

Section 3 – External Auditor’s Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of **Stoke Sub Hamdon Parish Council – SO0261**

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 2024; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

2 External auditor’s limited assurance opinion 2023/24

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. The Smaller Authority has confirmed that there are various errors in the accounts for 2023/24. The figures for the 2023/24 AGAR have been prepared using the bank statements and some figures for 2022/23 have been restated. The Smaller Authority has confirmed that proper accounting records were not kept during the year and ticked ‘No’ to Assertion 1 in respect of this. This is consistent with the weaknesses raised by the Internal Auditor in their detailed internal audit report. We have identified the following errors:

- Section 2, Box 7 for the prior year does not agree to Boxes 1+2+3-(4+5+6) and an adequate explanation has not been provided by the smaller authority.
- Section 2, Box 1 for the current year does not agree to the 2022/23 year end closing balance as per the 2022/23 bank reconciliation.
- Section 2, Box 10 is inconsistent with the balance published by the Public Works Loan Board. The figure in Section 2, Box 10 should read £119,098.
- The figures in Section 2, Boxes 4,6,7,8 and 10 of the prior year comparative column do not agree to the prior year final signed AGAR.

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

The smaller authority has confirmed that it has not complied with the governance Assertions in Section 1, Boxes 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 but it has provided the appointed auditor with an explanation for non-compliance and details of the actions necessary to address weaknesses identified. This is consistent with the significant weaknesses raised in Internal Control Objectives A, B, C, D, G and J by the internal auditor in completion of the Annual Internal Audit Report. The smaller authority must ensure that action is taken to address these areas of weakness in a timely manner.

The smaller authority has not provided: an adequate explanation for the variances between the prior and current year values in Boxes 2,3,4 and 6 of Section 2.

In the completion of the Annual Internal Audit Report, and their detailed report, the internal auditor has drawn attention to weaknesses in relation to Internal Control Objective M as the smaller authority did not minute the public rights dates when the AGAR was approved. The smaller authority must ensure that action is taken to address these areas of weakness in a timely manner.

3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

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 2024.

External Auditor Name

PKF LITTLEJOHN LLP

External Auditor Signature



Date

29/09/2024