

Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer's Report to Annual Town Meeting 6 May 2021

My report is mostly concerned with providing an overview of the Council and Charity finances,

1. In our Council, the Clerk is also the Responsible Financial Officer and works with Councillors to keep your cash and assets secure and minimise the risk of loss through fraud or theft. Bank statements, a summary of income and expenditure and a bank reconciliation statement for the previous month are prepared by me for review at each monthly Council meeting.
2. The past 14 months have seen a departure from the normal practice as Council has been unable to meet in person. Most bank payments are made online; ordinarily a Councillor would sit alongside the Clerk to ensure that the correct details are entered. Most of our payments are to regular firms and individuals so very few new payees have been created. Fortunately, the banking system now displays the payee's name so the possibility of error is reduced.
3. Following the recent year end, Councillors will conduct a review of internal controls, including spot-checks on individual items of income and expenditure to ensure that each has been properly ordered, received and paid for. This will also include reconciling payroll deductions and payments to HMRC and pension schemes, ensuring VAT is properly recorded and claimed back.
4. At the year end the Council's minute books, bank statements, cashbook and invoice files are sent to our internal auditor, Kim Duke, who conducts a review before signing a statement in the annual return. This year, a more comprehensive checklist has been agreed with Kim.
5. The Council now qualifies as a 'smaller authority' so there is no requirement for the annual return to be sent to the external auditor. In accordance with the Transparency Directive a smaller council must publish additional information on our website.
6. Identical procedures and checks are carried out on the Council and Charity accounts.
7. The charity's income is derived from the gallop fees paid by the trainers and other income from land such as the tables placed on the town wastes by pubs and tea shops. Income from the gallop fees has remained stable (excuse the pun!) however Council felt that it was important to support those businesses that have pavement furniture by waiving all charges from 1 March 2020 until 1 August this year.
8. Despite lockdown it has largely been business as usual for the Council. The land maintenance contract carried on, Council meetings have been held and thanks to electronic communication, Councillors have carried on with local engagement with residents' concerns and I have been able to work from home.
9. The Council seeks to reduce expenditure and increase income where possible. A change of broadband provider is saving around £400 per year. Interest rates on bank deposits increased in 2019 but over the past year have dropped significantly and there will be little scope for increasing returns and keep the cash reserves secure.
10. At the year end, both Council and Charity remains in surplus and in line with their budgets.
11. Total cash deposits at the recent year-end on 31 March were £120,909 for the Council and £67,011 for the charity.

That concludes my report. I'd be happy to take any questions.

David Keep
Clerk, Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer