
Leigh-On-Sea Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2021-22

Prepared by Nigel Archer

*For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Limited*

Background and Scope

The Accounts and Audit Regulations introduced from 1st April 2001 require all Town and Parish Councils to implement an independent internal audit examination of their Accounts and accounting processes annually. The Council complied accordingly, in terms of independence from the Council decision making process, appointing a local practice to provide the service for the Council from the outset. Subsequently however, we at Auditing Solutions Limited, were appointed for 2010-11 and beyond.

This report sets out those areas examined during the course of our recent audit work for the Council which, due to Covid and other travel restrictions, was undertaken remotely in my offices on various dates during June 2022.

Internal Audit Approach

In completing our review for 2021-22, we have again had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential misrecording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts, employing a range of selective sampling techniques (or 100% substantive testing if appropriate) across a range of the Council's activities in accord with our previously circulated Programme of Work.

Overall Conclusion

We are pleased to report that no significant issues have been identified in our review for the year that warrant formal recommendation and the Clerk, Finance Officer and their other staff are to be commended for the quality of work and documentation provided for the purposes of the internal audit.

Consequently, we have signed off the Internal Audit Report at Page 3 within the revised Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR in short), assigning positive assurances in all categories.

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Detailed Report

Review of Accounts and Accounting Arrangements

Our objective has been to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers. We have:

- Ensured that an appropriate nominal ledger coding structure remains in place, noting that this has again been further updated in accord with current Committee structures to further assist the budget monitoring and reporting process;
- Checked and agreed transactions on the Current, Payroll and Imprest bank accounts, as recorded on the Edge accounting system software, with the entries on the relevant HSBC bank statements for March 2022;
- Similarly, checked and agreed transactions on the other HSBC Business Money Manager Reserve account and the CCLA Public Sector deposit account from cashbooks to statements for the same sample month of March 2022; and
- Verified that regular, monthly bank reconciliations continue to be undertaken on all accounts, noting that appropriate hard copies are retained on file and that members are regularly provided with same. We have checked and agreed those as at 31st March 2022 on all five accounts with no matters arising.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has robust Corporate Governance documentation in place; that Council and Committee 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 minutes of meetings of the Full Council and its Standing Committees (except Planning) held throughout the current financial year to ensure that no issues affecting the Council's financial stability either in the short, medium or long term exist, also that no other issues are in existence whereby the Council may potentially be considering or have taken decisions that might result in ultra vires expenditure being incurred. No such issues were identified; and
- We have noted that both Standing Orders and Financial Regulations had been reviewed and re-affirmed in previous years and, subsequently, note further reviews were undertaken in May 2021 by the Finance Committee, which were recommended to and accepted by Full Council.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Review of Purchasing and Payment Procedures

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;
- 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 coded to the control account for periodic recovery.

As a result of the remote nature of this year's audit review, we did not specifically examine a sample of payments made. However, we note the sound controls and authorisations of the monthly payment schedules by Council or Finance (depending on the timing of the bi-monthly meetings), detail of which are properly displayed on the Council's website, and we have also, as noted above, verified all payments from bank statements to relevant cashbook transactions for a sample period.

We again note that the Finance Officer continues to submit periodic (quarterly in accord with revised HMRC filing requirements) and that the March 2022 debtor was properly recorded in the closing accounting statements for the year.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

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 and safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage those risks in order to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition. We have: -

- Previously noted that an appropriate review of the risk assessment register for all principal areas of the Council's activities was undertaken and that a formal Strategy and detailed risk registers were re-adopted by the Full Council at its meeting in March 2021. Subsequently, we note that the revised Strategy and Registers were approved by Full Council in March 2022 and

- Examined the current year's insurance policy schedules (to August 2022), cover continuing to be provided by Zurich, noting that Public Liability remains at £15 million; that employer's Liability remains at £10 million; that Fidelity Guarantee remains at £1 million and that Loss of Revenue is in place at £255,000.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Budgetary Control and Reserves

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 to be precepted on the local 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. To meet this objective:

- We note from examination of minutes and other documentation provided in support of this year's working papers that formal deliberations have been undertaken in relation to Revenue and Reserve budgets for 2022-23, with the final conclusions adopted at the Full Council meeting in January 2022 and the Precept was properly recorded at £452,880;
- We are pleased to record that members continue to be provided with sound, periodic and comprehensive management accounting information in order to provide an appropriate means for monitoring budgetary performance during the year; and
- We note that Total Reserves as at 31st March 2022 stood at just under £519,000, which comprised Capital Expenditure Reserves of £65,000, other specific Earmarked items of £315,000 and the residual General Fund of £139,000. The latter represents three to four months gross expenditure at current levels and is considered more than adequate to meet the needs of the Council at present.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Review of Income

In this area of our review work, we aim to ensure that income due to the Council is identified, invoiced (where applicable) and recovered at the appropriate rate and within a reasonable time scale: also ensuring that it is banked promptly in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations. In addition to the Precept, the Council's principal source of income is clearly the Community Centre, supplemented by allotment rentals, monthly farmers' market pitch fees, community transport ticket sales and ad-hoc activities such as Xmas Lights and other events.

Consequently:-

- We note that the schedules of Council's fees and charges continue to be reviewed and adopted annually, those for the Centre and allotments for 2021-22 having been formally considered by the relevant committee and Full Council during the previous municipal year, whilst those for 2022-23 were approved in June, December and February at relevant Committee levels; and
- We have, as noted earlier in this report, verified all receipt transactions from Edge ledgers to relevant bank statements for sample months in all bank accounts;
- We note that the bookings and receipting processes for the Community Centre, utilising bespoke Edge software for this purpose, remain largely unchanged compared with the detail previously tested and agreed during 2021-22 and did not consider this area in further detail at present.
- We are also pleased to note the levels of segregation in place despite the limited numbers of administrative personnel;

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Petty Cash Account and Debit Card Usage

A relatively limited petty cash account is operated in the Council's office on a straightforward "top-up as required" basis: at the time of the financial year end just £75.33 was held and no transactions of any materiality had been incurred since previous testing work for 2020-21.

Payment transactions are entered into the Edge Expenditure reports in the same manner as other supplier cheque and direct debit payments with full details of the payee and goods with VAT separately recorded for periodic recovery where applicable.

In addition, an HSBC Imprest bank account is in use with a debit card available for urgent goods / services and internet purchases to obtain best value pricing. Again this is utilised in a very limited manner (just 8 transactions totalling £233 in the sample month tested of March 2022 with all payments appropriately supported by supplier invoices and correctly entered in the ledgers.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Salaries and Wages

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 previously amended with effect from 1st April 2021 as regards employee contribution bandings.

To meet that objective, we have:

- Ensured that the Council reviews and approves pay scales for staff annually and has duly implemented the NJC award for 2021-22;
- Noted previously that a payroll bureau provider (James Todd) was engaged to provide the service and this remains the case in 2021-22;
- Agreed the amounts paid to employees by reference to the approved pay scales on the NJC annual schedules, examining a sample of all those salary payments made in December 2021;
- Ensured that Tax and National Insurance deductions for all employees have been made applying the appropriate PAYE code and NIC Table;
- Checked that the correct superannuation percentage deductions are being applied where applicable;
- Checked and agreed the net payments to staff from copy payslips to the resultant cashbook entries; and
- Similarly checked and agreed the payment over of deductions to HMRC and Essex County Council from copy payroll reports to cashbooks

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Asset Registers

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 (as amended from time to time) require that all Councils establish and maintain inventories/asset registers of buildings, land, plant and equipment, etc. owned by them.

We have noted previously that an appropriate register is maintained, the Clerk having updated detail to reflect acquisitions and disposals in 2020-21, and this continued to be the case for 2021-22.

We have checked and agreed the values recorded in the registers, correctly at cost with acquisitions / disposals in the year only without any “insurance inflation” in accord with current regulations, to the overall balances disclosed at Box 9, Page 5 of the revised AGAR.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

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 currently has one CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund account in place (approximately £323,000 in value) and, as noted earlier in this report, we have checked and agreed all dividend receipts / re-investments in the year to 31st March 2022 to third party statements and verified the Edge cashbook balance and Accounts disclosure.

The Council has no loans either repayable by, or to, it.

Conclusions

No issues requiring formal comment or recommendation have arisen in this area.

Statement of Accounts and Annual Return

We have verified the accuracy of detail in the Annual Statement of Accounts, as produced initially by the Edge accounting software, but also supplemented by more formal supporting Income & Expenditure and Balance Sheet statements prepared by the Clerk and Finance Officer, to the underlying records and other documentation provided. Additionally we have verified the transfer of the summarised results, and prior year's comparators, to Page 5 of the revised AGAR.

Conclusions

We are pleased to note that no issues have been identified in our review and, on the basis of the work completed on the Council's Accounts and other relevant supporting documentation for the year (as noted in the preamble to this report), we have duly signed off the Internal Audit Report within the AGAR assigning positive assurances in each relevant category.