

Mr J Robinson  
Bishop Middleham Parish Council  
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Sedgefield  
County Durham  
TS21 3BA

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Email: [local.councils@mazars.co.uk](mailto:local.councils@mazars.co.uk)  
Date: 20 September 2022

Dear Mr Robinson

### **Completion of the audit for the year ended 31 March 2022**

We have completed our audit for the year ended 31 March 2022 and I have pleasure in enclosing the certified Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The External Auditor's Certificate and Report is given in Section 3.

If there are any significant matters arising from the audit, they are summarised in the External Auditor's certificate in Section 3. If we have identified minor scope for improvement we have recorded this on page 2 of this letter. The Council must consider these matters and decide what action is required. In most cases this will be self-evident. In some instances we have referred to further guidance available, in particular, in the publication "*Governance and Accountability for Local Councils – A Practitioners' Guide (England) 2021*". This can be obtained via your NALC or SLCC branch, or downloaded free of charge.

### **Action you are required to take**

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 set out what you must do at the conclusion of the audit. In summary, you are required to:

Publish (which must include publication on the authority's website) a statement:

- that the audit has been concluded and that the statement of accounts has been published;
- of the rights of inspection conferred on local government electors by section 25 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; and
- the address at which, and the hours during which, those rights may be exercised.
- Keep copies of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum.
- Ensure that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return remains available for public access for a period of not less than five years beginning with the date on which the Annual Governance and Accountability Return was first published.

*The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 do not specify the period the Completion Notice needs to be on the council's website but this period must be reasonable.*

#### **Mazars LLP**

Mazars LLP is the UK firm of Mazars, an integrated international advisory and accountancy organisation. Mazars LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC308299 and with its registered office at 30 Old Bailey, London, EC4M 7AU. Registered to carry on audit work in the UK by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. Details about our audit registration can be viewed at [www.auditregister.org.uk](http://www.auditregister.org.uk) under reference number C001139861. VAT number: GB 839 8356 73

# mazars

## **Minor scope for improvement in 2022/23**

Although the Council provided explanations for all significant variances the reasons initially given for unusual income or expenditure in a particular year did not always include values, so it was not possible to determine if the variance was sufficiently explained from the information submitted for audit. The analysis focused on summarising the new ledger codes rather than the movement in the boxes at Section 2 of the AGAR. In future, all explanations provided on the variance analysis should be quantified and the proforma contained in our guidance used so they can be readily related to boxes in Section 2 of the AGAR.

## **Accessibility Regulations**

We are aware that the Accounts and Audit Regulations requirement for a physical 'wet ink' signature on the original AGAR, does not allow parish council's to fully comply with the Accessibility Regulations. The National Audit Office are aware that the two pieces of legislation are not compatible, therefore smaller authorities are advised to make it clear on their website that the document is a scan and will not be fully compliant with the Accessibility Regulations.

## **Audit fee**

Our fee note for the audit, which is in accordance with the audit fee scales set by SAAA, and available at <http://www.localaudits.co.uk/fees.html> will follow.

We would be grateful if you could arrange for this to be paid at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



**Cameron Waddell**  
Partner  
For and on behalf of Mazars LLP

# Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2021/22 Form 3

To be completed by Local Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and other Smaller Authorities\*:

- where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure exceeded £25,000 but did not exceed £6.5 million; or
- where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure was £25,000 or less but that:
  - are unable to certify themselves as exempt (fee payable); or
  - have requested a limited assurance review (fee payable)

## Guidance notes on completing Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2021/22

1. Every smaller authority in England that either received gross income or incurred gross expenditure exceeding £25,000 **must** complete Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return at the end of each financial year in accordance with *Proper Practices*.
2. **The Annual Governance and Accountability Return is made up of three parts, pages 3 to 6:**
  - The **Annual Internal Audit Report** must be completed by the authority's internal auditor.
  - **Sections 1 and 2** must be completed and approved by the authority.
  - **Section 3** is completed by the external auditor and will be returned to the authority.
3. The authority **must** approve Section 1, Annual Governance Statement, before approving Section 2, Accounting Statements, and both **must** be approved and published on the authority website/webpage **before 1 July 2022**.
4. An authority with either gross income or gross expenditure exceeding £25,000 or an authority with neither income nor expenditure exceeding £25,000, but which is unable to certify itself as exempt, or is requesting a limited assurance review, **must** return to the external auditor by email or post (not both) **no later than 30 June 2022**. Reminder letters will incur a charge of £40 +VAT:
  - the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Sections 1 and 2, together with
  - a bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2022
  - an explanation of any significant year on year variances in the accounting statements
  - notification of the commencement date of the period for the exercise of public rights
  - Annual Internal Audit Report 2021/22

Unless requested, do not send any additional documents to your external auditor. Your external auditor will ask for any additional documents needed.

Once the external auditor has completed the limited assurance review and is able to give an opinion, the Annual Governance and Accountability **Section 1, Section 2 and Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate** will be returned to the authority by email or post.

## Publication Requirements

Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website/webpage:

Before 1 July 2022 authorities **must** publish:

- Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and a declaration that the accounting statements are as yet unaudited;
- **Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2021/22**, approved and signed, page 4
- **Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2021/22**, approved and signed, page 5

Not later than 30 September 2022 authorities **must** publish:

- Notice of conclusion of audit
- **Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate**
- **Sections 1 and 2 of AGAR** including any amendments as a result of the limited assurance review.

It is recommended as best practice, to avoid any potential confusion by local electors and interested parties, that you also publish the Annual Internal Audit Report, page 3.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return constitutes the annual return referred to in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Throughout, the words 'external auditor' have the same meaning as the words 'local auditor' in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

\*for a complete list of bodies that may be smaller authorities refer to schedule 2 to the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

## Guidance notes on completing Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2021/22

- The authority **must** comply with *Proper Practices* in completing Sections 1 and 2 of this AGAR. *Proper Practices* are found in the *Practitioners' Guide\** which is updated from time to time and contains everything needed to prepare successfully for the financial year-end and the subsequent work by the external auditor.
- Make sure that the AGAR is complete (no highlighted boxes left empty), and is properly signed and dated. If the AGAR contains unapproved or unexplained amendments, it may be returned and additional costs will be incurred.
- The authority **should** receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report before approving the Annual Governance Statement and the accounts.
- Use the checklist provided below to review the AGAR for completeness before returning it to the external auditor by email or post (not both) no later than 30 June 2022.
- The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) must be approved on the same day or before the Accounting Statements (Section 2) and evidenced by the agenda or minute references.
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) must certify the accounts (Section 2) before they are presented to the authority for approval. The authority must in this order; consider, approve and sign the accounts.
- The RFO is required to commence the public rights period as soon as practical after the date of the AGAR approval.
- Do not send the external auditor any information not specifically requested. However, **you must inform your external auditor about any change of Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer or Chairman, and provide relevant authority owned generic email addresses and telephone numbers.**
- Make sure that the copy of the bank reconciliation to be sent to your external auditor with the AGAR covers all the bank accounts. If the authority holds any short-term investments, note their value on the bank reconciliation. The external auditor must be able to agree the bank reconciliation to Box 8 on the accounting statements (**Section 2, page 5**). An explanation **must** be provided of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8. More help on bank reconciliation is available in the *Practitioners' Guide\**.
- Explain fully significant variances in the accounting statements on **page 5**. Do not just send a copy of the detailed accounting records instead of this explanation. The external auditor wants to know that you understand the reasons for all variances. Include complete numerical and narrative analysis to support the full variance.
- If the external auditor has to review unsolicited information, or receives an incomplete bank reconciliation, or variances are not fully explained, additional costs may be incurred.
- Make sure that the accounting statements add up and that the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2021) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2022).
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), on behalf of the authority, **must** set the commencement date for the exercise of public rights of 30 consecutive working days which **must** include the first ten working days of July.
- The authority **must** publish on the authority website/webpage the information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, including the period for the exercise of public rights and the name and address of the external auditor **before 1 July 2022**.

| Completion checklist – 'No' answers mean you may not have met requirements |  | Yes | No |
|--|--|-----|----|
| All sections   | Have all highlighted boxes have been completed?  |     |    |
|  | Has all additional information requested, including <b>the dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights</b> , been provided for the external auditor?                |     |    |
| Internal Audit Report  | Have all highlighted boxes been completed by the internal auditor and explanations provided?   |     |    |
| Section 1  | For any statement to which the response is 'no', has an explanation been published?  |     |    |
| Section 2  | Has the authority's approval of the accounting statements been confirmed by the signature of the Chairman of the approval meeting?   |     |    |
|  | Has an explanation of significant variations been published where required?  |     |    |
|  | Has the bank reconciliation as at <b>31 March 2022</b> been reconciled to Box 8?   |     |    |
|  | Has an explanation of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8 been provided?  |     |    |
| Sections 1 and 2   | Trust funds – have all disclosures been made if the authority as a body corporate is a sole managing trustee? <b>NB:</b> do not send trust accounting statements unless requested. |     |    |

**\*Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices**, can be downloaded from [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk) or from [www.ada.org.uk](http://www.ada.org.uk)

# Annual Internal Audit Report 2021/22

BISHOP MIDDLEHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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During the financial year ended 31 March 2022, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2021/22 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

| Internal control objective   | Yes  | No | Not covered** |
|--|--|----|---------------|
|  | A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year. | ✓  |               |
| B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.  | ✓  |    |               |
| C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.  | ✓  |    |               |
| D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.   | ✓  |    |               |
| E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.  | ✓  |    |               |
| F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.   |  |    | ✓ not         |
| G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.  | ✓  |    |               |
| H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.   | ✓  |    |               |
| I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.  | ✓  |    |               |
| J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded. | ✓  |    |               |
| K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2020/21, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2020/21 AGAR tick "not covered")  |  |    | ✓             |
| L. The authority publishes information on a free to access website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with any relevant transparency code requirements   | ✓  |    |               |
| M. The authority, during the previous year (2020-21) correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (evidenced by the notice published on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).                    |  |    | ✓ see report  |
| N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2020/21 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).   | ✓  |    |               |
| <b>O. (For local councils only)</b><br>Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.   |  |    | ✓             |

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

27/05/2022

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

GORDON FLETCHER (C.M.I.A.)

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit

G. Fletcher

Date

07/06/2022

\*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

\*\*Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).

## Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

We acknowledge as the members of:

Bishop Middleham Parish Council

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022, that:

|   | Agreed                              |                                     |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
|   | Yes                                 | No*                                 |  |
| 1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.</i>   |
| 2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.</i>   |
| 3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.</i>   |
| 4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <i>during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.</i>   |
| 5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.</i>  |
| 6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.</i> |
| 7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.</i>   |
| 8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.                                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <i>disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.</i>   |
| 9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.                         | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A<br><i>has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.</i>                    |

\*Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

15/06/2022

and recorded as minute reference:

32.0/22

Signed by the Chairman and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Chairman

Clerk

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## Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2021/22 for

Brethog Middleham Parish Council

|  | Year ending        |                    | Notes and guidance  |   |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|---|---|
|  | 31 March 2021<br>£ | 31 March 2022<br>£ |   |   |
| 1. Balances brought forward  | 46,544             | 69,424             | Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.  |   |
| 2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies   | 50,637             | 50,364             | Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.   |   |
| 3. (+) Total other receipts  | 44,264             | 24,538             | Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.   |   |
| 4. (-) Staff costs   | 9373               | 9247               | Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments. |   |
| 5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments  | 0                  | 0                  | Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).  |   |
| 6. (-) All other payments  | 62,648             | 58,525             | Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).  |   |
| 7. (=) Balances carried forward  | 69,424             | 76,554             | Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).   |   |
| 8. Total value of cash and short term investments                                      | 69,424             | 76,554             | The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.   |   |
| 9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets                            | 335,610            | 335,610            | The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.  |   |
| 10. Total borrowings   | 0                  | 0                  | The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).  |   |
| 11. (For Local Councils Only)<br>Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable) | Yes                | No                 | N/A   | The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee for and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets. |
|  |                    |                    | 0   | N.B. The figures in the accounting statements above do not include any Trust transactions.                        |

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2022 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval

Date

14/06/22

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

15/06/2022

as recorded in minute reference:

~~35/00~~ 22 330/22

Signed by Chairman of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

K. I.

### Section 3 – External Auditor’s Report and Certificate 2021/22

In respect of

**Bishop Middleham 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 2022; 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 2021/22

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 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.

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

It came to our attention that in 2021 the Council may not have met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 in publishing a notice advertising a period of 30 working days to inspect the accounts. Internal audit were unable to obtain evidence that the notice was published on the website. The Council correctly answered no to the relevant assertion in the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement and has complied with the regulations in 2022.

#### 3 External auditor certificate 2021/22

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 2022.

\*We do not certify completion because:

Not applicable.

External Auditor Name

**Mazars LLP, Newcastle, NE1 1DF**

External Auditor Signature

*Mazars LLP*

Date

**20 September 2022**