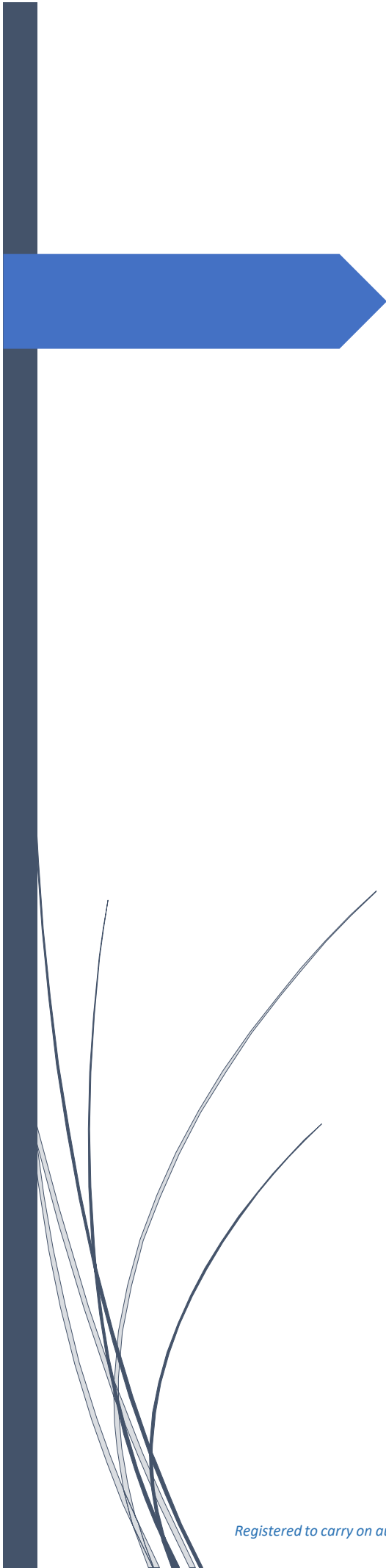




Cowbridge (Ancient Borough) with Llanblethian Town Council

Internal Audit
2023/24

Interim Report

JDH BUSINESS SERVICES LTD

Registered to carry on audit work by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

The internal audit of Cowbridge (Ancient Borough) with Llanblethian Town Council is carried out by undertaking the following tests as specified in the Annual Return for Local Councils:

- Checking that books of account have been properly kept throughout the year
- Checking a sample of payments to ensure that the Council's financial regulations have been met, payments are supported by invoices, expenditure is approved, and VAT is correctly accounted for
- Reviewing the Council's risk assessment and ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place to manage all identified risks
- Verifying that the annual precept request is the result of a proper budgetary process; that budget progress has been regularly monitored and that the council's reserves are appropriate
- Checking income records to ensure that the correct price has been charged, income has been received, recorded and promptly banked and VAT is correctly accounted for
- Reviewing petty cash records to ensure payments are supported by receipts, expenditure is approved and VAT is correctly accounted for
- Checking that salaries to employees have been paid in accordance with Council approvals and that PAYE and NI requirements have been properly applied
- Checking the accuracy of the asset and investments registers
- Testing the accuracy and timeliness of periodic and year-end bank account reconciliation(s)
- Year-end testing on the accuracy and completeness of the financial statements

The interim internal audit provides evidence to support the annual internal audit conclusion on the Annual Return for local councils.

Conclusion

On the basis of the internal audit work carried out, which was limited to the tests indicated above, in our view the council's system of internal controls is in place, adequate for the purpose intended and effective, subject to the recommendations overleaf. As part of the internal audit work for the next financial year we will follow up all recommendations included in the action plan.

JDH Business Services Ltd

ACTION PLAN

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
2023/24 Interim Internal Audit			
1	The SCRIBE VAT126 reclaim form does not contain VAT numbers of all suppliers. Further review of the VAT 126 analysis identified that VAT of £1,247.71 is being reclaimed on the Zurich insurance premium (12/04/23). However, there is no VAT charged on the actual insurance premiums so the council need to carry out an exercise to calculate any VAT overclaims for 2023/24 and prior years and adjust the next VAT return.	The council need to identify VAT numbers for all the supplies with no recorded VAT number in the VAT 126 analysis to reduce the risk of HMRC not reimbursing amounts where no VAT number is recorded. The council need to identify any overclaims of VAT relating to insurance for the statutory HMRC time period and adjust the next VAT return for any overclaims of VAT.	All overclaims identified, the next VAT return will be adjusted accordingly. Report supplied to auditor.
2	There is no formal adopted budget timetable in place evidencing the key milestones leading to the agreement of the precept request for the year and approval of the annual budget.	<i>A comprehensive formal budget timetable should be established annually covering the main elements of the Council's budget setting process together with key dates and responsibilities.</i>	Timetable to be approved at the May Annual meeting.
3	Hire Price Lists: One of our sample items related to a hire that was outside the two to eight hour hire periods recorded in the hire	<i>The council need to review the hire price lists to ensure that:</i> <i>all categories of hire are included</i>	The charges currently are a minimum of 2 hours and then rise hourly, this is reviewed annually, however, as recommended by

			auditor will be revisited in the next town hall committee meeting.
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	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	price lists. Our sample item was for a 10.5 hour hire but this is not covered by the price list so there is no clear guide to officers of hirers as to what the charge should be. A sample item related to a hire of the council chamber for two hours but the hire of the chamber is not included in the hire price list.	<i>pricing reflects all possible hire periods, for instance, by establishing a basic hourly charge that could be applied by officers.</i>	When outside the hire time on the price list we continue the same rise as per the hours accounted for, however, this will be remedied at the next time of review. The chamber is not normally for hire, except for weddings, hence why it is not included and is only used as an emergency option, the charges are the same as the lesser hall.
4	Although councillor periodic checks cover expenditure and payroll, the current checks do not review the accuracy of pricing of income invoices.	<i>Councillor periodic checks should be expanded to cover the accuracy of pricing of income invoices by comparing a sample of sales invoices to price lists.</i>	A sample will be provided monthly to the F&G committee.
5	One of our sample items for income (transaction no.105) dated 12/07/2023 for £475.00 hire fees did not agree to the invoice which stated £220 or the cumulative payment recorded on the hire invoice of £640.	<i>The council should review this income item and ensure that the hire fees have completely and accurately invoiced, received, and recorded in the council ledger.</i>	The hall hirer accidentally overpaid due to confusion between her and her husband, the payments were offset against other invoices, this is detailed in the notes of the transaction in Scribe.
6	We did not receive evidence that the following supplies were procured in accordance with Financial Regulations as the information could not be located by officers. This procurement review will	<i>The council should identify the procurement information and provide this for the year end internal audit.</i>	

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	therefore be carried forward to the year end internal audit: • The parks equipment contract for £3007 + VAT. • The Christmas lights contract, which was in excess of the level of £3000 requiring three quotations.		The park maintenance work totalled £2,902, staying below the £3,000 limit that requires quotes as per the Financial Regulations at the time. An additional £107 on the same invoice was for a monthly park inspection conducted by the same contractor, which is a long-term agreement. Although he was asked to send a separate invoice for the maintenance work and the inspections, he didn't on this occasion. However, the invoice does itemise the installation of goal posts and swing fittings separately from the playground inspections. Three quotes were gathered for the Christmas Lights contract, the report presented to council at the time has now been supplied to the auditor.
7	A significant number of issues were reported for the 2022/23 financial year (see below) and these will be followed up as part of the year end internal audit. The council should provide us with an action plan showing implementation of actions in response to the recommendations below.		

2022/23 Internal Audit			
1	The risk assessment was not reviewed, updated and approved during the 2022/23 financial year.	<i>The risk assessment should be reviewed, updated and approved every financial year.</i>	The risk assessment was reviewed in July 2023 for the 2023/24 year and is on the agenda for the annual meeting 2024.
2	Review of the draft accounts provided identified that year end procedures had not been correctly applied to produce income and expenditure accounts as no accruals, creditors, non-VAT debtors, prepayments or receipts in advance had been included in the trial balance and balance sheet. This	<i>The council is an income and expenditure council and must apply year end procedures to completely and accurately capture all accruals, creditors, non VAT debtors, prepayments and receipts in advance for inclusion in the year end trial balance and</i>	This has been rectified and all is in place for 2023/24.

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	was rectified by the clerk and the final accounts and the final Annual Return included appropriate debtors and creditors.	<i>balance sheet and income and expenditure accounts.</i>	
3	A comprehensive asset register is a key management tool for managing fixed assets effectively. The current register does not contain all the information necessary, for instance, there is no information to indicate the valuation method used for each asset or date of acquisition/disposal to enable annual movements on fixed assets to be reconciled, and no custodian or location is identified. The format of the fixed asset register should be improved to include key headings as described in the Practitioners' Guide.	<i>The council should improve the format of the asset register by including at least the following key information where relevant:</i> • <i>Valuation method</i> • <i>Confirm whether insured or not and insurance value</i> • <i>dates of acquisition, upgrade and disposal (it is useful to keep a record of disposed assets as an asset management tool);</i> • <i>costs of acquisition and any expenditure which increases the life of the asset;</i> • <i>if proxy cost is used for first valuation, a note of the method used for valuation and details of any professional advice received;</i> • <i>useful life estimate;</i>	The asset register has undertaken extensive review and it is hoped that the auditor will be content with the new format.

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
		• location; • responsibility/custodian); • any available indications of asset value and condition; any regular charges for usage or occupancy.	
4	A £5000 Debit Card fraud was committed against the council during the year but officers are not clear exactly how the fraud was perpetrated. The bank has refunded the monies in full so there has been no loss to the council.	<i>The council should review the Debit Card fraud prevention actions listed in the Action Fraud website and ensure they are all implemented. As a debit card gives a fraudster direct access to the council bank account to enable fraudulent payments, the council could consider other forms of payment such as a Prepaid card with strict monthly limits or a Credit Card with transactional and monthly limits..</i>	The clerk has contacted the bank regarding the option to replace the debit card with a credit card and is waiting for a response.
5	The risk assessment does not address the risks of supplier fraud. Most standard local council insurance policies do not cover third party/supplier fraud. The supplier fraud risks can be managed via appropriately robust policies and procedures. Examples of prevention actions include: - training for staff to alert them to the potential risks of providing sensitive	<i>The risk assessment should be updated to include supplier fraud including the adequacy of supplier onboarding controls.</i>	This has been included for 2024/25.

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	company information, by phone or other means, especially contract and account information. - establish a rigorous change of supplier details procedure - where a supplier has purported to have changed their bank details always call the supplier to check the veracity of a request, using details in your system, rather than those on any associated letter or email. A person should be authorised to approve a supplier bank account change after having reviewed the process undertaken to verify the supplier details change - periodic review of supplier accounts should also be undertaken to remove any dormant accounts. This reduces the likelihood of any old supplier information being used to secure fraudulent payments. - checking address and financial health details with Companies House - checking samples of online payments to supplier invoices to ensure the payment has been made to the supplier bank account		
6	There is no Investment Strategy and Treasury Management strategy established in accordance with the requirements of the	<i>The council should consider establishing an Investment Strategy and Treasury Management strategy with reference to the</i>	A draft will be taken to the Finance and Governance Committee in May 2024.

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	LGA 2003 and Welsh guidance regarding investments which states: <i>'All other town and community councils and charter trustees whose investments are not expected to exceed £250,000 shall have due regard to this guidance and give priority to security and liquidity rather than to yield for any investments they undertake. The level of detail and specific requirements outlined in this guidance will therefore not apply but all Town and Community Councils or Charter Trusts should;</i> <i>(i) agree a Capital Strategy before the start of the financial year as a minimum; this can be undertaken as a part of the budget setting process;</i> <i>(ii) agree appropriate limits for each category of investments it plans to carry out;</i> <i>(iii) agree a process that effectively monitors the strategy in year, and;</i> <i>(iv) ensure that all investments are in Sterling;</i>	<i>requirements of the Local Government Act 2000 and Welsh guidance regarding investments and strategies.</i>	
7	A checklist review of governance identified that policies for gifts and hospitality, and expenses, have not been adopted by council.	<i>The council should establish a gifts and hospitality policy, and an expenses policy.</i>	A gifts and hospitality policy was approved in July 2023.
8	Town Hall hire charges and cemetery fees are reviewed annually by the relevant committees. However, Section 9.3 of the Financial Regulations require that <i>'The council will review all fees and charges at least annually, following a report of the</i>	<i>Fees and charges should be reviewed and approved annually by council in accordance with the Financial Regulations.</i>	All charges and fees are reviewed annually pre budget.

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	<i>Clerk\RFO or duly delegated staff member.'</i>		
9	The following established working groups do not have an adopted terms of reference: • Coronation Working Group • Community Plan Working Group	<i>All working groups should be established with an approved terms of reference, making it clear that the working group has no decision making authority.</i>	All working groups now have terms of reference, these are reviewed and approved at the annual meeting.
10	There is no income collection/debt write off policy to ensure there is an agreed consistent approach to income collection and the procedures to follow with older debts including write offs.	<i>The council should consider establishing an income collection/debt write off policy to ensure a consistent approach to debtors.</i>	An income debt collection policy was approved at the Finance & Governance meeting in March 2024.