

Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of

Upper Heyford 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:

Boxes 1-6 of Section 2 of the AGAR do not arithmetically add down to Box 7 by £1 when summed. When rounding the numbers for the Return care should be taken to ensure boxes 1-6 sum to box 7 in accordance with Paragraph 2.19 of JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2023 and that box 7 agrees or reconciles to box 8 as is required per Paragraph 2.23 of JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2023.

The Council's name was not entered on Section 2 of the Annual Return on the initial submission. We consider the omission to be trivial, however, the Parish Council should take care to ensure the form is fully completed in the future to ensure full compliance with the regulations and code of practice.

The Internal Auditor has signed off the Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24 after the Section 1 Governance Statement 2023/24 was approved. As the completed 2023/24 report was not available for review and consideration with the form, it is presumed that the Assertions in Section 1: Annual Governance Statement refer to the previous year's internal audit report and to other checks performed by the Council.

Last year the External Audit Report noted that the Notice of Public Rights had an inspection period of 31 days which is more than the mandatory 30 days. Therefore, we expected a 'No' response to control objective M on the Annual Internal Audit Report.

Incomplete information was provided with the initial supporting data submitted for review, most of which was later provided on request with some items still outstanding. The parish council should in future ensure that all the necessary supporting information is provided with their annual submission.

The Council originally completed the wrong AGAR form; a form 2PM was used and then a form 3PM was used however these forms should only be used by Parish Meetings therefore Section 1 on a Form 3 was required and this was later submitted by the Council.

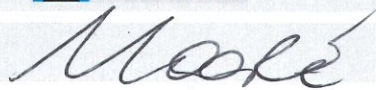
3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

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 2024.

External Auditor Name

 **MOORE**

External Auditor Signature



Date

20/09/2024



Upper Heyford Parish Council

External Auditor Report & Certificate 2023/24

Continuation Sheet

Box 11a on Section 2 of the AGAR was initially submitted with a 'N/A' response, however this is not a response that is available to be given. Section 2 was then resubmitted with a 'Yes' response to 11a. Given the Council are not a sole trustee, the response to this box should have been 'No'.

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 published Notice of Public Rights requires the name, position and contact details of the person to contact to exercise public rights, 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), suggesting that public rights have not been properly provided. The Council should ensure this is fully completed in the future. We would expect Assertion 4 to reflect this on 2024/25 AGAR.

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 2023-24. Therefore, it relates to the Notice announcing the public right to review the 2022-23 return which was published during 2023-24. As noted in the Auditor Report last year, this notice was not correctly advertised therefore this Assertion should have been answered 'No'. This 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.

The council has recorded a 'Yes' response at Assertion 1 effectively reporting that it has put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The external auditor noted on the 2022/23 external audit report that they expected to see the prior year column of the 2023/24 AGAR (2022/23 figures) should be amended due to the Box 6 amount not excluding the salary amount in Box 4, causing Boxes 1-6 to not add down to Box 7. Therefore, Assertion 1 of Section 1 should have been answered 'No'.

The Internal Auditor noted in their report, that although a budget had been prepared for 2024, progress was not monitored against it as required by paragraph 1.8 of JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2023. Therefore, since this is a breach of proper practices, we would have expected Assertion 3 on the Annual Governance Statement to be answered 'No'. The Council should note this action and ensure that it is done in regards to future periods.

Following a review of the minutes, due to the references at Section 1 and Section 2 being the same, it was noted that the minutes do not appear to approve the Annual Governance and Accountability Report. It is the requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 that Section 1 and Section 2 are both approved in a specific order. We would expect to see this rectified during the approval process for the 2024-25 return and we would anticipate this being taken into consideration when completing Assertion 3 of Section 1 of the 2024-25 form.

Section 16(1) of the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2015 requires the Notice of Conclusion of Audit to be published on the authority's website. In future, the Council should ensure that this notice is available on their website alongside the signed external audit report and the audited AGAR.
