



Wickham and Knowle Parish Council

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27th June 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: the financial year 2023/24 submission for external audit

Wickham and Knowle Parish Council has been through a year of change in 2023/24.

The previous Clerk and RFO resigned in early October 2023 and proceeded to delete the entire accounts history and 30,000+ emails, leaving the Parish Council without staff and access to any accounts data. The Council employed both a Locum Clerk and Locum RFO on a temporary, part-time basis to complete critical tasks during a period of recruitment. A new permanent Clerk & RFO was employed, beginning on 6th May 2024, to rebuild the accounting system.

The Council changed Internal Auditor from Blue Skies Accounting to Lightatouch during this time. Lightatouch carried out a forensic accounting exercise in late 2023, followed by the interim and full year end audit.

For the year ending 31st March 2023, the Councillors had been asked to tick YES to box 9 stating that the Council had discharged its accountability responsibilities as a sole managing Trustee. The Council are the Sole Trustee to a Charity, the Wickham Water Meadows Millenium Trust. During the forensic accounting exercise, it was discovered that grants for the Charity had been received into the Council's bank account, with the work being paid for from the bank account and the remaining pot of money having been left within earmarked reserves of the Council as at 31st March 2023. The Council are now aware that this method of treating the grant was not accurate and a reconciliation will be carried out to fully calculate the correct amount outstanding and will be transferred to the Charity's bank account.

The new permanent Clerk and RFO will ensure that the Council's accounting practices will be in accordance with JPAG going forward. As a result of this issue, the Councillors will be responding NO to box 9 this year.

During the difficult transition period, as the temporary staff were only contracted on a part-time basis, not all normal tasks were carried out. Consequently, the website was not maintained fully with minutes not being uploaded in a timely manner; and both the asset register and the financial risk assessment were not reviewed by the Council during the financial year 2023-24.

The new permanent Clerk and RFO will ensure that the website will be maintained accurately going forward and both the asset register and financial risk assessment will be reviewed by Council during the year. As a result of this, the Councillors will be responding NO to box 5 this year.

With a new full time Clerk and RFO in place, the Council have put in place measures to ensure better management of the Council procedures and accounts for 2024/25.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Cllr Manuel', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Cllr Craig Manuel
Chair to Wickham & Knowle Parish Council