

Market Drayton Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2024-25: Interim

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*For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background

All town and parish councils are required by statute to make arrangements for an independent internal audit examination of their accounting records and system of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2024-25 financial year to date which was completed by 20 September 2024, together with the matters arising and recommendations for action, where appropriate.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our review for the year to date, we have had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential mis-recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts/AGAR. We have employed a combination of selective sampling techniques (where appropriate) and 100% detailed checks in a number of key areas in order to gain sufficient assurance that the Council's financial and regulatory systems and controls are appropriate and fit for the purposes intended.

Our programme of cover has been designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems are robust and operate in a manner to ensure effective probity of transactions and to afford a reasonable probability of identifying any material errors or possible abuse of the Council's own and the national statutory regulatory framework. The programme is also designed to facilitate our completion of the 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the Council's AGAR, which requires independent assurance over a number of internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We are pleased to again report that the accounts and Council records are maintained to a high standard, together with supporting documentation which was provided for the purposes of our review.

We ask that members consider the content of this report and acknowledge that the report has been reviewed by Council.

Detailed Report

Review of Accounting Arrangements & Bank Reconciliations

The Council uses the Omega accounting software to maintain its day to day financial records and provide the basis for production of year-end accounts and AGAR detail. Our objective here is to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers. To that end, we have:

- Ensured that the ledger remains in balance at the present date;
- Agreed the opening trial balance detail for 2024-25 with that in the 2023-24 Statement of Accounts;
- Examined and ensured that the coding structure remains appropriate for purpose and provides sufficient detail to assist in the preparation of the Council's year-end AGAR and more detailed Statement of Accounts presented to members;
- Checked and agreed transactions in the Council's Handelsbanken Current and Deposit accounts cashbooks to the relevant bank statements for April and August 2024; and
- Checked detail on the bank reconciliations for the Current & Deposit accounts as at 30th April and 31st August 2024 relating to the aforementioned accounts to ensure that no long-standing uncleared cheques or other anomalous entries exist.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area. We will undertake further work at our final review.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has robust corporate governance documentation and processes in place, that Council and Committee (where appropriate) meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders and that, as far as we are able to ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation. We have: -

- Examined the Council's minutes for the current year to date to determine whether or not any issues exist that may have an adverse effect, through litigation or other causes, on the Council's future financial stability and are pleased to note that all Council Minutes are signed and initialled on each page;
- Noted that the Council reviewed Standing Orders (SOs) and Financial Regulations (FRs) which were adopted in May 2024 and the Financial Regulations were revised in June 2024.
- Noted that members continue to be provided with and approve a schedule of payments, together with details of petrol card purchases and Direct debits and periodic bank reconciliation detail; and
- Noted also that the council adopted General Powers of Competence in May 2021.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no significant issues have been identified in this area of review. We will undertake further work at our final review.

Review of Expenditure

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and budgets;
- 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;
- We note that the Council are approving most payments by BACS which are approved, in most cases, prior to the funds being transmitted.
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount;
- The correct expense codes have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and continues to be reclaimed quarterly.

We have selected a sample of payments to examine for compliance with the above criteria, to 31st August 2024.

We have also examined the content of the quarterly VAT reclaims submitted to HMRC and agreed detail to the underlying control account balance in Omega.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no significant issues have been identified in this area. We will undertake further work at our final review.

Assessment and Management of Risk

Our aim here is to ensure that the Council has put in place appropriate arrangements to identify all potential areas of risk of both a financial and health / safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage those risks identified in order to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

- We note that the Financial Risk Assessment programme was adopted by the Council in June 2024; and
- Zurich Municipal continues to provide the Council's insurance cover: we have examined the current year's schedule and are pleased to note that asset insurance cover has recently been reviewed, together with Employer's and Public Liability

cover, both of which are in place at £10 million and £15 million respectively, with Fidelity Guarantee cover at £1 million.

Conclusions

No issues have arisen in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation currently with appropriate insurance cover in place.

Precept Determination and Budgetary Control

We aim in this area of our work to ensure that the Council has appropriate procedures in place to determine its future financial requirements leading to the adoption of an approved budget and formal determination of the amount of the precept placed on the Unitary Authority, that effective arrangements are in place to monitor budgetary performance throughout the financial year and that the Council has identified and retains appropriate reserve funds to meet future spending plans.

The Council will commence consideration of the 2025-26 budgetary requirements later this year and we shall consider the action taken and outcomes, together with the approved level of precept at a future review.

We are pleased to note that members continue to receive regular budget monitoring reports with over/under-spends and the level of earmarked reserves the subject of regular review.

Conclusions

We have been advised that the Council are to formally consider and finalise its budget and precept requirements for 2025-26 later in the financial year. Consequently, we shall review this area further at our final review, also examining the year's budget outturn, following up any significant variances and obtaining appropriate explanations: we shall also consider the appropriateness of retained reserves to meet the Council's ongoing revenue spending requirements and any development aspirations.

Review of Income

In considering the Council's income streams, we aim to ensure that robust systems are in place to ensure the identification of all income due to the Council from its various sources, to ensure that the income is invoiced in a timely manner and that effective procedures are in place to pursue recovery of any outstanding monies due to the Council.

The main sources of income are the annual precept, toilets, cemetery, and related fees, together with CIL money.

We are pleased to note that members have considered and approved the fees and charges for cemetery & memorial activities for 2024-25 by 4% in line with the requirements of the Council's Financial Regulations.

At this interim audit, we reviewed the procedures in relation to the control of the Burial and Graves Register, together with the income collection and banking procedures, also examining

a sample of interment applications together with the receipt and banking records covering the period April to August 2024. We have also verified that this income is being recovered appropriately and banked in a secure manner.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues have been identified in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation. We will undertake further work at our final review ensuring that the income is correctly reported in the Annual Governance & Accountability Return.

Petty Cash Account

Our aim in this area is to ensure that appropriate controls are in place; that all expenditure incurred is adequately supported by trade invoices or till receipts; that the expenditure is appropriate for the Council's requirements; that VAT has been separately identified for periodic recovery and that cheque encashments from the main cashbooks are properly recorded.

We have not physically checked the cash but have reviewed the check lists that we have been provided with and we consider that it continues to operate effectively.

Conclusions

No matters arise warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Review of Staff Salaries

In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the Employee Rights Act 1998 and the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) legislation as regards the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme, as further revised from 1st April 2023 in relation to employee percentage bandings. Consequently, we have:-

- Checked and agreed the computation of staff gross and net pay and salary deductions for August 2024 as compiled using Sage software;
- Checked to ensure that the correct Tax codes, National Insurance tables and LGPS salary banding pension rates have been accurately applied and that the deductions arising therefrom have been paid over in a timely manner; and
- Checked and agreed a sample of enhanced payments to supporting timesheets ensuring that the latter were appropriately checked and certified for payment.

Conclusions

No issues have been identified in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Investments and Loans

Our objectives here are to ensure that the Council is “investing” surplus funds, be they held temporarily or on a longer term basis in appropriate banking and investment institutions, that an appropriate investment policy is in place, that the Council is obtaining the best rate of return on any such investments made, that interest earned is brought to account correctly and appropriately in the accounting records and that any loan repayments due to or payable by the Council are transacted in accordance with appropriate loan agreements.

The Council has two PWLB loans in place, the combined balance being repaid in half-yearly instalments. We have verified the instalment repayments for the year to date as part of the above referenced expenditure testing.

Conclusions

There are no issues arising in this area for this financial year to date. We will undertake further work at our final review.