

Audit Notice 2020

PURLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

NOTICE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS AND PUBLICATION OF UNAUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2020

LOCAL AUDIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT 2014 Sections 26 and 27
THE ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT REGULATIONS 2015(SI 2015/234)

1. Date of announcement: **26th May 2020**

2. Each year Purleigh Parish Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) needs to be reviewed by an external auditor appointed by the Audit Commission. The unaudited AGAR has been published with this notice. As yet it has to be reviewed by the appointed auditor, it is subject to change as a result of that review. Any person interested has the right to inspect and make copies of the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers and receipts and other documents relating to those records must be made available for inspection by any person interested. For the year ended 31st March 2020 these documents will be available on reasonable notice by application to:

Jane Potter,

Clerk to the Council

Lower Barn Farm

Roundbush Road

Mundon

Maldon

Essex. CM9 5NN.

Tel: 01621 828270. e-mail: jane.m.potter@btinternet.com

Commencing on Monday 15th June 2020 and ending on Friday, 24th July 2020

3. Local government electors and their representatives also have:

- The opportunity to question the appointed auditor about the accounting records; and
- The right to make an objection which concerns a matter in respect of which the appointed auditor could either make a public interest report or apply to the court for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful. Written notice of an objection must first be given to the auditor and a copy sent to Purleigh Parish Council at the address above.
- The appointed auditor can be contacted at the address in paragraph 4 below for this purpose between the above dates only.

4. The Parish Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return is subject to review by the appointed auditor under the provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the NAO's Code of Audit Practice 2015.

The appointed auditor is:

PKF Littlejohn LLP

Ref: SBA Team

15 Westferry Circus

Canary Wharf

LONDON

E14 4HD

(sba@pkf-littlejohn.com)

1. This announcement is made by:

Jane Potter, Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Purleigh Parish Council

LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNTS: A SUMMARY OF YOUR RIGHTS

The basic position

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act) governs the work of auditors appointed to councils and other local bodies. This summary explains the provisions contained in Sections 26 and 27 of the Act. The Act and the

Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 also cover the duties, responsibilities and rights of councils, other organisations and the public concerning the accounts being audited. As a local elector, or an interested person you have certain legal rights in respect of the accounting records and related documents. If you are a local government elector for the area to which the accounts relate you can ask questions about the accounts and object to them. You do not have to pay directly for exercising your rights. However, any resulting costs incurred by the council form part of its running costs. Therefore indirectly, local residents pay for the cost of you exercising your rights through their council tax.

The right to inspect the accounting records

Any interested person can inspect the accounting records, which includes, but is not limited to local electors. You can inspect the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records. You can copy all, or part, of these records or documents. Your inspection must be about the accounts, or relate to an item in the accounts. You cannot for example inspect or copy documents unrelated to the accounts, or that include personal information (Section 26 (6) – (10) of the Act explains what is meant by personal information). You cannot information which is protected by commercial confidentiality. This is information which would prejudice commercial confidentiality if it was released to the public and there is not, set against this, a very strong reason in the public interest why it should nevertheless be disclosed.

When councils have finalised preparing accounts for the financial year and approved them, they must publish them (including on the council's website). There must be 30 working day period, called 'the period for the exercise of public rights', during which you can exercise your statutory right to inspect the accounting records. Councils must tell the public, including advertising this on their website, that the accounting records and related documents are available to inspect. By arrangement you will then have 30 working days to inspect and make copies of the accounting records. You may have to pay a copying charge. The 30 day period must include a common period of inspection during which all smaller authorities' accounting records are available to inspect. This will be 1st to 12th July 2019 for the 2018/2019 accounts. The advertisement must set out the dates of the period for the exercise of public rights, how you can communicate to the council that you wish to inspect the accounting records and related documents, the name and address of the auditor, and the relevant legislation that governs the inspection of accounts and objections.

The right to ask the auditor questions about the accounting records

You should first ask your council about the accounting records, since they hold all the details. If you are a local elector, your right to questions of the external auditor is enshrined in law. However, while the auditor will answer your questions where possible, they are not always obliged to do so. For example, the question might be better answered by another organisation, require investigation beyond the auditor's remit, or involve disproportionate cost (which is borne by the local taxpayer). Give your council the opportunity first to explain anything in accounting records that you are unsure about. If you are not satisfied with the council's explanation, you can question the external auditor about the accounting records.

The law limits the time available for you formally to ask questions. This must be done in the period for the exercise of public rights, so let the external auditor know your concern as soon as possible. The advertisement or notice that tells you the accounting records are available to inspect will also give the period for the exercise of public rights during

which you may ask the auditor questions, which here means formally asking questions under the Act. You can ask someone to represent you when asking the external auditor questions.

Before you ask the external auditor any questions, inspect the accounting records fully, so you know what they contain. Please remember that you cannot formally ask questions, under the Act, after the end of the period for the exercise of public rights. You may ask your council other questions about their accounts for any year, at any time. But these are not questions under the Act.

You can ask the external auditor questions about an item in the accounting records for the financial year being audited. However, your right to ask the external auditor questions is limited. The external auditor can only answer ‘what’ questions, not ‘why’ questions. The external auditor cannot answer questions about the council’s policies, finances, procedures or anything else unless it is directly relevant to an item in the accounting records. Remember that your questions must always be about facts not opinions. To avoid misunderstanding, we recommend that you always put your questions in writing.

The right to make objections at audit

You have inspected the accounting records and asked your questions of the smaller authority. Now you may wish to object to the accounts on the basis that an item in them is in your view unlawful or there are matters of wider concern arising from the Council’s finances. A local government elector can ask the external auditor to apply to the High Court for a declaration that an item in the accounts is unlawful, or to issue a report on matters which are in the public interest. You must tell the external auditor which specific item in the accounts you object to and why you think the item is unlawful, or why you think that a public interest report should be made about it. You must provide the external auditor with the evidence you have to support your objection. Disagreeing with income or spending does not make it unlawful. To object to the Council’s accounts you must write to the external auditor stating you want to make an objection, including the information and evidence below and you must send a copy to the council. The notice must include:

- Confirmation that you are an elector in the council’s area
- Why you are objecting to the accounts and the facts on which you rely
- Details of any item in the accounts that you think is unlawful, and
- Details of any matter about which you think the external auditor should make a public interest report.

Other than that it must be in writing, there is no set format for objecting. You can only ask the external auditor to act within the powers available under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

A final word

You may not use this ‘right to object’ to make a personal complaint or claim against your council. You should take such complaints to your local Citizens’ Advice Bureau, local law centre or to your solicitor. Councils, and so local taxpayers, meet the costs of dealing with questions and objections. In deciding whether to take your objection forward, one of a

series of factors the auditor must take into account is the cost that will be involved, they will only continue with the objection if it is in the public interest to do so. They may also decide not to consider an objection if they think that it is frivolous or vexatious, or if it repeats an objection already considered. If you appeal to the courts against an auditor's decision not to apply to the courts for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful, you will have to pay for the action yourself.

<p>For more detailed guidance on electors' rights and the special powers of auditors, copies of the publication <i>Local authority accounts – a guide to your rights</i> are available from the NAO website</p>	<p>If you wish to contact your council's appointed external auditor please write to the address in paragraph 4 of the <i>Notice of public rights and publication of Unaudited Annual Governance and Accountability Return</i>.</p>
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