

In-year Internal Audit Report

(to be read in conjunction with Section 4 of the Annual Return)

Name of council:	Raunds Town Council		
Name of Internal Auditor:	John Marshall	Date of report:	30.01.2017
Year ending:	31 March 2017	Date audit carried out:	27.01.2017

Internal audit is the periodic independent review of a Council's internal controls resulting in an assurance report designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities and operating procedures under the Council's control. Managing the Council's internal controls should be a day-to-day function of the staff and management and not left for internal audit.

The Council is required to take appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit and to respond to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit. Failure to take appropriate action may lead to a qualified audit opinion.

To the Chairman of the Council:

At the Council's request, I carried out an interim ie in-year audit of Raunds Town Council on 27 January; thanks are due, as ever to Kate Houlihan, Clerk to the Council and her staff for their time and assistance.

In preparing for this audit, I particularly noted the Resolution relating to Internal Audit from the Council's Finance Committee at its meeting of 6 December 2016 '.. that [the Council] agree that the internal audit provided to the council should focus on governance and the testing of policies and procedures.' To that end, I selected a number of policies and procedures from those available on the Council's website and tested their relevance, application, currency and validity through questioning and the inspection of hard evidence including Minutes. The core documentation including Standing Orders, Risk Assessment and Financial Regulations will form part of the year-end scrutiny and I therefore selected policies and procedures other than those viz the Grant Awarding Policy, the Equality Statement, the Co-option Procedure, the 'How to have your say at a Council Meeting' procedure and the Council's Publications Scheme required by the Freedom of Information Act (FOI).

My overall finding is that I found no major cause for concern ie no significant errors or omissions in respect of content or application of the policies and procedures that I examined. That of course is not to say that I found nothing worthy of mention here; what follows is intended to be constructive comment that the Council, together with its Clerk is invited to consider with a view to improving the content, application or both of those policies and procedures.

Grant awarding policy

Whilst the Council currently receives and makes a small number of grants, this might change. It would be worth the Council considering whether there are any topics, areas or circumstances in which the Council would not make a grant and if so, including that pre-

emptively in the Policy. Such exclusions are not uncommon and by way of example South Northants Council include the following in their Policy for Community Grants;

What cannot be funded:

- *Activities promoting religious or political beliefs.*
- *Improvements to places of worship unless other community facilities are provided. (With the exception of New Homes Bonus Local Community Grants)*
- *Capital projects within schools or hospitals.*
- *Projects involving other authorities e.g. Highways.*
- *Projects outside South Northamptonshire district.*
- *Organisations which aim to distribute a profit.*
- *Projects cannot be funded retrospectively.*

The Equality Statement

This document is primarily a statement of intent that tends to aspiration rather than practicality. To be forewarned is to be forearmed and as your Clerk will confirm, recent experiences in Northamptonshire have shown that it is easy for those who have duties under the Equality Act 2011 to be found wanting and then playing catch-up when taken to task by an aggrieved party who is afforded protection by that Act. I am aware of at least some of the physical measures that the Council has taken in respect of its buildings, but it would be worth the Council pro-actively assessing other aspects of compliance, particularly for visually and / or physically impaired individuals and those who are hard of hearing, whether they be staff, visitors or elected members.

'How to have your say at a Council meeting'

As a procedure, the document is sound so far as it goes but it would be advisable to make mention within the document of the rights afforded to the public (including the press and other media) under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 to photograph, film, broadcast and report (including real time reporting eg by Twitter) on the meeting. It is not unusual for Councils to include an appropriate reference to these Regulations at the head of the meeting Agenda such as

The Public and Press are welcome to attend. Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 members of the public are permitted to photograph, film, broadcast and report on the meeting, subject to the efficient running of the business and the meeting not being disrupted.

Publications Scheme required by the Freedom of Information Act (FOI)

It is important that the documents cited in the Council's Publication Scheme as being available on the Council's website are both available and up to date. In this respect, the Register of Assets appears to be updated annually (last updated June 2016) and the Council should consider whether updating more frequently eg quarterly might be appropriate.

General comment

Following on from the above, the review and re-adoption of some policies and procedures appears to be overdue; this may be complicated by the Council operating a variable timescale for reviews and whilst I hesitate to suggest a further policy, that system in itself

warrants review. Coupled with that, the website would benefit from a 'spring clean' and I understood that this has already been identified by Kate and her staff.

This intermediate audit report focus just on governance issues, as requested by the Council. Whilst the comments above are not explicit compliance issues ie they are not based on regulatory requirements, they are constructive comments that the Council, together with its Clerk is invited to consider with a view to improving governance through review of the content and application of those policies and procedures.

I look forward to meeting with Kate and her staff later in the year to conduct the statutory year-end audit.

John Marshall
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