. We confirm we are independent from the management of the financial controls and procedures of the council and neither the internal auditor or the firm have any conflicts of interest with the audit client, nor do they provide any management or financial assistance to the client.

Your auditor has over 30 years' experience in the financial sector with the last 11 years specialising in local government.

Engagement Letter

An engagement letter was issued to the council covering the 2020/21 internal audit assignment. Copies of this document are available on request.

Planning and inherent risk assessment

The scope and plan of works including fee structure was issued to the council under separate cover. Copies of this document are available on request. In summary, our work will address each of the internal control objectives as stated on the Annual Internal Audit Report of the AGAR.

- There have been no instances of breaches of regulations in the past
- The client uses an industry approved financial reporting package
- The client regularly carries out reconciliations and documents these
- There is regular reporting to council
- The management team are experienced and informed
- Records are neatly maintained and referenced
- The client is aware of current regulations and practices
- There has been no instance of high staff turnover

It is my opinion that the inherent risk of error or misstatement is low, and the controls of the council can be relied upon and as such substantive testing of individual transactions is not required. Testing to be carried out will be "walk through testing" on sample data to encompass the period of the council year under review.

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A. BOOKS OF ACCOUNT (INTERIM AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Ensure the correct roll forward of the prior year cashbook balances to the new financial year
- Check a sample of financial transactions in cashbooks to bank statements, etc.: the sample size dependent on the size of the authority and nature of accounting records maintained

Interim audit

The council continues to use RBS as a day-to-day accounting package. This is a tried and tested industry specific package and I make no recommendation to change. The system is used regularly to report on and record the financial transactions of the council.

The information requested for the remote audit was provided in full, and my audit testing showed that these documents were well organised, clear and easy to follow. A review of meeting agendas show sufficient financial information is provided at committee and council meetings to support council decisions. I make no recommendation to change this system.

The council is VAT registered. VAT reclaims are completed on a quarterly basis. The last VAT reclaim was for the period to the end of September 2020 and showed a refund position of £2,866.33. The council is up to date with its postings.

Overall, I have the impression that the accounting systems are well ordered and routinely maintained and as such I make no recommendation to change.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control assertion of "Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year" has been met.

B. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, GOVERNANCE AND PAYMENTS (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Review the procedures in place for acquisition of formal tenders and quotes, ensuring they are in line with the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations which should be based on the latest version.
- Ensure that consistent values are in place for the acquisition of formal tenders between Standing Orders and Financial Regulations (frequently different limits are recorded in the two documents)
- Review the procedures for receipt of invoices, agreement of invoice detail and confirmation of goods /services delivery and approval for payment: ideally, a suitably designed certification stamp should be in place providing for evidencing of these checks and payment authorisation
- Check that there is effective segregation between the writing of cheques or the setting up of online payments, and physical release of payments
- Check that VAT reclaims are prepared and submitted in a timely manner in line with the underlying records and in accordance with current HMRC requirements
- Where debit / credit cards are in use, establish the total monthly and individual transaction limits and ensure appropriate controls over physical security and usage of the cards are in place

Check the publication and minuting of the prior year audited AGAR and notice of conclusion of audit.

Due to the extended deadlines for this year, the external auditors report and notice of conclusion of audit for 2019/20 have not yet been returned by the external auditor.

The internal auditor's year-end report was considered by council at its meeting on 11 June 2020 and this is recorded in the minutes.

Confirm by sample testing that councillors sign statutory office forms

I confirmed by sample testing that councillors sign "Acceptance of Office" forms and the web site shows the Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests for each councillor alongside their contact information.

Confirm that the council is compliant with the relevant transparency code

As the council's income and expenditure are between £25,000 and £200,000, is not required by law to follow the either of the Local Government Transparency Codes although it is recommended to do so. A review of the council website shows that the council is following the code through the publication of all the required information in a clear and transparent way.

Confirm that the council is compliant with GDPR

The council is fully aware of GDPR and has undergone training. It was noted the council has established common email addresses for all councillors. This is recommended because it gives a natural segregation between work and personal lives, making it clear beyond doubt in what capacity a councillor is acting. In addition to this it gives control to the council, adds a degree of professionalism and in the event of a FOI request limits access to personal computers.

The council has a Privacy Notice on of its website. It is clear the council takes its responsibilities seriously and has made every effort to comply with the legislation.

Confirm that the council meets regularly throughout the year

In addition to full council, the council has a committee structure, with a diary of meetings available on the council website. Each committee has terms of reference and there is a scheme of delegation in place. These were most recently reviewed by council in November 2020.

Check that agendas for meetings are published giving 3 clear days' notice.

The Clerk was able to demonstrate that at least 3 clear days' notice is given on agendas. Whilst we have not tested every single committee and council meeting there was no evidence of non-compliance in giving three clear days' notice of the meeting. It is noted that the non-confidential supporting documentation referred to in the agendas is included on the website.

Check the draft minutes of the last meeting(s) are on the council's website

Draft minutes are routinely uploaded to the council website and clearly marked as draft. These are subsequently replaced by final versions once approved.

Confirm that the Parish Council's Standing Orders have been reviewed within the last 12 months.

The standing orders are based on the latest NALC model. They were last reviewed and adopted by council in November 2020.

Confirm that the Parish Council has adopted and recently reviewed Financial Regulations.

Financial regulations are based on the latest NALC model. They were last reviewed and adopted by council in November 2020. The regulations contain provisions for the approval of spending, setting of budgets, reconciliation of the bank and reporting to council.

Check that the council's Financial Regulations are being routinely followed.

The council is performing a monthly bank reconciliation for each account. These are independently checked and then reported to council and review of the minutes confirms this action is being reported.

The council has thresholds in place at which authorisations to spend must be obtained as below:

- The council for all items over £5,000

- A duly delegated committee of the council for items over £1,000
- The Clerk, in conjunction with Chairman of Council or Chairman of the appropriate committee, for any items below £1,000

It was noted that the emergency authorisation level for the Clerk is £1,000.

Receipts and payments are reported to the council and evidence of this is recorded in the minutes of the meetings. The council approved the renewal of the use of electronic banking and direct debit and standing order payments at the meeting in November 2020.

Confirm all section 137 expenditure meets the guidelines and does not exceed the annual per elector limit of £8.32 per elector.

The council has section 137 spending within thresholds.

Confirm that checks of the accounts are made by a councillor.

The system noted above details internal review takes place and I am under no doubt that council properly approves expenditure.

Final Audit

I noted that the external auditor’s report and notice of conclusion were reported to council at the meeting held on 10 December 2020, along with reviewing the interim internal auditor’s report.

I am of the opinion the council is following its own regulations and that any changes are to be considered minor and not indicative of errors in the system.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control assertion “This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for” has been met.

C. RISK MANAGEMENT AND INSURANCE (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Ensure that authorities have prepared, and formally adopted, at least once annually, an appropriate and comprehensive register of assessed risks, both regular and ad hoc
- Ensure that appropriate levels of insurance cover are in place for land, buildings, public, employers’ and hirers’ (where applicable) liability, fidelity / employees (including councillors) liability, business interruption and cyber security
- Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for monitoring play areas, open spaces and sports pitches: such reviews should be undertaken by appropriately qualified external inspectors or, if by officers or members, that they have received the appropriate training and accreditation

Interim audit

The council has a general risk assessment, which includes some aspects of financial risk, and an additional Financial Risk Assessment, which provides greater detail of the measures in place to mitigate financial risks. This was most recently reviewed and agreed by council in November 2020.

The council has a valid insurance policy in place with Royal Sun Alliance in a long-term agreement expiring 31 May 2023. The policy includes Public Liability cover of £15 million, Employers Liability cover of £10 million and a Fidelity Guarantee level of £500,000.

A review of the bank statement for September 2020 shows that after receipt of the second half of the precept, the bank balance exceeded the £500,000 level and **I recommend the council consider whether the current Fidelity Guarantee level is sufficient.**

Final audit

The Clerk confirmed that plans were in place to increase the Fidelity Guarantee to £750,000 at renewal.

We discussed assertion 8 of the AGAR and whether or not this had any impact on the council.

“We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.”

The Clerk confirmed that she was not aware of any such liability at the year end.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control objective of “This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these” has been met.

D. BUDGET, PRECEPT AND RESERVES (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Ensure that the full authority, not a committee, has considered, approved and adopted the annual precept in accordance with the required parent authority timetable
- Ensure that budget reports are prepared and submitted to authority / committees periodically during the year with appropriate commentary on any significant variances
- Review the budget performance either during the year or at the financial year-end seeking explanations for any significant or unanticipated variances
- Ensure that the authority has considered the establishment of specific earmarked reserves and, ideally, reviews them annually as part of the budget assessment process
- Ensure that the precept in the accounts matches the submission form to the relevant authority and the public record of precepted amounts

Interim audit

I confirmed that the 2020-21 budget and precept setting process is underway with plans in place to approve the budget and precept requirement before the submission deadline.

I have confirmed that in accordance with Financial Regulations, regular reporting of budget against expenditure is carried out and reviewed at council meetings. Review recent minutes shows consideration given to the council’s overall financial position.

At the interim audit date, the council held circa £287,000 in earmarked reserves. These are predominately CIL and New Homes Bonus funds, and each are clearly identifiable by year of receipt. The council also held circa £122,000 in general reserves at the start of the year. General guidance recommends the council’s general reserve should be circa 50% of precept, or 3-6 months net revenue expenditure (NRE), as adjusted for local conditions.

At the interim audit date, the council’s income showed as 93.4% of budget and expenditure at 38.0% of budget.

Final audit

I confirmed the final budget and precept figures for 2021/22 were agreed by council at the meeting held on 10 December 2020 (minute ref 20.107).

At the year-end, the council held circa £324,000 in a number of clearly defined earmarked reserves, including CIL and New Homes Bonus funds allocated by year of receipt.

The council also holds circa £149,000 in general reserve, which equates to approximately one years' equivalent of precept. This is higher than might normally be expected and is the result of Covid-19 not having had as significant an impact as had been anticipated, due to reducing expenditure and successfully obtaining grant support.

However, it is likely the financial position will be affected during the first year of re-opening of facilities and this may impact on the general reserve over the next 12 months.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control objective of "The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate" has been met.

E. INCOME (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Review "aged debtor" listings to ensure appropriate follow up action is in place
- Allotments: ensure that appropriate signed tenancy agreements exist, that an appropriate register of tenants is maintained identifying, that debtors are monitored.
- Burials: ensure that a formal burial register is maintained that it is up-to-date and that a sample of interments and memorials are appropriately evidenced, that fees have been charged at the correct approved rate and been recovered within a reasonable time: (Authorities should also acquire and retain copies of Burial / Cremation certificates)
- Hall hire: ensure that an effective diary system for bookings is in place identifying the hirer, hire times and ideally cross-referenced to invoices raised
- Leases: ensure that leases are reviewed in a timely manner in accordance with the terms of the lease and rents similarly reviewed appropriately at the due time
- Other variable income streams: ensure that appropriate control procedures and documentation are in existence to provide a clear audit trail through to invoicing and recovery of all such income
- Where amounts are receivable on set dates during the year, ensure that an appropriate control record is maintained duly identifying the date(s) on which income is due and actually received / banked

Interim audit

The council's income sources (apart from the precept) have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the budgeted income for Bracklesham Barn where the facility has been unavailable for most of the year.

There has also been additional expenditure incurred on equipment and signage related to the pandemic, although the council have received a total of £15,000 to date in support grants. A number of budgeted events have not happened (thus saving on some expenditure), and the council are able to use their general reserve to balance any deficit at the year-end.

Final audit

I independently verified the precept amount received during the year and confirmed this to the total entered into box 2 on the AGAR.

The council's other income has been recorded clearly in the accounts and I was able to confirm the total entered into box 3 of the AGAR matches the information provided. The income has reduced since 2019/20 primarily due to the impact of Covid-19.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control objective of “Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for” has been met.

F. PETTY CASH (INTERIM AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.

Recommended minimum testing:

- A number of authorities are now running down and closing their petty cash accounts and using debit / credit cards for ad hoc purchases. Consequently, a “not applicable” response is frequently required in this area.
- Review the systems in place for controlling any petty cash and cash floats (used for bar, catering, etc.)
- Check a sample of transactions during the financial year to ensure appropriate supporting documentation is held
- Review the existence of evidenced periodic independent verification of the petty cash and any other cash floats held
- Ensure that VAT is identified wherever incurred and appropriate
- Physically check the petty cash and other cash floats held
- Where bar or catering facilities are in place, ensure that appropriate cashing-up procedures are in place reconciling the physical cash takings to the till “Z” total readings

Interim audit

The council retains a small petty cash float for incidental expenditure. Due to the remote nature of the interim audit, I was unable to physically reconcile the petty cash.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion the control objective of “Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved, and VAT appropriately accounted for” has been met.

G. PAYROLL (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority’s approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Ensure that, for all staff, a formal employment contract is in place together with a confirmatory letter setting out any changes to the contract
- Ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for the payment of members allowances and deduction of any tax liability
- Ensure that, for a sample of staff salaries, gross pay due is calculated in accordance with the approved spinal point on the NJC scale or hourly rate, if off-scale, and with the contracted hours
- Ensure that appropriate tax codes are being applied to each employee
- Where free or paid for software is used, ensure that it is up to date.
- For the test sample of employees, ensure that tax is calculated appropriately
- Check the correct treatment of pension contributions to either the Local Government pension scheme (non - taxable, deducted from the gross salary or DC schemes like NEST which already allow for tax deductions)
- For NI, ensure that the correct deduction and employer’s contributions are applied: NB. The employers’ allowance is not available to councils but may be used by other authorities
- Ensure that the correct employers’ pension percentage contribution is being applied

- Ensure that for the test sample, the correct net pay is paid to the employee with tax, NI and pension contributions correctly paid to the respective agencies

Interim audit

The council uses an external company to process payroll. Payments are made by the council and approved in the same way as other expenditure. The NJC pay agreement taking effect from 1 April 2020 has applied to all qualifying staff.

A review of the payslips provided for the interim audit shows that PAYE and NI calculations are correct.

Final audit

A review of the detailed expenditure included within box 4 of the AGAR shows only allowable amounts directly related to staff costs. However, the RBS figures show that in the previous year, staff mileage and benefits were included within box 4, and the totals will therefore need to be restated on the AGAR before submission to the external auditor.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that salaries are correctly stated on the AGAR and that the control object of “Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority’s approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied” has been met.

H. ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.

Recommended minimum testing:

Tangible fixed assets

- Ensure that the authority is maintaining a formal asset register and updating it routinely to record new assets at historic cost price, net of VAT and removing any disposed of / no longer serviceable assets
- Physically verifying the existence and condition of high value, high risk assets may be appropriate
- Ideally, the register should identify for each asset the purchase cost and, if practicable, the replacement / insured cost, the latter being updated annually and used to assist in forward planning for asset replacement
- Additions and disposals records should allow tracking from the prior year to the current
- Ensure that the asset value to be reported in the AGAR at Section 2, Box 9 equates to the prior year reported value, adjusted for the nominal value of any new acquisitions and /or disposals
- Compare the asset register with the insurance schedule to ensure that all assets as recorded are appropriately insured or “self-insured” by the authority

Fixed asset investments

- Ensure that all long-term investments (i.e., those for more than 12-month terms) are covered by the “Investment Strategy” and reported as Assets in the AGAR at Section 2, Box 9.

Borrowing and lending

- Ensure that the authority has sought and obtained appropriate DMO approval for all loans acquired
- Ensured that the authority has accounted for the loan appropriately (i.e., recorded the full value of the loan. Any arrangement fee should be regarded as an admin expense) in the year of receipt
- Ensure that the combined principal loan repayment and interest for the year is correctly recorded in the AGAR at Section 2 Box 5
- Ensure that the outstanding loan liability as of 31st March each year is correctly recorded in the AGAR at Section 2, Box 10 (value should be verified via the DMO website)

- Where the authority has issued loans to local bodies, they should ideally seek signed indemnities from the recipient body, or their members, agreeing to underwrite the loan debt

Interim audit

The council has a detailed fixed asset register in place in Excel format. Assets are correctly stated at historic or proxy cost, and other information includes location and description of assets, dates of acquisition, supplier details, estimates of useful life, present use and current condition and insurance values. An appendix to the main register lists disposals.

The register is reviewed and approved by council as part of the year-end process, and this action is recorded in the minutes of the council meeting held on 11 June 2020. The register is very comprehensive and represents a best practice example of how a local council should record the information.

Final Audit

I confirmed the payments and year-end balance of the council' loan against the details provided by the PWLB.

The asset register was updated at the financial year-end, and the total matches the figure entered into box 9 on the AGAR.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control objective of "Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained" has been met.

I. BANK AND CASH (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

Periodic and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Ensure that bank reconciliations are prepared routinely, are subject to independent scrutiny and sign-off by members
- Verify the accuracy of the year-end bank reconciliation detail and ensure accurate disclosure of the combined cash and bank balances in the AGAR, Section 2, Box 8
- Where the authority has bank balances in excess of £100,000 it has an appropriate investment strategy

Interim audit

Bank reconciliations are completed on a monthly basis. The samples provided for the interim audit were reviewed against the relevant bank statements and there were no errors identified.

It was noted that the previous audit report recommended that the council considers the protection offered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS), which the council agreed with. This action has been delayed due to the pandemic, but still represents a risk to the council. As a reminder, full details of the protection offered by the FSCS is attached

www.fscs.org.uk/

Final audit

At the year end, the council had a reconciled position on its account. There were 5 outstanding entries at the year-end totalling £1,336.99, all paid on 31 March 2021. I verified the bank balance to the statement dated 31 March 2021.

It has been highlighted before that with the council holding all of its funds on one bank account, it is not benefiting from the protection available to it from the FSCS, and I would encourage the council to pursue opening alternate bank accounts at the earliest opportunity.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that bank and cash balances are properly shown on the AGAR and that the control objective of "Periodic and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out" has been met.

J. YEAR END ACCOUNTS (FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Ensure that, where annual turnover exceeds £200,000, appropriate records are maintained throughout the year on an Income and Expenditure basis to facilitate budget reporting in that vein
- Ensure that appropriate accounting arrangements are in place to account for debtors and creditors during the year and at the financial year-end

The council, at its meeting to sign off the year-end accounts, must discuss the Annual Governance Statement and record this activity in the minutes of the meeting. Based on the internal audit finding, I recommend using the table below as the basis for that discussion. **THIS MUST BE A SEPARATE AGENDA ITEM TO THE SIGNING OF THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS.**

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement

	Annual Governance Statement	'Yes', means that this authority	Suggested response based on evidence
1	We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	<i>prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.</i>	YES –accounts follow latest Accounts and Audit Regulations and practitioners guide recommendations.
2	We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	<i>made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.</i>	YES – there is regular reporting of financial transactions and accounting summaries, offering the opportunity for scrutiny.
3	We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	<i>has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.</i>	YES – the Clerk is experienced and advises the council in respect of its legal powers.
4	We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	<i>during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.</i>	YES – the requirements and timescales for 2019/20 year-end were followed.
5	We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	<i>considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.</i>	YES – the council has a risk management scheme and appropriate external insurance.

6	We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	<i>arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.</i>	YES – the council has appointed an independent and competent internal auditor has completed two audits during the year.
7	We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	<i>responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.</i>	YES – where matters are raised, action taken by council is recorded
8	We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and. Where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	<i>disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.</i>	YES – no matters were raised during the internal audit visits.
9	Trust funds including charitable – In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/asset(s), including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	<i>has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.</i>	N/A – the council has no trusts.

Section 2 – Accounting Statements

AGAR box number		2019/20	2020/21	Auditor notes
1	Balances brought forward	410,980	418,231	Agrees to 2019/20 carry forward (box 7)
2	Precept or rates and levies	143,069	150,282	Figure confirmed to central records
3	Total other receipts	99,865	64,078	Agrees to underlying records
4	Staff costs	55,842	56,673	Agrees to underlying records
5	Loan interest/capital repayments	1,834	1,834	Verified to PWLB statement
6	All other payments	178,007	100,982	Agrees to underlying records
7	Balances carried forward	418,231	473,102	Casts correctly and agrees to balance sheet
8	Total value of cash and short-term investments	413,920	471,992	Agrees to bank reconciliation
9	Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	1,723,293	1,728,956	Matches asset register
10	Total borrowings	24,002	23,242	Verified to PWLB statement
11	For Local Councils only - Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	YES	NO √	Council has no trusts

Final audit

The year-end accounts have been correctly prepared on an income and expenditure basis, with the box 7 and 8 reconciliation accurately completed. The AGAR comparatives have been correctly copied over from the 2019/20 AGAR, although boxes 4 and 6 have been restated for 2019/20 due to the changes to allowable inclusions for staff costs.

Year-end debtors and creditors are at similar levels to the previous year.

The variance analysis is required because there are variances greater than 15% for boxes 3 and 6. **This has been completed although I recommend adding further detail to quantify the actual variance amounts.**

The council plans to sign the Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements at its meeting scheduled for 20 May 2021.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control objective of “Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded” has been met.

K. LIMITED ASSURANCE REVIEW (FINAL AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2019/20, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2019/20 AGAR tick “not covered”)

Recommended minimum testing:

- The correct exemption certificate was prepared and minuted in accordance with the statutory submission deadline
- That it has been published, together with all required information on the Authority’s website and noticeboard

Final audit

The council did not declare itself exempt from a limited assurance review in 2019/20.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control assertion of “If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2019/20, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt” has been met. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2019/20 AGAR tick “not covered”)

L: TRANSPARENCY (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

If the authority has an annual turnover not exceeding £25,000, it publishes information on a website / webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities

Recommended minimum testing:

- This test applies only to those councils covered by the £25,000 External Audit exemption
- Internal auditors should review the authority’s website ensuring that all required documentation is published in accordance with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities

Interim audit

The council has an annual turnover exceeding £25,000, and this test does not apply.

Final audit

The council has an annual turnover exceeding £25,000, and this test does not apply.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control assertion of “If the authority has an annual turnover not exceeding £25,000, it publishes information on a website/ webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the Transparency code for smaller authorities.” has been met.

M: EXERCISE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS - INSPECTION OF ACCOUNTS (FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

The authority has demonstrated that during summer 2020 it correctly provided for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Internal auditors should acquire / examine a copy of the required “Public Notice” ensuring that it clearly identifies the statutory 30 working day period when the authority’s records are available for public inspection.
- Internal auditors may also check whether councils have minuted the relevant dates at the same time as approving the AGAR

Final audit

Due to the Covid 19 outbreak, the statutory deadlines for publication during 2019/20 were changed as follows:

The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/404) amended the deadline by which the Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Accounts of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) together with any certificate or opinion issued by the local auditor must be published from 30 September 2020 to 30 November 2020.

This means that draft accounts must be approved by 31 August 2020 at the latest. However, they may be approved earlier, and we encouraged councils to do so wherever possible, to help manage overall pressure on audit firms towards the end of the year.

Previously there was a requirement for all smaller authorities to have a common period for the exercise of public rights, being the first 10 working days of July. Under the new regulations there is no requirement for a common period for the exercise of public rights. Smaller authorities are still required to set a period for this purpose, but the only requirement is that the 30-working day period for the exercise of public rights should start on or before the first working day of September i.e., on or before 1 September 2020.

Authorities must publish the dates of their public inspection period and given the removal of the common inspection period and extension of the overall deadlines for this year, it is recommended that all authorities provide public notice on their websites when the public inspection period would usually commence, explaining why they are departing from normal practice for 2019/20 accounts.

The regulations implementing these measures were laid on 7 April and came into force on 30 April 2020.

I confirmed that arrangements are in place at this council to ensure proper exercise of public rights. Relevant dates are set out in the table below.

Inspection - Key date	2019/20 Actual	2020/21 Proposed
Date Inspection Notice Issued	28 August 2020	21 May 2021
Inspection period begins	1 September 2020	3 June 2021
Inspection period ends	12 October 2020	14 July 2021
Correct length	Yes	Yes
Common period included?	n/a	Yes

I am satisfied the requirements of this control objective were met for 2019-20, and assertion 4 on the annual governance statement can therefore be signed off by the council.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion the control objective of “The authority, during the previous year (2019-20) correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (evidenced by the notice published on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set)” has been met.

N: PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS (INTERIM AND FINAL AUDIT)

Internal audit requirement

The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2019/20. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website / webpage.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Internal auditors should acquire / examine a copy of the required “Public Notice” ensuring that it clearly identifies the statutory 30 working day period when the authority’s records are available for public inspection.
- Internal auditors may also check whether councils have minuted the relevant dates at the same time as approving the AGAR

Before 1 July 2021 authorities must publish:

- Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and a declaration that the accounting statements are as yet unaudited
- Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2020/21, approved and signed, page 4
- Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2020/21, approved and signed, page 5

Not later than 30 September 2021 authorities must publish:

- Notice of conclusion of audit
- Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate
- Sections 1 and 2 of AGAR including any amendments as a result of the limited assurance review.

It is recommended as best practice, to avoid any potential confusion by local electors and interested parties, that you also publish the Annual Internal Audit Report, page 3.

Interim audit

This testing requirement was not in place at the time of the interim audit.

Final audit

The Clerk was able to demonstrate that the council has met the publication requirements.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control assertion of “the authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2019/20 AGAR. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website / webpage” has been met.

O. TRUSTEESHIP (INTERIM AUDIT)**Internal audit requirement**

Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.

Recommended minimum testing:

- Confirm that all charities of which the council is a Trustee are up to date with Charity Commission filing requirements
- that the council is the sole trustee on the Charity Commission register
- that the council is acting in accordance with the Trust deed
- that the charity meetings and accounts are recorded separately from those of the council
- review the level and activity of the charity and where a risk-based approach suggests such, review the Independent Examiner’s report

Interim audit

The council has no trusts.

Section conclusion

I am of the opinion that the control assertion of “Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee” has been met.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Andy Beams'.

Andy Beams
For Mulberry & Co