

Harberton Parish Council Statement of Internal Control

Introduction

Harberton Parish Council (the Council) is a local authority funded largely by public money and is responsible for ensuring its financial business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

In discharging this overall responsibility the Council is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council is required to review at least annually the effectiveness of its system of financial control. This is informed by the work of the internal auditor and Finance Committee, who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment, and also any comments made by the external auditors in their annual report.

The Purpose of the System of Internal Control

The Council's system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure. It cannot provide an absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised, and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them effectively and economically.

The system of internal control accords with the practices set out in the Governance and Accountability in Local Councils: A Practitioners' Guide (2014 edition).

The Internal Control Environment

The Council has adopted Financial Regulations which set parameters for the Council's financial operations. The Council has appointed a Responsible Finance Officer who implements financial systems and controls.

An independent internal audit service is provided by a competent and independent person, as laid out in the Parish Council's Finance Regulations, and Council's internal monitoring is undertaken by the Finance Committee.

Any issues raised by the Internal Auditor are reported in writing to the Council and agreed actions are monitored to ensure that they have been carried out and actioned within agreed timescales. Additionally, the Council seeks and receives appropriate property, legal, insurance, and health & safety advice as appropriate to manage risk.

The Council is responsible for:

- Establishing and monitoring the achievements of the authority's objectives
- The facilitation of policy and decision making
- Ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations
- Identification and management of risk
- Ensuring that best value and value for money are achieved in all purchases
- Ensuring all committees receive regular and up to date reports on financial activities under their direction
- Ensuring performance is regularly monitored against financial and operational budgets
- Control and reports on the financial management of the Council.

Review of Effectiveness

The Council through the Responsible Finance Officer has responsibility for conducting a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and the internal audit process.

The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is monitored by:

- The work of officers within the Council reporting to the Responsible Finance Officer.
- The Clerk is the Council's Responsible Finance Officer who acts as the Council's legal advisor and administrator. The Clerk is responsible for administering the Council's finances, for advising on compliance with laws and regulations which the Council is subject to, and for managing risks. The Clerk also provides advice to help the Council ensure that its procedures, control systems and policies are adhered to.
- Those elected Members of the Finance Committee who have particular responsibilities within this area. The committee meets 4 times in the financial year ending 31 March. Members of the committee monitor progress against objectives, financial systems and procedures, budgetary control, and carry out regular reviews of financial matters. Minutes of committee meetings are circulated to all members of the Council and recommendations are considered at full council meetings. The full council meets 11 times each year. It monitors progress by receiving relevant reports from the Finance Committee and the Responsible Finance Officer (Clerk).
- The work of the Internal Auditor. The Internal Auditor, an independent person specialising in local council matters, reports to the Council on the adequacy of its records, procedures, systems, internal control and risk management.
- The External Auditors in their annual report.

Any concerns about the effectiveness of the system of internal control are investigated and action taken as appropriate.

In the year there were no significant or fundamental weaknesses identified but the Council continuously seeks to address and action any recommendations to improve controls and manage risk.