

In respect of the internal audit of Tivetshall Parish Council for the 2012-2013 year, I have examined the following : meeting minutes & all associated papers; cheque books & paying-in books, invoices & receipts, bank statements & past annual returns. As well as reading the minutes, I have noted financial references, cross-checked figures, sampled invoices (for additions, VAT calculations, etc.) & duly completed the current annual return.

I would bring the following points to the attention of the Parish Council for their due consideration :

These are official files & documents, which I believe are available to the general public; it is not very professional if the reverse of so many council papers are covered in Sudoku puzzles (I actually found this both distracting & annoying!) (I do fully take on board the issue of saving paper.) Perhaps I could suggest that confidential minutes are filed elsewhere.

Overall there are a number of minor typos & errors, which suggest a lack of attention to detail, & seems in stark contrast to some of the wordiness employed; I always feel that less is more!

There are anomalies within the payroll & clerk's associated expenses. I assume that HMRC's own paye-tools programme has been used; in which case, it seems odd that the associated reports have not been printed out; if these had been used as council records, as opposed to making out new, it is less likely that these errors would have occurred.

It is confusing that the clerk's pay seems to have been discussed in July but the minuting of this has not been signed until some months later.

On the accounting side, it would be good practice to clarify what period certain bills cover; SNC dog bin servicing is a prime example; it may well relate to forthcoming financial year, but this should be confirmed; also there are two annual bills allocated to this one year, which could easily be misleading as far as year-end figures & budgeting are concerned.

Another concern is that of purchase invoices being addressed to an unfamiliar/unrelated name/company name; this is not acceptable; all invoices should be clearly directed to Tivetshall Parish Council, even if the clerk or chair's name & address are used. There are examples where VAT cannot be claimed back because of this.

There doesn't seem to be a system for sales invoices; some are headed receipts & some invoices; neither are numbered, which should be elementary really. It is very disappointing to learn of unpaid bills.

I am concerned about the 'arrangement' for splitting bills (ink cartridges for example) with other councils. There is certainly no evidence within the minutes that this was discussed and/or agreed. Apart from anything else, it distorts income & expenditure.

Cheque books have generally been rather sloppily & sometimes almost illegibly kept; one cheque was not presented but nor was the stub cancelled (one of three to Fun Force.) Book 3 of 2012/2013 has unused cheques; this is not considered good practice & the bank may well question this. It may be worth contacting the bank to request statements which more easily fit in with the council's own accounting periods.

The summary receipts & payments sheet is not very clear to the untrained eye; I don't know if this was presented to monthly meetings? I don't know that the same cost centres/expenditure codes as previous years have been used? There seems to be a change from showing 'expenditure,' to 'budget remaining,' this is both inconsistent & far from transparent. Neither are the fixed asset register figures clear.

The financial statement which used to be employed accompanying agenda/minutes was very clear; I understand that the acting clerk already has a similar format for future use.

I do not consider it good practice for a clerk to undertake the role of responsible financial officer.

As a footnote, obviously I am aware of the changes in personnel & circumstances over the last several months; additionally I am aware of the determined efforts of a new council since the new financial year; consequently various issues which I raise (or not) are already being addressed; working party meetings & minutes; standing orders; financial regulations, etc., but it would not be appropriate for me to do other than include those issues here. I do congratulate the four councillors for their positive attitude in taking Tivetshall Parish Council forward; I am willing to continue to help out as required.