

Final External Auditor Report and Certificate 2022/23 in respect of Bolton-by-Bowland, Gisburn Forest & Sawley Parish Council – LA0025

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Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/>.

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2023; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

External auditor's limited assurance opinion 2022/23

On 26 September 2023, we issued a report detailing the results of our limited assurance review of Sections 1 and 2 of this authority's Annual Governance & Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2023. We explained that we were unable to certify completion of the review at that time. We are now in a position to certify completion of the review.

The external auditor report given in Section 3 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return requires amendments as follows:

Except for the matters reported below, on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review. Please ensure that amendments are corrected in the prior year comparatives when completing next year's AGAR:

- The smaller authority has confirmed that the figures provided in Section 2, Boxes 6, 7 and 8 were incorrect and should read £25,484, £24,475 and £24,475 respectively.
- Information received from the smaller authority indicates that assets purchased during the year have not been included in Section 2, Box 9. Box 9 should read £17,111.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

We received challenge correspondence in relation to the 2022/23 AGAR which we considered before completing our work. The authority will receive an invoice in relation to this additional work.

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We note that the smaller authority did not comply with Regulation 15 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as it failed to make proper provision during the year 2023/24 for the exercise of public rights, since the period for the exercise of public rights did not include the first 10 working days of July. As a result, the smaller authority must answer 'No' to Assertion 4 of the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 and ensure that it makes proper provision for the exercise of public rights during 2024/25.

In the prior year, the smaller authority was exempt from our review, thus we have not reviewed any evidence to support the prior year comparatives on the AGAR.

In the completion of the Annual Internal Audit Report, and their detailed report, the internal auditor has drawn attention to weaknesses in relation to Objectives A, B, D, G, I and J. The smaller authority must ensure that action is taken to address these areas of weakness in a timely manner.

The smaller authority has confirmed that it has not complied with the governance Assertions in Section 1, Boxes 1, 2 and 7, but it has provided the appointed auditor with an adequate explanation for non-compliance and details of the actions necessary to address weaknesses identified. The smaller authority failed to approve the AGAR in time to publish it before 1 July 2023, the date required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, and disclosed this by answering 'No' to Section 1, Box 1.

The Annual Internal Audit Report focuses on a series of internal control objectives covering an authority's key financial and accounting systems and concludes whether, in all significant respects, the internal control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the authority. We note that the internal auditor has ticked 'Not covered' to internal control objective K. The Annual Internal Audit Report will inform the authority's response to Assertions 2 and 6 in the annual governance statement. As a result, the authority must ensure that assurance that has not been provided via these control objectives has been sought elsewhere.

The smaller authority should ensure it requests and retains supporting evidence for all payments. This is consistent with the findings of the internal auditor and the 'No' responses to the internal control objectives on the Annual Internal Audit Report, and the smaller authority's 'No' responses to Section 1, Assertions 1, 2 and 7.

External auditor certificate 2022/23

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2023.



PKF Littlejohn LLP
28/02/2024