

Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate 2024/25

In respect of **Burcot and Clifton Hampden Parish Council**

1 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 2025; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors

2 External auditor limited assurance opinion 2024/25

Except for the matters reported below on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with the 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 council have not provided explanations to explain the significant variances in box 4 to bring them within the acceptable level of 15% or £500. This is required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations and proper practices. We are therefore unable to confirm that the budgeting processes are adequate and that proper practices have been followed.

The council has answered 'no' to assertion 4 of Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return which relates to how the Notice of Public Rights was advertised within the financial year 2024/25. Therefore, it relates to the Notice announcing the public right to review the 2023/24 return which was published during 2024/25. This notice was correctly advertised therefore this assertion should have been answered 'yes'.

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

We note that the contact email address on the council's website does not appear to belong to the council. Paragraph 1.26 of JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2024 states every authority should have an email account that belongs to the council and to which the council has access. An email account that is considered to belong to the council should have an authority owned domain, for example clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk. From 1 April 2025 this became a mandatory requirement, and the council will need to consider whether it is fully compliant.

Section 2 of the AGAR was initially submitted without the trust fund disclosures in box 11a and box 11b completed. This was later resubmitted with a 'no' answer to box 11a and a 'yes' answer to box 11b. Since it appears that the council are not a sole trustee based on trust fund disclosures on other sections, the response to box 11b should have been 'N/A'.

On review, the council's general reserves are higher than the generally accepted level for general reserves for smaller authorities. The council have however informed us in previous years that the build up of reserves is because the Parish Council is working on the submission of a Neighbourhood Development Plan requiring expert support and holding funds for flood alleviation works. Whilst this is reasonable as a statement, the council should quantify the amounts earmarked for these projects from general reserves each year under the budgeting guidance, ensuring that they then leave sufficient general reserves which under Paragraph 5.34 of JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2024 is 0.25 and 1.0 times annual expenditure. Amounts can be designated to and/or from this reserve as part of the in year budget monitoring process as is required.

The Internal Auditor has answered 'no' to control objectives A, B, C, D, H, L and N. This demonstrates a pervasive issue during the year with regards to lack of controls, compliance, monitoring, and reporting. The clerk agreed with this assessment and advised that the internal system had been reviewed and updated. Assertions have been answered correctly as 'no'.

3 External auditor certificate 2024/25

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2025.

External Auditor Name

 **MOORE**

External Auditor Signature



Date

10/09/2025