

Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of **Sidlesham Parish Council**

1 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

2 External auditor limited assurance opinion 2023/24

Except for the matters reported below on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with the 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 14(1) of the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2015 requires the period of public rights should be a 'single period of 30 working days'. The Council provided a period of 25 working days in 2024 for the review of their records which is a breach of the regulation, and we would anticipate the Council taking this into account when it completes Assertion 4 on its 2025 Annual Governance and Accountability Return. In future the council should ensure that it calculates and provides a period of precisely 30 working days.

A similar issue was also raised on the prior year's External Audit Report and hence this was not appropriately actioned. The Council therefore should have answered 'No' to Assertion 7 of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return which relates to taking appropriate action on matters reported from internal and external audit. For future reference in a standard week, with no bank holidays, a period of 6 weeks is required to provide 30 working days.

A review of the Council's website, the Documents section and using the search function, has identified that the Council does not appear to have fully met the requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Regulation 13 (1) which states that the final audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return should, on conclusion of the audit, be available for public access, which includes publication on the Council's website. The Council amended Section 2 of their 2023 return year during the 2023 review process however only the original version of the return is visible on the Council's website. In addition, it appears that the 2023 notice of conclusion has not been published as is required by regulation 16 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Council should bring these points into line with the regulations as soon as practically possible.

In the previous year, it was noted that the minutes did not record the approval of the AGAR form but rather the fact that the year end accounts were approved. As this approval occurred during the 2024 return period, we expected a 'No' response to Assertion 3 on the 2024 return rather than the 'Yes' response provided. We note that the Council have ensured that the approval of the 2024 AGAR is properly reflected in the minutes and therefore do not anticipate this being an issue in respect of the 2025 return.

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

During the year it was identified that due to an administrative error an element of PAYE was not being paid over to HMRC as is required. This has been rectified in the period and we do not anticipate this issue recurring.

The Council provided a narrative explanation for the variance on Box 4 on Section 2 of AGAR from the prior year to the current year. Whilst the explanation was reasonable, we require values to be provided to support the movement. On request these were provided, and we had no further issues in this regard, but if the council could bear this in mind for future variance explanations.

We identified during our initial review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return that box 9 of the prior year column, 2023, on Section 2 - Accounting Statements has been restated. This has been confirmed by the Council to have been due to a duplication of the valuation figures in respect of some of the assets. The parish council has therefore updated its fixed asset register to appropriately reflect this.

3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

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

External Auditor Name

 **MOORE**

External Auditor Signature



Date

28/08/2024