

Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of

Dordon Parish Council

1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/>.

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2024; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors

2 External auditor limited assurance opinion 2023/24

Except for the matters report below on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with the Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

The internal auditor has provided a 'yes' response at control objective K on their report. This suggests that the council correctly claimed exemption from audit in the previous (2022/23) year. As the council was not exempt and did not claim exemption, the answer to this point should have been 'not covered'. We note that this is a repeat issue so please could this be brought to the Internal Auditor's attention.

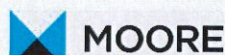
The internal auditor has provided a 'Yes' response at control objectives L and N on their report. This suggests that the Council correctly published all relevant documents on its website. As the Council currently has not published the audited 2022-23 return following amendments made during the 2022/23 limited assurance review, the answer to these points should have been 'No'.

3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

We certify/~~do not certify~~* that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2024.

*We do not certify completion because:

External Auditor Name



External Auditor Signature

Date

17/09/2024



Dordon Parish Council

External Auditor Report & Certificate 2023/24

Continuation Sheet

Section 14(1) of the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2015 requires the period of public rights should be a 'single period of 30 working days'. The Council provided a period of 21 working days in 2023/24 for the review of their records. Furthermore, the inspection period for the exercise of electors' rights provided in respect of the 2023/24 AGAR does not include the first ten working days of July as specified in the Accounts and Audit Regulations, Part 15 (1). These points are a breach of the regulations, and we would anticipate the Council taking this into account when it completes Assertion 4 on its 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement. In future the council should ensure that it calculates and provides a period of precisely 30 working days that includes the first ten working days of July.

It was noted on review that the announcement of the Period for Public Rights was the same date as the approval of Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. Regulations 12 – 15 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 set out the order required to be followed when approving, announcing and publishing the Return and related documents in order to satisfy the Public Rights requirements. The Return must be approved prior to the Notice being published. To be able to demonstrate this, best practice is that the Notice is published no sooner than the day following the approval meeting and the Public Rights period commences no sooner than the next working day after that.

The Council recorded on the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) that it approved Section 1 of the AGAR after Section 2 which would be a breach of Section 6(4)(a) of The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which requires Section 1 to be approved in advance of Section 2. On review of the minutes where the approval of the AGAR took place, it was noted that the meeting, and therefore the approval of Sections 1 and 2, was held on 25/07/2024 and not 24/07/2024 as it was recorded on Section 2. Therefore, Section 1 was correctly approved prior to Section 2 but Section 2 was dated incorrectly. The Council should take care when completing these forms. We would anticipate this being taken into consideration when completing Assertion 3 of Section 1 of the 2024/25 form.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return was completed as approved with a minute reference 577. This minute reference has been mis-reported and should be 177. We would expect this to be considered when providing the council's responses to Assertion 3 on the 2024/25 return and any future minute references to be correctly reported.

Although trivial, there is a £1 difference between the carried forward figure (box 7) for 2023 and the brought forward figure (box 1) for 2024. In future, the Council should take care in ensuring these figures agree as required by paragraph 2.11 of the Practitioners Guide 2023.

Section 2 of the AGAR was initially submitted without the Trust Fund disclosures in Box 11a and Box 11b completed. This was later resubmitted with a 'No' answer to Box 11a and 'N/A' answer to Box 11b which was in line with our expectations. Whilst this was amended with no further concerns, a similar issue was also raised on the prior year's External Audit Report and hence this issue was not appropriately actioned. The Council therefore should have answered 'No' to Assertion 7 of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return which relates to taking appropriate action on matters reported from internal and external audit.

We identified during our initial review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return that Box 9 of the prior year column (2022/23) on Section 2 - Accounting Statements has been restated. This was in order to remove the estimated value of the village hall which should not have been included. However, the column has not been marked as 'Restated' to bring it to the attention of the reader.

A review of the Council's website has identified that the Council does not appear to have fully met the requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Regulation 13 (1) which states that the final audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return should, on conclusion of the audit, be available for public access, which includes publication on the Council's website. The Council amended Section 2 of their 2022/23 return year during the 2022/23 review process however only the original version of the return is visible on the Council's website. In addition, it appears that the 2023 notice of conclusion has not been published as is required by regulation 16 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Council should bring these points into line with the regulations as soon as practically possible.

The AGAR was not approved until after 30 June 2024 which is a breach of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. We would expect Assertion 3 to reflect this on 2024/25 AGAR.
