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INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

TO THE MEMBERS OF **BREAGE PARISH COUNCIL**
YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

ISSUE DATE: 19/04/2024

Overview of internal audit:

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, internal controls and governance process.

The scope of the audit covers the areas included in the Internal Audit Report contained in the Annual Governance & Accountability Return.

It should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The internal audit does not involve the detailed inspection of all records and transactions and therefore it does not guarantee that the accounting records are free from fraud or errors.

Comments:

I would like to express my thanks to the Clerk, Mrs Carol Macleod, for her assistance and co-operation during the audit.

Objectives of the internal audit:

AGAR Certificate reference

A. Appropriate accounting records have been kept throughout the year and periodic bank reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.

Ensure the correct roll forward of the prior year cashbook balances to the new financial year.

All balances have been brought forward correctly.

Check a sample of financial transactions in cashbooks to bank statements etc: the sample size dependent on the size of authority and nature of accounting records maintained.

The accounts are maintained in Scribe accounting software, they were up to date and appeared free from material errors. A sample of payments was tested to establish whether required controls had been applied and Vat had been accurately recorded.

Ensure the bank reconciliations are prepared routinely, are subject to independent scrutiny and signed-off by members.

Monthly bank reconciliations have been produced throughout the year and have been reviewed/checked by a member.

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, line 8).

The year-end reconciliation was found to be accurate with no “balancing” entries or old unrepresented payments.

Where the authority has bank balances in excess of £100,000 it has an appropriate investment strategy.

The Investment Strategy is not in place.

- Recommendation: It is recommended to implement appropriate investment strategy as Council’s balances are in excess of £100,000.

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

Review the procedures in place for acquisition of formal tenders and quotes, ensuring they are in line with the SOs and the FRs which should be based in the latest version.

Financial Regulations and Standing Orders based on the model documentation are in place. Both documents were reviewed in October 2023.

- Recommendation: New NALC Model Financial Regulations should be available anytime soon.

Ensure the consistent values are in place for the acquisition of formal tenders between SOs and FRs (frequently different limits are recorded in the two documents).

Testing revealed no issues.

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 evidence of these checks and payment authorisation.

All invoices appeared to be checked by Clerk and signed/authorised prior to the payment.

Check that there is effective segregation between the writing of cheques or the setting up of online payments, and physical release of payments.

A sample of payments was tested to establish whether required controls had been applied and Vat had been accurately recorded. The Council uses online transactions as the main form of payments. The list of Council’s direct debits/standing orders is annually reviewed by the members. Invoices are supported by a payment list which goes along with the meeting minutes.

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.

VAT claims are up to date.

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 cards are in place.

Testing revealed no issues, it has been noted that debit card is in use by the Clerk with £500 limit, spending is checked by member monthly as a part of internal controls.

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

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.

The Council reviewed its Financial Risk Assessments in April 2024.

Ensure that appropriate levels of insurance cover are in place for land, buildings, public, employers and hirers liability, fidelity/employees' liability, business interruption and cyber security.

Insurance cover in place. Fidelity Guarantee was slightly inadequate at £150,000 to compare to Council reserves.

- It is recommended to increase the Fidelity Guarantee limit, so it is adequate.

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.

Inspections of play areas, open spaces and sport pitches are carried out by appropriately qualified inspectors.

Review the effectiveness of internal control carried out by the authority.

Testing revealed no issues.

D. The Precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process, progress against the budget was regularly monitored: and reserves are appropriate.

Ensure that the full Authority, not a Committee, has considered, approved and adopted the annual precept in accordance with the required parent Authority timetable.

The Full Council approved the annual precept at the meeting on 17 November 2022. Setting up process and budget monitoring has been carried out in order with Financial Regulations.

Ensure that budget reports are prepared and submitted to Authority/Committees periodically during the year with appropriate commentary on any significant variances.

Budget monitoring activity has occurred regularly throughout the year which has been presented and minuted in Clerk's financial report to the Council.

Review the budget performance either during the year or at the financial year-end seeking explanations for any significant or unanticipated variances.

Variance report has been checked and all items have explanation.

Ensure that the Authority has considered the establishment of specific earmarked reserves and, ideally, reviews them annually as part of the budget assessment process.

Earmarked reserves in place.

- Recommendation: It is recommended to establish a general reserve policy detailing the minimum levels required as per practitioner's guide.

Ensure that the precept in the accounts matches the submission form to the relevant authority and the public record of precepted amounts.

The precept received is in accord with that approved by Council.

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

Review "Aged debtor" listings to ensure appropriate follow up action is in place.

Not applicable.

Allotments: ensure that appropriate signed tenancy agreements exist, that an appropriate register of tenants is maintained identifying, that debtors are monitored.

Not applicable.

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).

The formal burial register is maintained and up to date, fees are in place and copies of Burial/Cremation certificates are retained.

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.

Not applicable.

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.

Not applicable.

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.

Testing revealed no issues.

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.

Testing revealed no issues.

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

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 covered" response is frequently required in this area.

Petty cash in use, stored in the safe.

Review the systems in place for controlling any petty cash and also cash floats (used for bar, catering, etc).

Testing revealed no issues.

Check a sample of transactions during the financial year to ensure appropriate supporting documentation is held.

Testing revealed no issues.

Review the existence of evidenced periodic independent verification of the petty cash and any other cash floats held.

Testing revealed no issues.

Ensure that VAT is identified wherever incurred and appropriate.

Testing revealed no issues.

Physically check the petty cash and other cash floats held.

Testing revealed no issues.

Where bar or catering facilities are in place, ensure that appropriate cashing-up procedures are in place reconciling physical cash takings to the till "Z" total readings.

Not applicable.

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

Ensure that, for all staff, a formal employment contract is in place together with a confirmatory letter setting out any changes to the contract.

Employment contracts in place.

Ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for the payment of members allowances and deduction of any tax liability.

Testing revealed no issues.

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 also with the contracted hours.

Tax, National Insurance and Pension deductions have been properly applied and paid over to the relevant authority in a timely manner. A sample of payroll was tested and revealed no issues.

Ensure that appropriate tax codes are being applied to each employee.

Testing revealed no issues.

Where free or paid for software is used, ensure that it is up to date.

Testing revealed no issues.

For the test sample of employees, ensure that tax is calculated appropriately.

Testing revealed no issues.

Check the correct treatment of Pension contributions.

Testing revealed no issues.

**For NI, ensure that the correct deduction and employer's contributions are applied: .
The employer's allowance is not available to councils but may be used by other
authorities,**

Testing revealed no issues.

Ensure that the correct employers' pension percentage contribution is being applied.

Testing revealed no issues.

**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.**

Testing revealed no issues.

***H. Asset and investment registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained. This
section / assurance should be extended to include loans to or by the authority.***

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.**

Asset register list was last updated in March 2024 to reflect acquisitions during the year and
total value of assets held has been accurately disclosed in AGAR.

**Physically verifying the existence and condition of high value, high risk assets may be
appropriate.**

Testing revealed no issues (Parish Rooms/Office).

**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.**

Testing revealed no issues.

**Additions and disposals records should allow tracking from the prior year to the
current.**

Testing revealed no issues.

Ensure that the asset value to be reported in the AGAR at 30 Section 2, line 9 equates to the prior year reported value, adjusted for the nominal value of any new acquisitions and / or disposals.

Testing revealed no issues.

Compare the asset register with the insurance schedule to ensure that all assets as recorded are appropriately insured or “self-insured” by the Authority.

Testing revealed no issues.

Fixed Assets 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, line 9.

Not applicable.

Borrowing and Lending

Ensure that the authority has sought and obtained appropriate DMO approval for all loans acquired.

Testing revealed no issues. It has been noted that during the year the Council took a new loan of £20,000 over five years for the purpose of purchasing additional land in order to extend Breage Parish Council Cemetery.

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.

Testing revealed no issues.

Ensure that the combined principal loan repayment and interest for the year is correctly recorded in the AGAR at Section 2, line 5.

Testing revealed no issues.

Ensure that the outstanding loan liability as at 31st March each year is correctly recorded in the AGAR at Section 2, line 10 (value should be verified via the DMO website).

Testing revealed no issues.

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.

Not applicable.

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

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.

The accounts were produced on receipts and payments basis and were in accordance with underlying records.

Ensure that appropriate accounting arrangements are in place to account for debtors and creditors during the year and at the financial year-end.

Not applicable.

K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in the prior year, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt.

Ensure the correct exemption certificate was prepared and minuted in accordance with the statutory submission deadline.

Not applicable.

Ensure that exemption certificate has been published, together with all required information on the Authority's website and noticeboard.

Not applicable.

L. The authority publishes information on a free to access website / web page, up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Review the Authority's website ensuring that all required documentation is published in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The Council publishes information on a free to access website that is up to date at the time of the internal audit and provides information that would reasonably be expected to be there.

M. The authority has, during the previous year, correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

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 and also check whether council have minuted the relevant dates at the same time as approving the AGAR.

The Council met its obligations under the Accounts & Audit Regulations 2015 in respect of advertising the public rights to inspect the accounts.

N. The authority complied with the publication requirements for the prior year AGAR.

Ensure that the statutory disclosure / publication requirements in relation to the prior year's AGAR have been met as detailed on the front page of the current year's AGAR.

The opportunity for electors to examine the accounts was properly advertised and the publication requirements in respect of the 2022/23 accounts were met.

O. Trust funds (including charitable) - the Council has met its responsibilities as a trustee.

Confirm that all charities of which the council is a Trustee are up to date with CC filing requirements.

Confirms that the council is the sole trustee on the Charity Commission register.

Confirm that that the council is acting in accordance with the Trust deed.

Confirm that the Charity meetings and accounts 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 Examiners report.

Testing revealed no issues. The parish council is sole managing trustee for the playing field. The parish council has a separate bank account for the playing field. However, the council is contributing towards the costs of the upkeep of the community asset.

Other Matters

The above enabled me to complete the internal audit section of the AGAR and there are no additional matters to bring to the attention of the Council.

End of report.

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