

## Final External Auditor Report and Certificate 2022/23 in respect of Weasenham Parish Council NO0540

### 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 2023; 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 2022/23

On 26 September 2023, 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 2023. 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.

Section 1, Assertion 2 has been incorrectly completed and should have been ticked 'No'. Information received from the internal auditor and confirmed by the smaller authority highlights that there was a lack of internal control and non compliance with Financial Regulations at the beginning of the year. The smaller authority has confirmed that the weaknesses identified have subsequently been addressed.

The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review. Please ensure that amendments are corrected in the prior year comparatives when completing next year's AGAR:

- Section 2, Box 4 incorrectly includes items which are not staff costs as defined in the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners' Guide. Please note that Box 4 should comprise payments made in relation to the employment of staff including only gross salary, employers' national insurance contributions, employers' pension contributions, gratuities for employees or former employees and severance or terminations payments to employees. Employment expenses which are benefits (mileage, travel, etc.) and items of reimbursement of expenses for postage, stationery or other outlays made on behalf of the smaller authority are not staff costs for the purpose of completion of the AGAR in accordance with proper practice. The figures in Section 2, Boxes 4 and 6 should read £7,328 and £20,814 respectively.

- Section 2, Box 10 for the prior year does not agree to the prior year final signed AGAR and is inconsistent with the balance published by the Public Works Loan Board. Section 2, Box 10 for the prior year should read £8,039.

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

The smaller authority has confirmed that it has not complied with the governance Assertions in Section 1, Boxes 3, 7, 8 and 9 but it has provided the appointed auditor with an adequate explanation for non-compliance and details of the actions necessary to address weaknesses identified. In the completion of the Annual Internal Audit Report, and their detailed reports, the internal auditor has drawn attention to these matters by answering 'No' to Internal Control Objectives B, D, J and O. We understand that the smaller authority has started to address the matters raised but must ensure that action is taken to address any remaining areas of weakness in a timely manner.

As a result of the additional work we have carried out on the challenge correspondence received by us we note that while the smaller authority has provided evidence that risk management arrangements were reviewed and approved during the year and that risk assessments were carried out for individual events during the year, it has confirmed that there was no risk assessment carried out for one event in the early part of the year. This is consistent with the Internal Auditor's negative response to Internal Control Objective C. The smaller authority has confirmed that measures have been put in place to ensure that this does not recur.

We received challenge correspondence in relation to the 2022/23 AGAR which we considered before completing our work. The authority will receive an invoice in relation to this additional work.

**External auditor certificate 2022/23**

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 2023.

*PKF Littlejohn LLP*

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**29/02/2024**