

Coddington Parish Council
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Coddington
Newark
NG24 2QY

2020-21 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF CODDINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

During the Covid-19 pandemic the council met virtually. Ways of working needed to be adapted to fit the circumstances and repeated lockdowns. This resulted in minutes and schedules not always being signed off at the meeting or shortly afterwards as would normally have been the case. With Coronavirus being lifted great care should be taken that minutes, payment schedules, monthly reports bank reconciliations and statements are signed/initialled as described in standing orders and financial regulations. Members and the public were kept informed of the council's decisions and financial status via the council's website.

The website where the council publishes its minutes, agendas and other documents does not display an accessibility statement. Its domain appears to be owned by an individual councillor rather than the council. The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 require all public websites to be accessible since 23 September 2020 and to display an accessibility statement if only partially compliant. The council should audit its website to ensure it meets the requirements or it could leave itself open to compensation claims for non-compliance.

The council publishes its monthly financial reports on its website. The Council thus publishes expenditure above £100, albeit not in a reader friendly format. However, unless employees have given their explicit written consent for their personal details – their take home pay – to be published on a public website, the council could be breaching data protection rules. Instead the council should publish staff cost totals including any PAYE/NICS payments.

At the end of the 2019-20 financial year the council had received interest payments on some of its accounts but had not recorded the income during that financial year because bank statements had not been available. The income was nonetheless received in the previous financial year rather than 2020-21, therefore Box 8 on the annual accounting statement should be restated as £39,928. Boxes 3 and 7 for 2019-20 as well as box 1 for 2020-21 should therefore be restated.

When sampling some of the payments I noticed that order confirmations were used as proof of purchase rather than VAT. Amazon provides invoices for its online purchases. If these are not readily available they can be requested in their access portal. The VAT invoice will provide the correct VAT registration number of the seller which should be used to recover VAT paid. VAT numbers are not listed and no VAT numbers were shown on the invoices/till receipts. I am therefore not satisfied that objectives B "VAT was appropriately accounted for" was sufficiently met.

The Local Government Act 1972 s. 137 power of last resort rather than the power to award grants. The parish council has other powers to make grants to the village hall.

The council should urgently review the handyman's contract of employment. It states that he is entitled to 28 hours of annual leave. I believe this to be too low. The legal minimum entitlement is 28 days/annum or

5.6 weeks. 5.6 weeks at 6 hours per week equates to 33.6 hours of annual leave not 28. Coddington Parish Council may not be granting the statutory minimum of annual leave.

The transparency code for smaller authorities requires the publication of meeting agendas and associated meeting papers not later than three clear days before the meeting to which they relate is taking place. It is acknowledged that occasionally not all meeting papers may be available in time before the meeting, but I have not found any evidence that any papers have been published, yet minutes speak of reports previously circulated.

In 2016 Newark and Sherwood District Council transferred ownership of the Community Centre to Coddington Parish Council. Prior to this, the council leased the centre from NSDC and in turn leased it to Coddington Community Association on a peppercorn rent on a repair and maintain basis. Yet CPC has paid invoices and reclaimed VAT on regular annual testing and servicing work at the community centre. The council should obtain independent specialist advice whether it is obliged to pay for regular testing and servicing at the community centre such as Portable Appliance Testing and whether it is entitled to reclaim VAT if paying for these services without a contractual obligation. Any such professional advice obtained should be in writing and kept on file for future reference.

Periodic bank reconciliations are published as part of the monthly report. I have, however, not seen any evidence that actual bank statements have been seen and checked by councillors. I therefore consider objective I not to be met.

The Council publishes an assets register. However the listing of its main material assets does not follow the guidance in as laid out in Annex A of the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities. Because of this and the absence of published meeting papers (which would also usually contain draft minutes) I do not consider objective L to have been met.

When considering these findings and how to address any shortcomings, the Council should consider any implications on staff time, training needs and cost for additional hours worked.

Finally, may I thank the Clerk for her assistance and co-operation during this internal audit, she has been most helpful in providing me with all the information asked for.



Belina Boyer BA (Hons)
05 June 2021