

Accounts and Audit - Overview

Budget:

During November / December, the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) prepares a forecast of the expected spend for the current financial year - ending on the following 31 March; the RFO also prepares an estimate of the spend for the following financial year. The Council reviews these estimates and having regard to the levels of reserves, agrees a precept by 31 January. The Precept is advised to Cotswold District Council; who then collect it as part of the overall Council Tax Bill.

Controls:

The Council's agreed procedures for accounting are contained in the Financial Regulations. In summary, the RFO is responsible for implementing accounting controls and control systems in line with the agreed procedures.

All payments made by the Council require the signature of two Councillors; a proposed payments list will be approved at a Council meeting and the cheques then signed. There are provisions that allow the signing of cheques between meetings where a delay would incur additional cost or damage to the Council - in these cases a list of such cheques is presented to the next meeting of the Council.

Reporting

Each month, the RFO should supply to each councillor a statement summarising the council's receipts and payments for the month and cumulative to date, and the bank balances at the end of the month. These should include a comparison with the budget so that any potential overspends are identified.

Following the year end, accounting statements are prepared by the RFO in accordance with proper practices detailing the receipts and payments for the year to 31 March. The RFO should present a completed draft annual return to each councillor before the end of May. The Annual Return of the Council, which is subject to external audit, including the annual governance statement, shall be presented to council for consideration and formal approval before the end of June.

Once the Annual Return is completed it is displayed in the village, together with a 'Notice of Commencement of Period for Exercise of Public Rights' - see below.

Internal Audit

Each year the Council appoints an independent external person to perform an Internal Audit of the Council. The primary purposes of this audit are to ensure that adequate financial control have been operated, and that the reported numbers in the annual return agree to the underlying accounting records. The Internal Auditor issues a report which is considered by the Council and recommendations made by the auditor considered.

External Audit

Once the Annual Return has been approved by the Council, the external auditor (2016/17 - Grant Thornton) undertake an audit and provide a report on the Annual Return.

Public Rights

Following the Notice of Commencement of Period for Exercise of Public Rights, there is a 30 day period where any person may inspect and copy (with a small number of exemptions) the Annual Return, vouchers invoices etc. Additionally, an elector may question the External Auditor about the Accounting records or object to the accounts or any item in them. Details of Public Rights are explained in this booklet:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2015/03/Council-accounts-a-guide-to-your-rights.pdf>