

## Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of **Swannington 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 2024; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors

### 2 External auditor limited assurance opinion 2023/24

Except for the matters reported below 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 the 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.

A review of the Finance and Open Data Section on the Council's website has found that the Council has not fully met the requirement of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Regulation 13 (1) which states that the audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return should, on conclusion of the audit, be available for public access which includes publication on the Council's website. The Council amended their return in the prior year during the 2022/23 audit process however only the original version of the return has been published on the Council's website. The Council should bring this into line with the regulations as soon as practically possible.

On review of the full Internal Auditor report provided on submission, it appears that the Council last reviewed their statement of internal control policy in March 2023. The Council is required to review the effectiveness of its internal controls on an annual basis as per the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 Section 6 Paragraph 1 and the JPAG Practitioners Guide 2023 at Paragraph 1.20. Therefore, the Council should have answered 'No' to Assertion 2 on its Annual Governance Statement.

Also, it appears that the Council last reviewed their Risk Assessment in March 2023. Paragraph 1.32 of JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2023 provides that these risks need to be assessed or the assessments considered during the year to ensure they are appropriately managed and/or mitigated. Therefore, we would have expected Assertion 5 on the Annual Governance Statement to have been answered 'No'. The Council should look to ensure this is reviewed annually going forwards.

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

The Internal Auditor has signed off the Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24 after the Section 1 Governance Statement 2023/24 was approved. As the completed 2023/24 report was not available for review and consideration with the form, it is presumed that the Assertions in Section 1 : Annual Governance Statement are supported by the previous year's internal audit report and to other checks performed by the Council.

As a result of the Council appearing to not have reviewed their risk assessment during the financial year, we feel that the response to control objective C on the Annual Internal Audit Report would have been more appropriately marked as a 'No'.

The internal auditor has provided a 'Yes' response at control objectives L and N on their report. This suggests that the Council correctly published all relevant documents on its website. As the Council currently has not published the audited 2022-23 return following amendments made during the 2022-23 limited assurance review, the answer to these points should have been 'No'.

### 3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

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 2024.

External Auditor Name



External Auditor Signature

Date

01/09/2024