

Bulmer Parish Council

INTERNAL CONTROL POLICY

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Bulmer Parish Council (the Council) is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions, and which includes arrangements for the effective management of risk.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

Internal control is designed to reduce financial risk to the Council; the system of internal control is designed to ensure that the Council's activities are carried out properly and as intended. Internal controls are set up by the Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) but it also falls to Council Members to ensure that they have a degree of control and understanding of those controls. Controls will include the checking of routine financial procedures; the examination of financial comparisons; the recording of assets and liabilities; the identification of risk and to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively, and economically.

PERSONNEL INVOLVED WITH THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

- The Council
- The Council has appointed a Chair who is responsible for the smooth running of meetings and for ensuring that all Council decisions are lawfully taken.
- The Chair of Committees exercise similar responsibilities under delegated authority within their terms of reference.
- The Chair of each meeting initials each page and signs the last page of the minutes which record the proposer and seconder of all resolutions passed at Council and Committee meetings.
- The cashbook is presented each month for scrutiny by the Council and a named Councillor is responsible for liaison with the Clerk/RFO regarding its upkeep.
- Decisions made are within the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations laid down and approved by the Council. These are kept regularly under review.
- The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approves budgets for the following year at its December meeting.
- The December meeting of the Council approves the level of precept for the following financial year.
- The Council and its Finance Committee receive regular financial statements which they approve of at their meetings.
- Payments are made in accordance with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The appointment of authorised signatories is kept under review.

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- Two Councillors (from the currently authorised non-banking signatories) under delegated authority sign all invoices against payment sheets. The signatories will ensure that the banking agrees with the amount of the invoice and the payee named on the invoice.
- All payments are made using cheques or internet banking; these will be first set up by the Clerk/RFO and then authorised by two designated Councillors in accordance with Financial Regulations.
- Internal control issues are reviewed at least annually by the Full Council.
- All Council policies are reviewed annually for accuracy in relation to the policy are as they reflect, changes in legislation and current best practice.
- The Council has an up-to-date Risk Register which is reviewed annually (or as needed) by the Full Council and actions are put in place to either control, mitigate or remove risks as they occur.

PARISH CLERK (PROPER OFFICER) TO THE COUNCIL/ RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER (RFO)

- The Council has appointed a Clerk and Executive Officer to the Council who acts as the Council's advisor and principal administrator.
- The Clerk is also the Council's Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and is responsible for managing the Council's finances. The RFO is responsible for the day-to-day compliance with legislation and policies and for managing risks. The RFO ensures that the Council's procedures, control systems and policies are maintained. The RFO also exercises responsibility for the Council's banking arrangements in conjunction with Full Council.
- The duties of the Clerk/RFO are laid down in a Job Description which is subject to review. It was last reviewed and updated with effect from 11th November 2023.
- The Clerk/RFO manages the timetable for the audit programme, Council approval of the annual return, and the compliance with the electors' rights. The RFO submits all the requested information to the External Auditor by the agreed date and arranges for the required publication of notices, accounts and returns.
- The RFO will retain all relevant documents relating to the financial year for 6 years (Annual Return, VAT Returns, PAYE/NIC information, public notices, Fixed Asset register, risk assessments; accounts and supporting information).

INTERNAL AUDITOR (IA)

The Council has appointed an Independent Internal Auditor (the IA) who will provide a report to the Council on the adequacy of the Council's:

- Records, procedures, and systems
- Book-keeping and bank reconciliations
- Financial regulations and standing Orders
- Budgetary controls
- Asset management

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- Payment controls
- Risk management.
- Statutory/regulatory compliance
- Regular reviews of the effectiveness of internal control.

The effectiveness of the internal audit is reviewed after it has been produced and the Council reviews the appointment of the IA. The IA, who is competent and independent, will carry out the work required in accordance with the Governance and Accountability Guide for Local Councils and additionally will be advised of any additional work required by the Council.

The scope of the work of the IA is reviewed annually and the review and the appointment are minuted.

The IA will inspect the accounts at the year-end (prior to completion of the Annual Return pages) and will complete the last page of the Annual Return.

The IA will write a separate report to Parish Clerk and the Council (a copy of which is sent to the Chair) detailing any findings they might have.

The report of the IA is copied to all Members of the Council and considered as an agenda item at their next meetings. Recommendations from the report will be recorded in the minutes.

Internal Auditor to confirm if accounts for the Village Hall are to be reviewed separately from the Parish Council accounts.

EXTERNAL AUDIT

The Council's External Auditors submit an External Auditor's Report, which is presented to the Council as an agenda item and any actions needed are implemented.

REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Council has responsibility for conducting at least an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control.

The review is informed by the work and any issues identified by:

- Full Council—identification of new activities
- Clerk to the Council / RFO who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment and managing risks.
- IA, who reviews the Council's system of internal control and who makes a written report to the Council.

The Council's External Auditors, who make the final check using the Annual Return, a form completed and signed by the RFO, the Chair and the IA. The External Auditor issues an annual audit certificate—action arising from Audit Report.

SIGNIFICANT INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

Subject to the Internal Auditors review, controls to be implemented if there are any changes to be put into place.

EXTERNAL AUDIT OPINION

The audit reports in respect of the financial year to 31 March 2023 were adopted and with measures put in place in respect of comments made.

BUSINESS PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT PLAN AS AN AID TO INTERNAL CONTROL

In 2024 the Council is developing a Business Plan which aims to improve decision- making by focusing on what it intends to do over the next few years and how it intends to do it. It will enable the Council to act in a more coordinated way, will demonstrate that it knows where it is going, and how it plans to use elector's money effectively.

The Business Plan will align with and drive the direction of all internal strategies and resources, through both the budget setting process, and via key strategic policies. Decision-making will become more consistent and more in line with core strategies, which in turn will improve both management of risk and more effective use of resources. This is particularly important in the context of the Council's need to account within the terms of the statutory framework for its use of monies received under the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Business Plan affords a mechanism to ensure that spending decisions on parish infrastructure to support growth are made in the most robust and transparent way. The Business Plan was last updated in March 2024, to reflect decisions in terms of capital investment to support growth.

DATA PROTECTION COMPLIANCE

The Council has fully complied with the Data Protection legislation which came into force in the United Kingdom dated 25th May 2018 and keeps its compliance under regular review. Risks associated with Data Protection are reviewed by the Council on a six-monthly basis.

Full Council members are requested to consider this Statement of Internal Control Policy and to agree to unanimously. On agreement the Chair will sign off the policy.

Signed by Cllr R Raymond:

Signed by Parish Clerk/RFO:

Date Adopted: 25th June 2024