

**WOULDHAM PARISH COUNCIL  
STATEMENT ON INTERNAL CONTROL  
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2024**

## **1. SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Wouldham Parish Council (the Council) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including the preparation of the accounting statements as required by Section 1 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) – Annual Governance Statement and its 9 “assertions”.

## **2. THE PURPOSE OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL**

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council’s policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The Council has in place a set of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, which set out the general rules applicable at council and committee meetings and in carrying out the council’s business. These two documents are reviewed on a regular basis and influence the system of internal controls in place.

The system of internal control has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the AGAR (annual governance statement and accounting statements) and, except for the details of significant internal control issues at section 5 of this Statement, accords with proper practice.

## **3. THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT**

### **The Council:**

The Council has appointed a Chairman who is responsible for the smooth running of meetings and for ensuring that all Council decisions are lawful.

The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approved budgets for the following year at its January meeting. The January meeting of the Council approved the level of precept for the following financial year.

The full Council meets eleven times each year and monitors progress against its aims and objectives at each meeting by receiving relevant reports from the Committees, Clerk and Councillors.

The Council carries out regular reviews of its internal controls, systems and procedures.

### **Clerk to the Council / Responsible Financial Officer:**

The Council has appointed a Clerk to the Council who acts as the Council’s advisor and administrator. The Clerk is the Council’s Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the Council’s finances. The Clerk is responsible for the day-to-day compliance with laws and regulations that the Council is subject to and for managing risks. The Clerk also ensures that the Council’s procedures, control systems and policies are adhered to and reviewed as necessary.

### **Payments:**

All payments are reported to the Council for approval. Two Members of the Council must authorise and sign a monthly payment request identifying all payments to be made during the month. The RFO will then pay the approved amounts via BAC’s/internet banking. This includes regular direct debit and standing orders. A different member of the Council must authorise payments against statement.

Expenditure on revenue items may be authorised up to the amounts included for that class of expenditure in the approved budget. This authority is to be determined by:

- the council for all items over £2500;
- a duly delegated committee of the council for items over £500. However, Working Groups have no delegated authority and can only make recommendations for approval at full council meetings. the Clerk, in conjunction with Chair of Council or Chair of the appropriate committee, for any items below £500.

Such authority is to be evidenced by a minute or by an authorisation slip duly signed by the Clerk, and where necessary also by the appropriate Chair. Standing order & direct debit arrangements are reviewed annually.

**Income:**

All income is received and banked in the Councils' name in a timely manner and reported to the Council at the next meeting.

**Risk Assessments / Risk Management/Risk Register:**

The Council carries out regular risk assessments, identifying risks, assessing risks, addressing risks and reviewing & reporting these risks on an annual basis in a risk register.

**Internal Audit:**

The Council has appointed an Independent Internal Auditor who reports to the Council on the adequacy of its:

- Records
- procedures
- systems
- internal control
- regulations
- risk management
- reviews

The effectiveness of the internal audit system and audit plan is reviewed annually.

**External Audit:**

The Council's External Auditors, Mazars LLP, submit an annual report and Certificate of Audit, which is presented to the Council.

**4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS**

The Council has responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of:

- the full Council;
- the Clerk to the Council / Responsible Financial Officer who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment and managing risks;
- the Finance and Administration Committee for conducting internal audit checks;
- the Independent Internal Auditor who reviews the Council's system of internal control;
- Mazars LLP, the Council's external auditors, who make the final check using the AGAR, a form completed and signed by the Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer, the Chairman and the Independent Internal Auditor. The External Auditors issue an annual audit report and certificate;
- the number of significant issues that are raised during the year.

**5. SIGNIFICANT INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES**

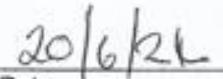
No significant internal control issues were identified during the 2023-24 financial year. Although, due to S106 payments, income exceeded 200k. Clarification has been agreed with the Internal Auditor that, as this is a 'one off', there is no requirement to change to an Income and Expenditure reporting basis. The Scribe software package has also been instigated for year 24/5 as recommended by the Internal Auditor.

As income exceeded 100k, an Annual Investment Strategy was produced and approved at the November meeting.

Whilst no significant internal control issues were identified during the year the Council strives for the continuous improvement of the system it has adopted for internal control and has addressed all the minor issues and weaknesses raised and reported during the review process.

  
Chairman  
Eddy Bell  
Wouldham Parish Council

  
Clerk  
Tina Miles  
Wouldham Parish Council

  
Date