



Skipton Town Council

Internal Audit Report

Covering Dates between April 2024 and June 2024 for Audit trail

Provided by: Account-ant Yorkshire Limited

For: Chief Officer & Finance Manager

Date Issued: 14th August 2024

Where information resulting from investigation and/or audit work is made public or is provided to a third party by the client or by Account-ant Yorkshire Limited then this must be done on the understanding that any third party will rely on the information at its own risk. Account-ant Yorkshire Limited will not owe a duty of care or assume any responsibility towards anyone other than the client in relation to the information supplied. Equally, no third party may assert any rights or bring any claims against Account-ant Yorkshire Limited in connection with the information. Where information is provided to a named third party, the third party will keep the information confidential.

Introduction & Scope

- I. Local councils in England must complete an Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) which includes an Annual Governance Statement, Accounting Statements, and an Annual Internal Audit report.
- II. Proper practices for Town Councils and the preparation of the AGAR is included in Joint Panel on Accountability & Governance (Practitioner's Guide) March 2024. A copy of which can be found on nalc.gov.uk
- III. Internal Audit is a key component of the council's system of internal control. The purpose of internal audit is to review and report to the council whether its systems of financial and other internal controls and procedures are effective.
- IV. As part of the AGAR, the council's internal auditor, acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carries out assessments of compliance with relevant procedures and controls in operation throughout the financial year.
- V. Our work with Skipton Town Council commenced on 7th May 2022. The current year audit was held partially remotely with an on-site visit 13th August 2024.
- VI. All aspects of internal audit were covered.

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About Account-ant Yorkshire Limited

Skipton Town Council has appointed Account-ant Yorkshire Limited with the view to complete Interim and Year End Internal Audits for the Council.

Account-ant Yorkshire Limited is an Accountancy Practice owned and run by Rachel Pearson who is a CIMA Qualified Management Accountant and Member in Practice. She has been fully qualified for over 10 years and been in a finance role for over 20 years.

Rachel started of Town and Parish Council Audits in 2018 and has gained a vast amount of knowledge and experience in the subsequent years.

The Auditor for the period April 2024 – March 2025 is Rachel Pearson ACMA (MiP)

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Summary

I have reviewed a wide range of documentation including documentation provided by the Finance Manager and Chief Officer as well as the Town Council website.

I completed an on-site visit for Interim Audit on 13th August 2024. My Primary contact on visits being the Finance Manager, Helen Marshall.

I have met all other members of the team working in the Council offices on previous occasions and some during this visit.

Helen, Louise and colleagues have been open and clear with regards any queries I have made. The team have been thorough and knowledgeable when met with queries.

Having reviewed the Council, I believe they are at a High standard whilst there is always room for continuous improvement even in a High standard Town Council.

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Findings

Proper Bookkeeping

Skipton Town Council uses an Accounting System called Rialtas to record all its financial transactions. The system is arithmetically correct. Monthly Reconciliations are undertaken as a minimum however the finance department often reconcile on a daily basis. These reports are subsequently presented to the Finance & Policy Committee.

We have reviewed a sample of income and expenditure, tracing the transaction through to the bank or credit card statement and purchase orders where appropriate. Please see the recommendations section for our findings

Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

Standing orders and Financial Regulations were agreed at Full Council in May 2024. The Standing Orders had a slight amendment with regards the replacement of "District Council" with "North Yorkshire County Council". The Financial Regulations with adopted without amendment.

Both are easily accessible on the website:

Financial Regulations:

https://www.skiptontowncouncil.gov.uk/_UserFiles/Files/NALC%20model%20financial%20regulations%202024.pdf

Standing Orders:

https://www.skiptontowncouncil.gov.uk/_UserFiles/Files/Standing-orders%202024-25.pdf

Documentation Readoption by Finance & Policy Committee

We have observed The Finance and Scrutiny Committee choosing policies to scrutinise in their meeting. This is evidence of policies being reviewed on a regular basis

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Payment Controls

Staffing

The Finance Department as of March 2024 comprised of the Chief Officer and Finance Manager. Each employee has an up to date job description and has been appointed with specific duties.

There is also a Deputy Clerk.

Purchases above De Minimus

The Financial Regulations state that any contract over £3,000 will require 3 quotes to be obtained by the Clerk or RFO and for any amount over £100 they shall strive to receive 3 quotes.

Two items over the DeMinimus were observed. They have the appropriate number of quotes and signed Purchase Orders.

Sample Review

The Auditor reviewed a sample of purchase and sales invoices. All items were found to have an audit trail and were authorised.

A list of payments are provided to Full Council at each meeting where payments are agreed.

Payments are not listed in minutes as per point 4.1 of the Financial Regulations States. "Such authority is to be evidenced by a minute or an authorisation slip duly signed by the Clerk, and where necessary also by the Chairman as appropriate"

Payments are supported by purchase order, invoice and bank authorisation. Please see the recommendations section for my comments

VAT reporting

Vat returns observed. Auditor satisfied the Council are reporting VAT correctly. It has also recently come to the attention of the Council that VAT is not chargeable on "Permission to Trade" – this has been confirmed in writing by NAMBA

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S137 Expenditure

The Council has General Power of Competence and therefore is not required to report S137 expenditure separately.

As the Council has General Power of Competence they cannot use the S137 Power

Risk Management Arrangements

Risk Assessments

It has been noted that the documentation was approved at Full Council in May 2024.

The document approved has been observed and we have made some observations which can be found in the recommendation section of this report.

Burial Authorities

Skipton Town Council is a burial authority for 3 closed burial grounds. One is at Trinity Church and the other at Raikes Road which is managed and assessed by "Friends of Raikes Road" and Christ Church.

Unusual Financial Activity

The minutes and accounts have been reviewed for unusual financial activity and none has been identified.

Insurance Cover

The council is covered by Hiscox from 2021 until the policy is ended by council on a rolling 12 month basis. The policy is comprehensive.

Internal Controls

Internal Controls observed to be working and sufficient in general.

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The internal control checklist has been reviewed for its effectiveness and found to be sufficient – the only change being a change to the wording relating to payments as cheques are only written in relation to petty cash float.

Investments

The Council does not hold any investments

GDPR

The GDPR policy forms part of the Privacy Policy and is appropriate.

Budgetary Controls

Budget Preparation

The normal process is as follows:

“Each year the Council undertakes an extensive budget process. This starts with a draft budget being reviewed, line by line by the Finance & Policy Committee. The process starts in October. Once the Finance & Policy Committee are in agreement with the budget it is given to Full Council for review and/or agreement in January of each year.”

Only once the budget is agreed Full Council will the precept be requested from North Yorkshire.

The Finance Manager also produces a Forecast for the rest of the year.

The Budget has been reviewed and found to be in order – we note some income is conservative in estimates, however, they are not guaranteed income.

Budget Reviews

The Finance Committee reviews the actual versus budget quarterly. Evidence of this is seen in the Finance Committee meeting minutes.

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Budget Variances

Variances to budget were observed and found to be reasonable

Income Controls

Precept

The precept reviewed matches the request sent to North Yorkshire County Council who do not provide a notification.

Cash and Near Cash Security

The Council holds a small amount of petty cash which is located in the new offices in Otley Street. Cash from market traders is banked daily, apart from the weekend when it is put in the safe.

If any member of staff needs to go into the safe then they are accompanied by another member of staff which is most often a member of the Finance Department.

The Mayoral chains are located in this safe. The buddying system has been deemed sufficient in the absence of CCTV.

This system is still continuing well.

Multipay Card/Credit Card

The Council has a Credit card which is used sparingly for office and small general purchases. Purchase Orders are raised and signed by the RFO.

We reviewed every PO relating to the card income during this Audit and found some items to note which I have noted in the recommendation section.

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Payroll Controls

Staffing

All members of staff have current job descriptions and terms and conditions. The council also has an annual appraisal process.

Payroll Processing

Payroll is processed in house using Sage Payroll. Payments are made at the end of the month for the payroll file ran the previous month. i.e. Month 7 payroll file relates to payments made 30th September.

Expenses

Expense claims observed as part of the sampling exercise and found to be reasonable.

Approval of salaries and increments

The Council adopts NJCP terms and conditions. NJC increases are budgeted and reported to Council. These are reviewed by the Management and Staffing Committee.

Minimum Wage Threshold Met

All members of staff are paid above the National Living Wage

HR Procedures and policies adopted

The Council has HR Policies in place. HR is managed internally with Consultant assistance when complex issues arise.

Training Policy and record for staff and elected members

The Council has a training policy in place

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Auditor has had sight of the up to date training record. We have noted ILCA training has been completed by Toby & Teagan which will help them to understand such things as the requirements of record keeping for council funds. We also note Mark has completed ROSPA.

Qualified Clerk

The Chief Officer, Louise Close is a CILCA qualified. The Finance Manager, Helen Marshall has completed ILCA and FILCA.

Jenny Dean, Deputy Clerk has also completed ILCA and is working towards CILCA

Annual Staff Appraisals

Appraisals are undertaken.

H&S review of Staff Workstations and PC equipment

H&S for workstations are completed at the start of employment or when changes of health occur.

Asset Control

Register

The Asset Register is updated yearly. Auditors had sight of the Asset Register which matches the Trial Balance during this visit.

Insurance

The insurance of assets is covered under the Council Commercial Combined Policy. This will form part of the year end Audit as the policy is due for renewal in October 2024

Bank Reconciliations

Bank reconciliations are present for all accounts. These are reconciled monthly but often daily in Rialtas are matched to physical bank statements. No differences have been observed.

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Accounting Principles

The Council are operating as Income and Expenditure.

Accruals & Prepayments are reviewed as part of year end process

Allotments

There are a team of employees who run and manage the Allotments The Council owns allotments. The Rate card is advised as £96 for Full Plot, £48 for half.

Allotment fees invoiced in April which are payable in July. We have observed a number of payments and a standard tenancy agreement during our site visit.

Facilities Management

As the Town Hall is in need of repairs, the facilities have not been available for use until further.

Markets

The Council runs a market several days a week. The process of recording and managing payments from the Market formed part of our Internal Audit in May 2022 which suggested some improvements in the governance of monies. These suggestions were implemented and are still in place at the current site visit.

Earmarked Reserves

Earmarked Reserves are considered yearly.

This will form part of year end Audit.

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Monies in Bank

Monies in Bank are regularly reviewed by the Finance and Policy Committee.

Year End & AGAR

This will form part of year end Audit.

Other items of Note

The council is registered with the Information Commissioners Office under membership number: Z8619249 and expires in May 2025

The council has sufficient security over information and uses Cloud Storage.

Arrangement for inspection of public records

There is now a policy and plan in place for the inspection of public records per the auditors recommendation in the year end audit for 2022/23.

During the repairs to the Town Hall, any inspection of Public records would be held at the offices on Otley Street.

Memberships

The Council has many memberships in place in order to assist with the successful management of the Council and it's amenities.

YCLA – for advice regarding the running of the Council along with relevant training courses

NAS – National Allotment Society

NAMBA – Markets

SLCC – advice and training for Clerks.

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Recommendations/Further Information Required

Internal Audit Checklist

The Finance Manager asked the Auditor for review of the Internal Audit Checklist and comment. The only point is regards “cheques” – the Council only signs cheques for the Petty Float.

Alcohol purchase

The auditor queried Alcohol purchased for the AGM as it is against regulation for Alcohol to be consumed during a meeting. However, we were advised this is for a social event after the meeting but was not consumed and is still available for use at future events.

Purchase Orders

We reviewed all purchase orders relating to the Credit card along with two for the items over DeMinimus in Quarter 1 and have noted a lack of detailed description compared to prior visits.

We recommend the descriptions be more informative, as Auditors we are not present in the Council every day nor would members of the public who may wish to exercise their right to inspect the records.

We have noted:

- a parking receipt which was unclear as to whether it was parking for staff or coach parking.
- An item of staff subsistence with no clear reason
- An unsigned purchase order
- A few missing receipts – the largest of which was £80 and explained as due to the supplier being unable to provide a receipt after inputting the council email address incorrectly.

Risk Assessment

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The risk assessment report presented to Council has a few items which we recommend be reviewed:

- Office Security relates to The Town Hall and not other offices where Council staff are located during the building works are being completed on the Town Hall
- Cash collection and banking refers to cash banked regularly – on a weekly basis but it is usually daily
- Petty Cash float is £100 and not £50 per the risk assessment

Website

The website updates have been improved, which we are pleased to note. We have some minor points

- The title “Standing Orders” in policies is a smaller font size than the other policies
- In the Council staff page, the “email me” links do not work. Either fix or delete.

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