

Weasenham Parish Council Internal Audit 2022/23 Supplementary Report

Chairman's Response

As stated in the Internal Auditor's (IA) supplementary report, certain queries came to light following an Elector's Rights inspection of the 2022/23 accounts, which required investigation and/or resolution. Following investigation, the IA produced their report.

On receipt of the first draft of the report, The Chairman, Vice Chairman and Clerk met with the IA to present certain facts pertinent to the queries raised. Unfortunately, the second draft of the report largely failed to address those facts.

The Chairman of the Weasenham Parish Council is obliged to sign the report at the Parish Council Meeting (PCM) on Tuesday 15 August, which he will do, however, neither he, nor his fellow Councillors, fully accept its content.

This response is intended to better explain the facts around the queries raised and the information provided by the IA.

Why was fire retardant paint only used on one wall of the Community Building?

Breckland Building Control advised the Parish Council (PC) that the rear external wall of the Community Building (CB) should be treated with fire retardant paint. This was due to the closeness of the CB to the neighbouring garden fences.

The PC purchased fire retardant paint in February 2021 and gave it to a contractor. The contractor had already been given the task of painting the external walls of the CB in the colour that we see it today. They duly coated the rear wall in the fire retardant paint before adding two topcoats of regular paint. This work was carried out in April 2021.

Later in 2021, Breckland Building Control recommended that the interior exposed woodwork of the CB be coated in fire retardant paint. The PC acted on this recommendation and purchased a further supply of fire retardant paint together with brushes. Two Councillors undertook the work of painting the timber, thus saving the Parish money by not having to employ a contractor.

Clerk's Timesheets

The issue raised here was in connection with the then Clerk's timesheet for April and May 2022 and did it reflect the salary paid.

After investigation, it was confirmed that the Council of the day were satisfied that the salary paid was commensurate with the hours worked.

The IA has made recommendations on the way forward in this area and stated that it is down to the current Councillors to decide upon appropriate action for the future verification of hours worked. The Council will give due cognisance to the recommendations.

Hog Roast – 5th June 2022

The Council decided that it would be appropriate to hold an event on the Recreation Field to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It was agreed, via a system of round-robin emails between the Councillors, that a hog roast would be purchased. The cost of this hog roast would be £675.

Although this disbursement was noted on a schedule to the minutes of the PCM on 18 May 2022, it was never actually discussed, proposed, and seconded during the actual meeting, as required. This was an oversight and lessons will be learned from it.

Furthermore, the Clerk of the day failed to publish the schedule with the minutes. This was an omission, which has since been corrected by the current Clerk.

The IA Supplementary Report states that all Councillors "resigned *en masse*" at the end of the PCM on 18 May 2022. They did not. The Chair announced their intention to resign in the "next one or two days", as stated in the minutes of that meeting. In fact, they announced their resignation, with immediate effect, via email, to an officer of Breckland Council on 19 May 2022.

Finalisation of the payment for the hog roast was made on 20 May 2022. The question raised, but left unexplained by the IA, is, was a payment authorised by a person who had ceased to be a Councillor the previous day. If this was the case, it would potentially be a serious issue. However, it was not the case. The facts are that a Councillor first-authorised the payment through the bank on the morning of 19 May, before resigning, and the Clerk second-authorised the payment on 20 May, whilst they were still in office.

The IA's report then goes on to state that the event on 5 June was not hosted by Parish Councillors as none were in office at the time. This is incorrect. A member of the Interim Council was at the event and would have been considered as its host. This negates further issues regarding the event's legitimacy and legal consequences of not being appropriately hosted.

Based on information supplied by a Parishioner, the IA states that "a gathering of 30 people" took place on 5 June. This brought into focus the issue of whether sufficient benefit was derived from the £675 expenditure.

This figure is refuted by other Parishioners, who actually attended the event, and put the number of attendees at nearer 70. It should be remembered that the weather on 5 June 2022 was not great and, in that context, 70 attendees was a reasonable attendance.

The IA's report further states that there was only one quote for the provision of the hog roast. In fact, several quotes were received. However, they were received via telephone calls and not in writing. For audit purposes, written quotes are preferential. The current Council will learn from this.

The report states that there was no "clear reason for the event". Had the IA had the correct date for the event in the first instance (5 June, not 9 June), the reason for the

gathering would have been obvious, Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Conclusion

The most important objection raised is undoubtedly the fact that £675 was expended from Council funds for a hog roast without going through the formal proposing and seconding process at a PCM. This was an error. But it was simply that. Not a deliberate intent to circumvent due process. It was agreed with the best of intentions and, at the end of the day, brought the community together for a worthy celebration.

The current Council accepts this, but also recognises that lessons must be learned.

The IA's report has made several recommendations, and these will all be considered by the current Council.

Martin Romanovsky
Chairman
Weasenham Parish Council