

Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate 2022/23

In respect of

Watlington Parish Council

1 Respective responsibilities of the body and the auditor

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 2023; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors

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Except for the matters reported 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.

The published Notice of Public Rights requires the name, position and contact details of the person placing the notice, usually the RFO, to be entered at line 2(b) on the form to satisfy the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Paragraph 15(2)(b). The Council should ensure this is completed in the future.

The Council has answered 'Yes' to Assertion 4 of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return which relates to how the Notice of Public Rights was advertised within the financial year 2022-23. Therefore, it relates to the Notice announcing the public right to review the 2021-22 return which was published during 2022-23. As noted in our Auditor Report last year, this notice was not correctly advertised therefore this question should have been answered 'No'

The Council has responded 'Yes' to Assertion 5 on the Annual Governance Statement, which is an annual statement meaning it has considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly. Whilst performing intermediate review testing, it has been reported that the council has not reviewed its Risk Register since November 2021. Whilst it is not anticipated such a register be re-written annually, an annual review to ensure the register is still relevant and appropriate to the risks faced by the council is required to satisfy this assertion and therefore we would have anticipated the council to have answered 'No'. The Council have explained that they are in the process of updating their risk register and therefore we expect no further concerns in this area.

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

Section 2 of the AGAR was initially submitted without the Trust Funds disclosure in Box 11a completed. This was later resubmitted with a 'Yes' answer which was in line with our expectations and so there are no further concerns in this area.

The Council originally answered 'N/A' to Box 11b of Section 2 of the AGAR however this is inconsistent with the 'Yes' answer given in Box 11a. On review, it has been confirmed that the Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return does not include any income and expenditure transactions which relate to the Trust it is sole trustee for. The form has been initially amended incorrectly to show a 'No' response and then correctly to show a 'Yes' response and we consider that there is no further impact from this inconsistency.

The Internal Auditor has answered 'Yes' to Control Objective M of their report despite the council providing a period of 31 working days for the Notice of Public Rights during the financial year 2022-23 which does not accord with the mandatory 30 working days as set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Paragraph 14(1). We would therefore have anticipated this response to have been 'No'.

Incomplete information was provided with the initial supporting data submitted for review with regards to significant variances, which was later provided on request. The parish council should in future ensure that all the necessary supporting information is provided with their annual submission.

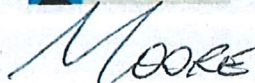
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We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2023.

External Auditor Name

 **MOORE**

External Auditor Signature



Date

28/09/2023