



MARY TAVY PARISH COUNCIL

STATEMENT ON INTERNAL CONTROL FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Mary Tavy Parish Council is a local authority funded largely by public money. It 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, Mary Tavy Parish Council (the council) is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and includes arrangements for the management of risk.

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
- evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised
- to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The system of internal control has been in place at the council for the financial year ended 31st March 2024 and accords with proper practices as set out in the Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England guide.

THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

The Council

The council appointed a chairman who is responsible for the smooth running of council meetings. For the financial year ended 31st March 2024, this was Cllr. Jane Dunn.

The council reviewed its obligations and objectives and approved a final budget for the 2023-2024 financial year at the full council meeting held on 9th January 2023 (minute reference: page 84). After

approving the final budget, the council then set the precept level for the 2023-24 financial year as the next agenda item (minute reference: page 84) and reviewed its earmarked reserves (minute reference: page 85) at the same full council meeting.

The council monitors progress against objectives, financial systems and procedures, and budgetary controls and carries out regular reviews of financial matters. The draft minutes of council meetings are circulated to all members of the council and are published on the parish council's website, www.marytavyparishcouncil.gov.uk, within one calendar month of the meeting taking place.

The council appointed a named councillor specifically to monitor its internal control system and procedures. Cllr. Herbert was appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the Responsible Financial Officer. For the 2023-2024 financial year, this involved a check of each bank reconciliation produced by the Responsible Financial Officer against original bank statements (followed by a wet signature on each document as evidence of the verification) every three months and at financial year-end; the conclusion of which was reported to and noted by the full council during council meetings.

Clerk to the Council / Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

The council has appointed a clerk to the council who acts as the council's advisor and administrator. The clerk is also the council's Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the council's finances. The clerk is responsible for advising on day-to-day compliance with laws and regulations that the council is subject to and for managing risks. The clerk also provides advice to help the council ensure that its procedures, internal control system and policies are adhered to.

Payments

The clerk provides the council with a bank reconciliation, a statement of receipts and payments to date and a year to date budget monitoring sheet every month by email with the agenda at least three clear days before a full council meeting. The council approve by resolution the bank reconciliation, year to date budget monitoring sheet and payment schedule during their monthly full council meetings. The chairman of the meeting then signs the bank reconciliation, year to date budget monitoring sheet and payment schedule as evidence of approval. The signed payment schedule is filed in the minute book with the approved signed minutes of the council meeting.

All payments and receipts are entered onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on the parish council's laptop, which has password access. The parish council's laptop has up to date anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software packages installed.

All invoices and grant applications are signed by two councillors following a resolution instructing payment during a council meeting.

With regards to cheque payments, two councillors who are authorised bank signatories, must check and sign every cheque against the relevant invoice and initial the cheque stub. Cheques are only presented for signature at full council meetings.

The council mainly pays invoices and grants electronically via internet banking arrangements. The clerk is the Administrator of the bank accounts and is able to submit payment instructions for subsequent authorisation by two councillors who are bank signatories; the clerk has no power to authorise payments. The clerk sends two councillors who are authorised bank signatories an electronic copy of the invoices and grant applications (approved for payment by the full council) by email to their parish

council email accounts; the two councillors are required to check the amount to be debited and the account number and sort code of the beneficiary on the invoice/grant application against the payment instruction for errors prior to submitting an electronic authorisation. Payment instructions require separate authorisation by two councillors who are bank signatories in order to be fully processed; if this does not occur within a one-month period, the payment is not made and the instruction is automatically cancelled by the bank.

Payments to the following beneficiaries are made by direct debit: West Devon Borough Council (bi-annual for the dog bin emptying service), Information Commissioner's Office (annual data protection fee) and Campaign to Protect Rural England (annual subscription fee). All direct debit instructions are signed by two bank signatories (following approval by resolution of the full council) and the subsequent written confirmations of the set-up of direct debit instructions received in the post are checked for accuracy by the clerk, passed to the two bank signatories for a further accuracy check and then initialled by the two bank signatories as proof of the check. The clerk reports to full council, via the agenda and minutes, each time a bank statement shows that a payment by direct debit has been made. The council does not have any standing orders for payment set up.

Income

All income is received and banked in the council's name in a timely manner and reported to the full council via the agenda and the monthly updated statement of receipts, year to date budget monitoring sheet and bank reconciliation. Income cheques (receipts) are sent to the bank by post with a completed paying-in slip; the origin of the receipt is entered onto the paying-in book stub which is retained by the clerk.

Contracts

Procedures as to contracts are laid out in the council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The full council oversees all contract procedures.

Risk Assessments / Risk Management

The council carries out an annual risk management review which examines current records of risks and related health and safety, employment and insurance issues and strategies to mitigate risk in terms of continued applicability, likelihood and effectiveness. The clerk reports risk assessments to the full council for consideration, approval and action.

Internal Audit

The council appointed Rachel Avery as its independent internal auditor for the 2023/2024 financial year who has reported to the council on the adequacy of its records, procedures, systems, internal control and risk management. The appointment of an internal auditor is reviewed by the full council annually.

External Audit

The council's appointed external auditor is PKF Littlejohn.

The council will be eligible to certify itself exempt from the requirement for a limited assurance review as its annual turnover for the financial year ended 31st March 2024 did not exceed £25,000. Should the council wish to exempt itself, a resolution to this effect will be passed during a full council meeting and the Certificate of Exemption will be signed by both the Responsible Financial Officer and the Chairman.

REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

Mary Tavy Parish Council has responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control. In the 2023/2024 financial year, review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control was monitored and informed by:

- The Clerk to the Council/ Responsible Financial Officer
- The work of the independent internal auditor
- The external auditor through their annual letter
- The appointed council member with delegated responsibilities within this area (Cllr. Herbert)

Any concerns about the effectiveness of the system of internal control are investigated promptly and action taken as appropriate.

We are satisfied on all accounts that our arrangements are effective and meet expected standards.

Council approved this statement on internal control, prior to consideration of the Annual Governance Statement, on 9th July 2024

Minute reference: item FC.24/115

Next review due: June 2025