

Warminster Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2024/25 (Interim update)

Chris Hackett

*For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background and Scope

The Accounts and Audit Regulations require all Town and Parish Councils to implement an independent internal audit examination of their Accounts and accounting processes annually. The Council has complied with the requirements in terms of independence from its decision-making process appointing Auditing Solutions Ltd to provide the function.

This report details the work undertaken for our 2024/25 interim review which took place on the 16th January 2025 together with our preparatory work. We wish to thank the Officers for providing all the requested documents to facilitate the completion of our work. This Report will be updated following our final review which will follow the contract accountant's closure of the Council's Accounts for the financial year.

Internal Audit Approach

In commencing our review for the year, we have again had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential miss-recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The latter is a statutory return provided to the External Auditor.

Our programme of cover has been designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems remain 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 'Internal Audit Report' which forms part of the Council's AGAR and requires that we give independent assurance over specified internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

Based on our work completed to date, the Council continues to operate reasonable control systems that should help ensure that transactions are recorded accurately in the financial ledger and subsequently, the Statement of Accounts and AGAR. Our detailed findings are set out in the following sections.

We request this report is presented to Members.

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Detailed report

Accounting Records and Bank Reconciliations

The Council uses the Rialtas accounts software, with external contractors (DCK Beavers Ltd) preparing the accounts from detailed records maintained by the officers. A single combined cashbook for the Current & Instant Access bank accounts, operated at HSBC, remains in place.

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. At this stage of our review we have:

- Checked and agreed the opening Trial Balance in the Rialtas software for 2024/25 to the closing financial records for 2023/2024 to ensure that all balances have been properly rolled forward;
- Verified that an appropriate cost and nominal ledger coding structure remains in place;
- Confirmed the accounting system remained in balance at the date of our review by running a data check to confirm the trial balance agreed to the nominal ledger (the main accounting record);
- Confirmed the External Auditor raised no issues on the 2023/24 accounts requiring our follow-up;
- As a sample, checked and agreed one month's transactions in the cashbook (November 2024) to the bank statements, including the regular "sweep" transfers to maintain the current account balance at a constant £5,000;
- Checked and agreed the software based bank reconciliations as at 31st October and 30th November 2024 confirming there were no long standing, un-cleared adjustments or any other abnormal entries arising; and
- Confirmed Member oversight of the accounts and bank reconciliations which is done primarily by the Finance and Audit Committee.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues arise in this area currently. The Accounts are in balance and reconciled regularly with no anomalous entries in the reconciliation.

We shall undertake further work in this area at our final visit, including checking one further month's transactions and ensuring the accurate disclosure of the combined year-end cash and bank balances in the year's Accounts and AGAR.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has robust corporate governance documentation and processes in place and that, as far as we may reasonably be expected to ascertain (as we do not attend Council or Committee meetings), all meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders. We note that:

- Full Council adopted the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations at their meeting in May 2024;
- Details of payments are posted monthly onto the Council's website in the Policies and Financial Information section;
- Full Council agreed to renew the General Power of Competence at their meeting in May 2021; and
- Following approval of the 2023/24 Accounts the Council advertised their availability for public inspection by publishing the notice of Public Rights.

Further we have commenced our examination of the minutes of the Full Council and its extant Committee meetings (except for Planning) as posted on the Website.

Conclusions

No matters have been identified in this area from our work to date. We shall extend our review of minutes at our final visit and report our conclusions accordingly. We note the officers plan to bring revised financial regulations for approval by Members next May taking account of recent advice and model guidance issued by NALC.

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;
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and coded to the control account for periodic recovery.

We discussed with officers the controls over the authorization of payments. We consider the controls to be suitable. To gain assurance in this area we have tested a sample of payments examining all those individually in excess of £3,500, together with a more random sample of every 40th cash book transaction to the end of November 2024. Our test sample comprised 54 cash book payments plus the monthly payments for non-domestic rates and totaled £308,061 representing 41% of non-payroll costs for the year to 30th November. Payments were supported by suitable documentation.

The Council tendered a contract for the installation of play equipment reporting the results in January 2024, with the installation in 2024/25. We reviewed the report by the Tender Evaluation Team and confirmed suitable bids were received.

We have reviewed the VAT control account on the Rialtas system noting that returns continue to be prepared and submitted quarterly. We have verified the first two quarterly reclaims for 2024/25 to the underlying control account records checking the funds were recovered and confirmed the VAT due to be recovered at the 31st March 2024 has also been reclaimed in the current financial year.

Conclusions

No issues arise from our work in this area. At our final visit we shall complete an overall analytical review of year-end expenditure querying any unusual trends.

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:

- Noted the Council approved its risk assessment for 2024/25 at its meeting in May 2024. The Council's risk assessment matrix includes a large range of risks including financial ones;
- Reviewed the current insurance policy provided by Aviva which runs to November 2025, cover includes:
 - Buildings and property insurance;
 - Business interruption insurance;
 - Employer's liability £10m;
 - Public liability £10m; and
 - Internal crime cover of £999,000, subject to an excess of £10,000.

We note the Council has separate insurance for events; and

- Noted the Council continues to undertake weekly safety inspections of play equipment supplemented by an annual check by RoSPA.

Conclusions

No issues arise to date in this area of our work. The Council has arrangements for managing risk.

Review of Income

Our objective here is to ensure that robust procedures are in place to ensure that all income due to the Council is identified and invoiced (where applicable) with recovery effected within a reasonable time span. In addition to the precept the Council receives various grants and income from lettings and service provision. At this review we have considered the latest budget report and tested as follows, specifically we:

- Agreed the 2024/25 precept as recorded in the minutes to the amounts receipted into the Cash Book and to remittance advices from Wiltshire Council;
- Tested income from the Lettings of Council rooms. We tested two bookings arising in October selecting from the electronic diary, confirming the use was invoiced at the rates published on the Council website and that the income was recorded in the Rialtas Ledger. For one booking an up to date booking agreement could not be located. As it was an on-going user the Officer agreed to send out a copy of the terms and condition and further to check that no other ones were missing;
- Test checked cash sheets from October in relation to the Pavilion Café, confirming they were signed by officers, that a till roll was attached and checking the income to the bank paying in book, or in the case of card payments to the World Pay reports. Officers have decided to introduce an additional spreadsheet record to make it easier to trace from the cash sheets through to the Rialtas accounts;
- Tested the receipt of CIL of £36,169.36. received in October 2024 to the remittance advice from Wiltshire Council;
- Reviewed the unpaid invoices report on Rialtas noting there were no material aged debts; and
- As noted earlier in this report, we have tested one sample month's receipt transactions from the cashbook to the bank statements with no issues arising.

Conclusions

The Council has systems in place to manage and monitor income. We will review income further at the final visit.

Petty Cash Account and Floats

The Internal Audit Report within the AGAR requires that we comment on arrangements for managing petty cash. The Council continues to operate a petty scheme with an Excel control sheet forming the basis of the periodic re-imbursement to the agreed maximum holding level of £250. We have:

- Reviewed the summary petty cash sheets and test checked the payments in October 2024 to the supporting vouchers;
- Noted that petty cash schedules are reported periodically to Members; and
- Agreed the physical cash held on the day of our visit to the accounting record.

Conclusion

No issues arise 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 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 in relation to the employees' contribution bandings.

We note that Wiltshire Council processes the payroll with officers checking and authorizing the amounts paid. We tested transactions in December 2024 as a sample month. Specifically, we have:

- Sample tested for five staff the calculation of PAYE and employees NI contributions;
- Sample checked the calculation of employee pension deductions;
- Agreed net pay per the summary report to the Rialtas Cash Book;
- For one officer checked their pay to their contract of employment;
- Test checked the application of the national pay award; and
- Commenced a month-on-month trend analysis of payroll costs to identify any material changes, should they occur, in payroll.

Conclusions

No issues have arisen from our review of a sample of payroll transactions. We will complete our month-on-month trend analysis of payroll costs to the year end at our final visit.

Investment 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 and that interest earned is brought to account correctly and appropriately in the accounting records. We also aim to ensure that any loan repayments due to or payable by the Council are transacted in accordance with appropriate loan agreements.

The Council has invested funds in the CCLA. We obtained the CCLA statement for 5th December 2024 agreeing the reported balance to the Rialtas Ledger.

We note the Council readopted its updated Treasury Management Policy in May 2024.

We also note the existence of a PWLB loan and have agreed the repayment made in September 2024 to the PWLB statement.

Conclusions

No issues arise in this area currently. We shall check movements on loans and investments at our final visit and confirm they are correctly disclosed in the year end accounts and AGAR by reference to third party statements.