

Final External Auditor Report and Certificate 2023/24 in respect of Leigh Parish Council – GL0133

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.

External auditor's limited assurance opinion 2023/24

On 27 September 2024, we issued a report detailing the results of our limited assurance review of Sections 1 and 2 of this authority's Annual Governance & Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2024. We explained that we were unable to certify completion of the review at that time. We are now in a position to certify completion of the review.

The external auditor report given in Section 3 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return requires amendments as follows:

Except for the matters reported below, on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with 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 smaller authority has disclosed that it made proper provision during the year 2023/24 for the exercise of public rights, by answering 'Yes' to Section 1, Assertion 4. However, as was reported last year, we are aware that it failed to do this and therefore should have answered 'No' to this Assertion. It has also disclosed that it took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit, by answering 'Yes' to Section 1, Assertion 7, which, on the basis of the above, is not correct.

The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review. The figures in Section 2, Box 8 for both the current and prior year are blank and should read £265,715 and £54,894, respectively.

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

The smaller authority has not provided:

- an adequate explanation for the variance between the prior and current year values in Box 6 of Section 2
- an adequate explanation as to why the trust fund entries in Section 1, Box 9 and Section 2, Boxes 11 (a) or (b) of the AGAR vary from the entries in the prior year final signed AGAR

- the required supporting documentation requested by the appointed auditor to allow for a review of the procedures deemed necessary to test Assertion 3 of the Annual Governance Statement.

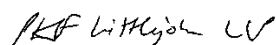
The Annual Internal Audit Report focuses on a series of internal control objectives covering an authority's key financial and accounting systems and concludes whether, in all significant respects, the internal control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the authority. We note that the internal auditor has not provided an adequate explanation on the following internal control objective: O where the response given is 'No'. The Annual Internal Audit Report will inform the authority's response to Assertions 2 and 6 in the annual governance statement. As a result, the authority must ensure that assurance that has not been provided via these control objectives has been sought elsewhere.

The internal auditor is not independent of the financial decision making, management and control of the smaller authority or of the authority's financial controls and procedures and the smaller authority must disclose this by answering 'No' to Assertion 6 of the Annual Governance Statement on the 2024/25 AGAR. In future years, the smaller authority must maintain an independent system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems. The Internal Auditor is related to the clerk.

The smaller authority has confirmed that it has not complied with the governance Assertion in Section 1, Box 9, and it has not provided the appointed auditor with an adequate explanation for non-compliance and details of the actions necessary to address weaknesses identified.

External auditor certificate 2023/24

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2024.



PKF Littlejohn LLP
30/09/2024