

MIDGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – APRIL 2021

Introduction

The Internal Audit was carried out in line with the new Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which came into force on 1st April 2015. These Regulations are supported by the Practitioners Guide, issued by JPAG, to support the preparation by smaller authorities in England of statutory annual accounting and governance statements found in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

As a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic the 2020/2021 Financial Year has been a very challenging and testing time for Parish Councillors and Clerks in trying to maintain the day to day administration and procedures relating to the Councils business.

The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2021

In response to the Coronavirus an amendment to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, having been made on 8th March was laid before Parliament on 9th March and having been approved came into force on 31st March 2021. The amendments to regulation 10 of the 2015 Regulations extend the deadline for relevant authorities to publish their statement of accounts and supporting documents (together with any certificate or opinion of the local auditor) in relation to the financial year beginning on 1st April 2020 from 31st July to 30th September 2021.

A further amendment to regulation 15 of the 2015 Regulations extends the deadline to commence the period for the exercise of public rights, so that the relevant period must commence on or before the first working day of August 2021. The draft accounts must therefore be approved by 31st August at the latest or earlier if possible.

Please note that due to the Coronavirus Pandemic it may not be possible to complete all the actions recommended in the Audit Report and/or Audit Plan.

Zoom Meetings

Under the Local Authorities were granted permission to allow members, the public and press to attend meetings remotely from 4th April 2020 for all smaller authorities and 1st August 2020 for Parish Meetings. The legislation only permits remote attendance at meetings held before 7th May 2021. **Therefore if no further legislation is passed in 2021 smaller authorities will/are not be able to hold virtual meetings after that date**

2020/2021 Internal Audit Procedure

As a result of the virus the procedure for completing the Internal Audit has once again been amended slightly in that the Audit has taken place in the confines of my home and

I would like to express my very sincere thanks to the Parish Clerk for her help in ensuring that I have received the relevant documents in order that the Internal Audit can take place.

New Practitioners Guide 2021

In response to issues raised by local Councils and others a major focus of the JPAG activity during 2020 has been to review the Best Practice Guidance for Internal Audit set out in Section 4, pages 23 to 33 of the Guide. It has been completely rewritten and now includes links to relevant information sources throughout. It is a regular use document rather than a once a year resource.

The 2021 edition of the Guide applies in respect of financial years commencing on or after 1st April 2021 with the 'proper practices' laid down in Sections 1 and 2 of the new Guide must be applied in the financial year ending 31st March 2022 as must the AGAR Form. The 'proper practices' in the new Guide may be applied in preparing the AGAR for the year ending 31st March 2021 but this is not mandatory.

Reviewing Internal Audit

Authorities should on an annual basis, carry out a review of the effectiveness of their overall internal audit arrangements. It should be designed to provide sufficient assurance for the authority that standards are being met and that the work of internal audit is effective. Authorities should judge the extent and scope of the review by reference to their own individual circumstances. Such a review should take place when a new Internal Auditor and/or the Responsible Financial Officer are appointed.

Parish Councils usually appoint a small Working Party to carry out the review and report back to full council. As with any review, it should be evidence based which should, if possible, be gathered throughout the year and may include the following:

- previous review and action plan;
- independence and competence of the Internal Auditor;
- annual report by internal audit;
- other reports from internal audit, including internal audit plan, monitoring reports, and the results of any investigations;
- relationships with the Clerk and the authority;
- any reports by the external auditor;
- the results of any other external reviews of internal control.

Details on how the review could take place is set out in the Practitioners Guide.

Internal Audit

Internal audit is a key component of the system of internal control and is considered to be an ongoing function reporting to the Parish Council once a year. The purpose of

internal audit is to review whether the systems of financial and other controls over a Parish Councils activities and operating procedures are effective. It is essential that the internal audit function is sufficiently independent of the other financial controls and procedures of the Council which are the subject of review.

Regulation 5(2) requires:

- (a) An officer or member of the relevant body to make available such documents and records as appear to be necessary for the purpose of audit: and
- (b) Supply the Internal Auditor with such information and explanation as is considered necessary for that purpose.

It is not a matter for the internal auditor, to actively seek evidence of fraud, corruption or error. The internal auditor's role is to assist the council in fulfilling its responsibility to have and maintain proper arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud, error or mistakes.

The internal audit is therefore based on the following two key aspects of the Council's procedures:

- ❖ Financial Regulations
- ❖ Risk Management

The Internal Audit, which took place on Thursday 15th April 2021, is based on the Internal Audit Plan, a copy of which is attached for members' information together with any relevant information outlined in the Practitioner's Guide. The Internal Audit Plan provides details of the Financial Regulations/Risk Management and other issues together with the compliance checks that were carried out.

This is my third report as your appointed Internal Auditor and I would once again like to place on record my sincere thanks to Christine Heath the Parish Council Clerk for her patience and co-operation in answering my questions and providing me with all the necessary information and documentation required to complete the audit.

Internal Audit – 2021

As referred to above the purpose of Internal Audit is to review whether the systems of financial and other controls over a councils activities and operating procedures are effective. My investigations were risk based, and included, as far as possible, examination of the council's administration and accounting procedures, such as income, payment and budgetary controls, VAT recording, claims and reconciliation, salary controls, bank reconciliation and the year-end procedures. The former included, where possible, the examination of documents, such as minutes, contracts together with the Financial Regulations, Standing Orders, Policies and Procedures and the Members Code of Conduct.

Despite the ongoing Pandemic I found the administration and procedures of the Council to be carefully planned, controlled and well documented with reports being presented to

the Council as deemed appropriate. In addition the Minutes provide a very factual and comprehensive record of the Councils activities with a clear indication of who is responsible for follow-up action. The actions of the Clerk, continues to provide a very reliable system producing comprehensive and informative minutes and reports, tight budgetary controls and a clear and concise audit trail. The ongoing administration of the tender documents and contracts, where applicable, continues to be well documented and monitored.

All Council meetings during the past year have taken place via Zoom. The following is a summary of the issues identified which I feel should be drawn to Councilors attention, none of which, in my opinion, affect the final outcome of the Internal Audit:

Budget Estimates 2021/2022 and Precept

The 2021/2022 Budget Estimates and the Parish Council's Precept in the sum of £9,500 was approved by the Council at its meeting on 18th January 2021. It is noted that the CIL funding received has or will be spent of projects within the confines of the parish.

Payment of Salaries

In accordance with guidance from HM Revenue and Customs, a Parish Clerk is recognized as an Office Holder and is subject to PAYE if necessary. It is noted that the Clerk declares her salary on a regular basis to the HMRC for information.

Asset and Investment Register

The Council is required to maintain an asset and investment register and in respect of the latter this is recognized and confirmed as the Council's Business Bank Account. I consider that the Council has adequate but not excessive reserves. The latest Register dated 31st March 2021, is reviewed by the Clerk on a regular basis with any additional assets being added and presented to meetings of the Council for approval.

Insurance

My examination has confirmed that insurance cover is still considered to be adequate and sufficient but needs to be kept under review in the light of any significant changes to the Parish Council's assets etc.

Risk Management

The greatest risk is not being able to deliver the activity or services expected of a Council. I therefore examined the Minutes and found no evidence to suggest that risks are not being identified and managed. The current Risk Management Assessment, dated 31st March 2021, has been reviewed and approved by Councillors. It will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Clerk with any required amendments being presented to a future meetings of the Council for consideration and approval.

Policies and Procedures

It is noted that the Council resolved that, following a review by the Clerk, all existing Policies and Procedures were sufficient for the needs of the Council and no amendments were required. A new Complaints Procedure, prepared by the Clerk will be presented to the Council at its meeting in May 2021 for approval and adoption. The Clerk will however inform the Council of any required amendments to the existing Policies and Procedures and/or new Policies required to reflect any future changes in legislation.

Revision of Financial Regulations(FR) and Standing Orders(SO)

It is noted that the Councils FR and SO were last approved in May 2019. The Clerk has now completed a comprehensive review of both the Council's SO and FR and revised documents amended to reflect any changes in legislation and/or regulations will be presented to the Council at its meeting in May 2021 for consideration, approval and adoption. The next review should be undertaken in May 2022.

Members Code of Conduct

Its purpose is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of the Council. A revised Code of Conduct for Members was approved by the Council at its meeting held on 15th May 2019. The Clerk has continued to review the Code and a revised document amended to reflect any changes in legislation and/or regulations will be presented to the Council at its meeting in May 2021 for consideration, approval and adoption. The next review should take place once the revised Code, referred to below, has been published.

The LGA is to develop a new Model Code of Conduct for Councillors. This is in response to the recommendations made in the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report published in 2019, and in response to rising local government concern about the increasing incidence of public, member-to-member and officer/member intimidation and abuse, overall behavioural standards and expectations in public debate, decision making and engagement.

NALC's aim was to launch a revised code at their annual conference scheduled to take place at the end of June 2020 but this has now be deferred to a late date.

Internal Audit Statement

I am satisfied that the Parish Council has put in place safe and efficient arrangements and maintains robust controls on payments as an integrated part of the overall financial control system.

Subject to the comments above and agreed actions, I am therefore pleased to report that no matter has come to my attention that requires further investigation and report to

the Parish Council or that gives me reasonable cause to believe that the requirements for adequate control and monitoring as outlined in the regulations have not been met. In addition there are no matters that have come to my attention, concerning the effectiveness of the system of internal control, to which members' attention should be drawn.

In conclusion I consider that, within the Parish Council, the management of processes by the Clerk and Councillors is continuing to be well controlled and monitored.

During this testing and challenging time I wish the Parish Clerk and Councillors all the very best but more importantly please keep safe and well.

Signed: *David R Weller*

David R Weller DMA, HNC/ONC
Internal Auditor

Date: 16th April 2021