

Audit Explainer 2019-20

BACKGROUND

The Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities was issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government in December 2014. It sets out ways in which town and parish councils can present more information to its residents to help them understand how their council is working and increase its democratic accountability. The code comes from the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Every year, the parish council goes through a process of having its accountancy records and working methods independently audited. This is a two part process. Firstly, the council appoints an internal auditor (paid for by the council but acting independently) who will examine its bookkeeping and governance (the council's own rules and regulations). If this is satisfactory, councillors will be asked to approve the report at its public meeting in May. For this year and because of the national lockdown, this public meeting is postponed until June.

In previous years, the council has sent a copy of the audit report to an external auditor that has been appointed by central government. However, where the council's income and expenses are below £25,000 during the audit period, it may record an 'exemption'. That is, it certifies itself that the accounts are in order and that councillors have agreed that there is no need for an external check.

However, the council's accounts and records still remain open to any resident who wishes to examine them. If you would like to view them or have any questions to ask about this process, please contact the Clerk's Office.

There are seven items that the council is obliged to make available to you which are described below. Although the time within which you have a legal right to examine the council's accounts is limited by law, you can ask questions about the way that money is spent at any time. Contact the Parish Clerk by email with any questions you might have.

1 All Expenditure

You can view the council's cash book which shows what payments have been made throughout the year. Expenses are divided into 10 categories. This is done so that the council can keep track of what its expenses are, and how it is performing against the budget that was set. Your councillors receive a regular summary of this information. The regulations state that the council should publish all expenses that are above £100. However, in order to be completely transparent, this parish council publishes every item from 2016 onwards (visit the website and look in the Archive section).

2 End of Year Accounts

This is a simple summary of the council's accounts at the end of the tax year that is submitted to the external auditor for checking. This shows the council's income in from the precept you pay (the local council tax); other income (for example, from grants or subsidies); staff costs (the council employs one person), and a total figure for all other expenses. You can see the detail of this in the 'All Expenditure' sheet. These accounts also show what the council's cash holdings are, and the value of other fixed assets it owns. These figures may appear high, but the council needs to keep a level of cash in reserve in order to maintain

their services and pay their bills as they are presented. Cornwall Council is making proposals to pass down (devolve) some of its services to the parish but without additional funding. For this reason, it needs to be ready to use some of its own reserves to pay for them.

3 Annual Governance Statement

The council manages itself according to a list of procedures and processes to ensure that what it does is legal, ethical and proportionate. These controls are set down by government, and councillors reviewed all their governance statements throughout 2018/19.

4 Internal Audit Report

The council employs an independent auditor to examine its governance statements and procedures each year as part of the Annual Return. You can see what the auditor was checking for and her sign-off in this document.

5 Councillors & Responsibilities

Your councillors are elected every four years by ballot of eligible residents in the parish. Each year, at its annual meeting, the councillors will elect a chair, vice-chair and volunteers to take responsibility for specific areas of council work. This list shows who has taken responsibility for what. If you need to contact a councillor personally, you can write to them via the parish clerk.

6 Asset Register

The council owns land in the parish at Jubilee Park (Valley View) and the Lawn Cemetery at Church Park. The council has a responsibility to insure, maintain and repair these assets listed.

7 Certificate of Exemption

At its public meeting on 9 June 2020, councillors agreed that they would apply the exemption process to their accounts for the previous year. You can view this certificate at Item 7.

How the council meets

The parish council meets on the second Tuesday of every month. You can see a full list of the dates on this website. The agenda for monthly council meetings is published at least four days before the meeting takes place, and the Clerk aims to post the minutes of its meetings within 10 working days of the meeting itself. You can always find this information on the website or on the public noticeboards in St Keyne.

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