



Report regarding issues with the Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2022/23

When I joined Balderton Parish Council at the beginning of October, I was made aware that the external auditor PKF Littlejohn were unable to complete their review of our Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for the financial year ending March 31st 2023.

A number of issues had been raised which we have liaised with the external auditor on. It was acknowledged at the October full council meeting that the AGAR approval process was not carried out correctly. The response in section 1, to point 1 was changed to no.

In their final report, dated December 1st 2023, PKF have also detailed that the response in section 1, to point 2 has been incorrectly completed due to:

The Council has routinely been confirming committee minutes as a true record, rather than receiving the minutes and considering recommendations, as per its standing orders. Although minutes are not a verbatim record of the meeting, well-written minutes should be brief yet informative; factual; accurate; relevant; logically presented; and, importantly, include a clear record of resolutions (including recommendations) including those made in confidential session.

The external audit report has been duly noted. Lessons have been learnt and it is acknowledged that we need to ensure our staff and members receive regular training. New members will be given an induction going forward. At the full council meeting on November 8th 2023, the terms of reference for all committees were reviewed. Our standing orders are to be reviewed at the December full council meeting. The deputy clerk and I have attended a course on internal controls and recommendations will be brought to council in January regarding our banking arrangements. I will continue to review all our policies and procedures and bring recommendations to the full council. Agendas and minutes have been reviewed since I have joined the council and their detail enhanced to allow transparency in the council's decisions. As much information on exempt items will be given, whilst not undermining or disclosing confidential or other sensitive information.

Before the AGAR is presented at council for approval next year, I will meet with councillors to explain the process that has to be followed. In election years we will endeavour to get an induction completed for councillors before their first meeting.

The council has given a commitment to openness and transparency⁸, with a new website and Facebook page due to be launched this month. I will work with the council to ensure we continue to enhance service delivery and follow best practice in our operations and decision making going forward.

Marion Fox Goddard

Parish Clerk

December 6th 2023

⁸ Communications and Engagement Policy agreed on November 8th 2023