

Assertion in Annual Governance Statement

I would like to thank our Auditor for his report as I welcome the opportunity to place us on a firm footing going forwards. Naturally it is disappointing to be criticised but perhaps less hurtful in this case as we had internally identified many of the failings and moved towards improved processes. Though I dispute some of the recommendations below, and hindsight has proven that some documents which could not be located prior to the audit do exist and were actually posted in a timely manner, I recognise the opportunity to put things right and therefore recommend that we state NO to the following parts of the AGAR:

1 We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.

Comment: We have improved in many governance areas during the year but the fundamental truth is that we did not maintain a cash book for the second part of the accounting period. Part of this was due to absence, resignation or inefficiency of Clerks, and latterly due to misunderstanding of the essential nature of the Cash Book as a record and financial management tool. Preparation of statements was made more difficult by the inability to reconcile the April 22 Bank statement with the figures transferred from the 21/22 AGAR. A small discrepancy was noted and the surplus will be brought to account. I believe that much of this will be interest, which might in turn explain the inability to reconcile earlier accounts. It should also be noted that we have no sight of Auditors comments from the previous two years.

Action Plan: We will shortly have in place a Cash Book for 23/24 and this will be formally reviewed quarterly, with the Apr-Jun period confirmed in Jul 23. We will develop a protocol to ensure that interest is brought to account in a timely manner and will continue the recently introduced process of minuting the reconciliation between the RFO's Financial summaries and amounts held in the bank accounts.

2 We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.

Comment: For the first part of the year the only control mechanism was the report at each meeting of income and expenditure, with no formal reference to the bank account for reconciliation – of interest we have no evidence that anything other than this was done in previous years. Quarterly reviews were conducted by independent Councillors for the second and third quarters with findings recorded in the minutes (with the final quarter being dealt with by the Audit). Again of interest we have no evidence that this process mandated by our Financial regulations had been carried out in previous years. Additionally, during the void left by the previous Clerk a full reconciliation was carried out confirming that all receipts and payments this year were accurately reflected in the bank account. However the lack of a Cash Book meant that this did not provide complete assurance. Our authorisation of payments process was regarded as adequate

Action Plan: Our processes will be improved by the measures described under 1 above and the payments system will be formalised as a simple protocol supporting our Financial Regulations: other than where there are exceptions,

approved by the Council, for example perhaps the Grounds Contract, prior to raising a payments from the bank the Clerk will gain the Chair, or in his absence the Vice-Chair's written approval which will be copied to the Councillors able to authorise payments.

4 We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

Comment: As we had no evidence of having done so we reported that we had not and have been appropriately criticised for this. However, we have now found evidence of full electronic publication in June 22 and a date-stamped photograph showing that the required documents were placed on the notice board at the appropriate time. The failing was therefore purely in preparation for the audit.

Action Plan: We will ensure that all documents are published, and displayed for the requisite periods at the end of Jun 23.

7 We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.

We were unable to locate the Internal Auditors reports for 20/21 or 21/22, and no serving Councillor recalled having seen them.

This commentary recognises the matters raised in the 22/23 Audit report and demonstrates our determination to take appropriate action.