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# **Burnham Parish Council**

*Internal Audit Report 2017-18 (Interim)*

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## **Background**

Statute requires all town and parish councils to arrange for an independent internal audit examination of their accounting records and systems of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year as part of the Annual Return process.

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2017-18 financial year, during our first visit to the Council which took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018.

## **Internal Audit Approach**

In commencing our review, we have paid due regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential mis-recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts/Annual Return.

Our programme of cover has been designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems are robust and operate in a manner to ensure effective probity of transactions and to afford a reasonable probability of identifying any material errors or possible abuse of the Council's own and the national statutory regulatory framework. We have, consequently, employed a combination of selective sampling techniques (where appropriate) and 100% detailed checks in order that we may sign-off the 'Internal Audit Report' associated with the Council's Annual Return, which requires independent assurance over ten specific internal control objectives.

## **Overall Conclusion**

We are pleased to conclude that, in the areas examined to date, the Council operates generally effective control systems that should help ensure that transactions are free from material misstatement and will be reported accurately in the Annual Return.

We have identified a few areas where we consider that further action is required to further enhance existing controls and / or correct one or two financial anomalies that we have identified.

# Detailed Report

## Maintenance of Accounting Records & Bank Reconciliations

The Council uses Sage software to maintain its day-to-day accounting records, which also form the basis of the year-end Statement of Accounts and Annual Return. The Council operates a single bank account with Barclays plc, together with a Barclaycard: further surplus funds are held in a CCLA Deposit Fund account. Our objective in this area is to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and in a timely manner and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers. We have consequently: -

- Ensured that an appropriate income and expenditure coding structure is in place;
- Checked the year's opening balances for 2017-18 to those reported in the closing Trial Balance and Annual Return for 2016-17;
- Checked and agreed detail of current account transactions as recorded in the detailed nominal ledgers for two sample months (April and October 2017) from the cashbooks to the relevant and bank statements; and
- Reviewed and verified detail of the 30<sup>th</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017 current account bank reconciliations, noting that no long-standing uncleared cheques or other anomalous entries exist, and that members are routinely provided with same at Council meetings.

### Conclusions

*We are pleased to report that no significant issues have been identified in this area to date: we shall undertake further work at our final visit, verifying a further month's current account transactions, together with a sample of Barclaycard transactions and detail of the CCLA Deposit Fund transactions for the year. We shall also ensure the accurate disclosure of the combined year-end cash and bank balances in the Annual Return.*

## Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has a robust regulatory framework in place; that Council and Committee meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders; that financial transactions are made in accordance with the extant Financial Regulations and that we have a reasonable chance of identifying any actions of a potentially unlawful nature that have been or may be considered for implementation. Consequently: -

- We have reviewed the full Council and standing Committee minutes (except for Planning & Highways) for the financial year to date (end January 2018) to ensure that no issues exist that may affect the Council's financial stability either in the short, medium or long term;
- Noted that Standing Orders (SOs) and Financial Regulations (FRs) were reviewed and re-adopted at the full Council meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017. We have examined the content of the documents noting that the Council has acknowledged and recognised the requirements of the 2015 Public Contract Regulations indicating a limit of £25,000 for the formal advertising of contracts on the Government's Contract Finder website (FRs para 11.1 refers); and

- However, we note that both the SOs and FRs imply a formal tender limit of £60,000 (SOs paras 30 (a) (v) and (b) refer and FRs para 11.3 refers) and consider that the £25,000 limit relating to the Public Contract Regulations is a more appropriate level, as also set out in the latest NALC model documents.

### ***Conclusions and recommendations***

***Whilst no significant issues of concern have been identified in this area currently, we consider, as above, that the limit for formal tender action should be reduced to £25,000. In reviewing minutes posted on the Council's website, we note that the Chairman's signature is displayed on the minutes. Whilst we appreciate the desire to comply with the Transparency and Openness Codes, publication of signatures on the website could pose a potential threat and, consequently, we suggest that all published documents should be edited to remove / redact officers' or members' signatures.***

***We will review minutes for the remainder of the year at our final visit, also further considering the Council's approach to Governance.***

- R1. *The Council should consider setting a lower limit of £25,000 for formal tender action, bringing it into line with the NALC model Financial Regulations.*
- R2. *Detail posted on the Council's website should exclude detail of any officers' or members' signatures to protect against their potential copying and / or fraudulent misuse.*

## **Review of Expenditure**

Our aim here is to ensure that, in addition to confirming that sound financial control procedures are in place: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and budgets;
- Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure compliance with the Council's SOs and FRs in relation to tendering and quotation action;
- Payments are supported by appropriate documentation, either in the form of an original trade invoice or other appropriate form of document confirming the payment as due and/or an acknowledgement of receipt, where no other form of invoice is available;
- Where applicable, appropriate contracting arrangements are in place and that they comply with the Council's current Standing Orders and Financial Regulations;
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount;
- The correct expense codes have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and coded to the control account for periodic recovery.

To ensure compliance with the above criteria, we have examined a sample of approximately 75 payments processed in the financial year to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018. Our test sample includes all

individual non-pay related payments exceeding of £2,500, plus a more random sample of every 40<sup>th</sup> payment to provide a broad cross section of expenditure and traders' invoices: the sample totals just over £264,000 and equates to 50% of total non-pay related expenditure to the above date.

Finally, in this area, we note that VAT Returns continue to be submitted, electronically as required by extant legislation, in an accurate and timely manner and have verified the December 2017 submission accordingly with no matters arising.

### **Conclusions**

***We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation: we shall extend our test sample to cover the remainder of the year and prepare our annual, analytical review of expenditure incurred across the range of budget headings, at the final visit.***

## **Assessment and Management of Risk**

Our aim here is to ensure that the Council has put in place appropriate arrangements to identify all potential areas of risk of both a financial and health and safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage those risks to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

- We have examined the Council's approach to the identification, recording and management of risks noting that the Council re-adopted its Financial Risk register at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017;
- We also note the existence of an overall financial risk policy;
- We are also pleased to note that the Council uses RoSPA to undertake an annual inspection of its play areas, with weekly reviews and reports also prepared by the Council's groundsmen, detail of which is retained in hard copy format; and
- We have examined the Council's insurance policy with Zurich Municipal for the financial year with Public and Employer's Liability cover in place at £15 million and £10million respectively; Fidelity Guarantee cover at £1 million, Hirer's Liability cover at £2 million and Business Interruption cover at £540,000, all of which we consider appropriate for the Council currently.

### **Conclusions**

***We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation, although we suggest that, given the potential for injury claimants to lodge a claim up to the age of 21 in certain circumstances, that the weekly reports be kept for that length of time, ideally in electronic format to minimise storage requirements.***

***We shall continue to monitor the Council's approach to risk management at future visits.***

## Precept Determination and Budgetary Control

We aim in this area of our work to ensure that the Council has appropriate procedures in place to determine its future financial requirements leading to the adoption of an approved budget and formal determination of the amount of the precept placed on the collecting authority, that effective arrangements are in place to monitor budgetary performance throughout the financial year and that the Council has identified and retains appropriate reserve funds to meet future spending plans. We are pleased to note that members continue to receive regular budget monitoring reports with over/under-spends and the level of earmarked reserves the subject of regular review.

We note that following recommendation by the Policy and Resources Committee, Full Council approved a precept increase of 2% for 2018-19 at the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017, although the actual precept value (£522,700) is not formally recorded in the minutes.

We are pleased to note that members continue to receive and approve each month detail of management accounts, a summary of ring-fenced funds and bank reconciliations, all of which we consider reflects good practice.

### *Conclusions and recommendation*

*Whilst no matters of significant concern have been identified in this review area to date, in line with best practice, the full Council minutes recording formal adoption of the annual precept should also record the actual precept value.*

*We shall undertake further work in this area at our final visit, reviewing the year-end budget outturn and seeking explanations for any significant variances, also assessing the appropriateness of retained reserves to finance the Council's ongoing revenue spending requirements together with any development aspirations or plans.*

R3. *The Council minutes should identify the actual value of the approved annual precept; that for 2018-19 should be minuted retrospectively at the next full Council meeting.*

## Review of Income

In this area of review, we aim to ensure that income due to the Council is identified, invoiced (where applicable) and recovered at the appropriate rate and within a reasonable time scale, also that it is banked promptly in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

We have, at this our first visit to the Council, focused attention on income arising from hire of Burnham Park and its various meeting rooms noting that the Avalon software is in use to record and manage bookings, together with generating invoices.

Consequently, we have selected a week's bookings (w/c 8<sup>th</sup> January 2018) as recorded on the software. We understand that regular hirers generally only complete a hire agreement form at the time of their initial booking and are not subject to periodic renewal either at the start of each hire term or, as a minimum, annually. Casual hirers are required to complete an agreement form at the time of booking, although, where bookings are received by phone, the agreements are not always signed as they are generated on site.

We note that invoices are raised through the software for regular hirers at the end of each month covering the full month, whilst those for casual hirers are raised generally at the time the booking is made and a booking deposit is received.

We have examined the file of agreement forms for casual hirers, forms being filed by month in date order of the booking, with no issues identified other than a potential concern that, in the event of any damage or injury arising during a hire period, were the agreement form not signed, the Council could potentially be at risk of loss.

We have also reviewed the invoices raised covering that period ensuring that, for casual hires, the appropriate fees have been charged in accordance with the approved scale of fees and charges. We note that regular hirers are receiving varying levels of discount ranging from 0% to as much as 50% and understand from the General Manager that the variances have arisen over the years with more recent regular hirers receiving lower discounts than longer term clients.

Whilst we acknowledge that the Council needs to maximise the use of the venue, the application of such significant variances in the discounts being applied could generate problems in the future were clients to compare the prices they are charged for hire of the same facilities. Consequently, we suggest that the Council should develop an appropriate policy and pricing structure reflecting a more standardised approach to discounts to be applied dependent on the nature of the hirer.

We shall review further income streams at future visits, also setting up a spreadsheet analysis of income across the various chargeable functions, together with grants, precept, bank interest, etc: this detail will be applied to add focus to planning the review of income streams at future years internal audit reviews.

### ***Conclusions and recommendations***

***We are pleased to report that no major issues have been identified in this area at present, although we suggest that the Council should review and establish a more formalised policy on the discounted charges to be applied to regular hirers, also ensuring that formal signed agreement forms are obtained covering all hires.***

***As indicated above, we shall undertake further work in this area at future visits including the preparation of our annual analysis of income arising across the range of budget headings, at the final visit.***

- R4. Regular hirers should be required to sign new hire agreements either at the start of each term / hire period or at least once annually.***
- R5. Where casual bookings are taken by phone or e-mail, hirers should be required to sign a formal agreement form as and when they attend the venue to protect the Council's interests in the event of any damage arising during the hire period.***
- R6. The Council should develop a more equitable approach to the provision of discounted hire rates for regular hirers to ensure greater equanimity of charges levied between the various types of hirer.***

## Review of Petty Cash and Cash Handling Procedures

We are required, as part of the annual Internal Audit Reporting process, to indicate the soundness of controls in this area of the Council's financial activities.

We note that the Sage Balance Sheet records cash floats of £1,200, which are split into a £600 change float held in the bar safe, floats of £150 each for the two bar tills and £100 for the Reception till, the remaining £200 being used to fund petty cash expenditure, the account being operated on an "imprest" basis with periodic top-ups to replenish actual expenditure incurred.

A handwritten petty cash register is maintained recording detail of individual payments, together with the reducing balance and detail of reimbursements received to return the holding to £200.

We have examined a sample of transactions including all those between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and the date of this, our first visit, ensuring that an appropriate trade invoice or till receipt is held in support of all expenditure with VAT being identified for recovery, wherever appropriate on entering detail to the Sage accounts.

We have also checked the physical cash retained by the General Manager, noting that £201.01 was actually held in the petty cash tin, an excess of £1.01 over the nominally held cash imprest balance of £200.00. We also noted that the handwritten "cashbook" records a cash holding of £195.93 following a recent "top-up". Consequently, at the time of our review, a total surplus cash holding of £5.08 was held in the cash tin against the recorded cash balance.

With an intended imprest holding of £200, the manual register of transactions should reflect that value, being an amalgam of the physical cash held and any un-reimbursed expenses.

We have also examined the procedures in place for cashing-up tills at the close of daily trading or, in the case of the reception till, at approximately 4 p.m. daily, with subsequent takings regarded as part of the next day's trading income. The daily cash takings are securely housed in the General Manager's safe when the venue is closed and passed to the admin office for banking once weekly.

In reviewing the process, we note that tills are only being cashed-up by one officer, the bar cash-up sheets not being signed by the officer recording the detail. We also note that the sheets record cash held net of the till floats with no provision to identify any unders or overs against the "Z" total readings, although the latter are recorded. We have examined a sample of one week's records noting that the cash value recorded for each till matches the "Z" totals and, whilst that may be the case, we are doubtful that no errors in change giving occur occasionally.

Consequently, we consider and suggest that the cash-up sheets should be redesigned to record the full cash holding at the end of each shift, together with detail of the float removed leaving the actual cash takings value to be recorded and compared with the "Z" total. The reasons for any variance between the latter two should, wherever practicable, be identified and explained on the cash-up sheet.

Best practice also suggests that, at the start of each shift / trading period the opening float in each till should be checked and recorded with the checker signing an appropriate certificate. Similarly, when cash is handed from one officer to another (e.g. weekly takings transferred to the admin office) the cash should be checked by the recipient and officer handing over the cash to confirm its accuracy.

### ***Conclusions and recommendations***

***As indicated above, we consider that the cashing-up and handling procedures need to be reviewed and strengthened to protect staff in the event of any significant shortfall of cash occurring at any stage of the cashing-up and transfer procedures.***

- R7. *Consideration should be given to strengthening the cashing-up and cash handling procedures as detailed in the body of the report to further strengthen them and afford greater protection for officers in the event that any significant shortfall in cash occurs.*
- R8. *The cashing-up sheets should be redesigned to record the total cash held at the close of trading / when tills are cashed-up and identify any variances to the tills "Z" totals, explanations for which should, if significant, be identified and recorded.*

## **Review of Staff Salaries**

In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) legislation as regards the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme (and others), as regards employee contributions. To meet this objective, we have: -

- Reviewed the Council's payroll preparation procedures noting that the Council have outsourced production of the payroll to a local firm of chartered accountants (Stiles & Co);
- Checked to ensure that the Council has reviewed and approved appropriate pay scales for staff, most latterly in April 2017;
- Checked and agreed the amounts paid to individuals by reference to the approved pay rates verifying payments made in December 2017 and Week 40 for 2017-18;
- Checked PAYE Tax Codes and National Insurance Rates to ensure that appropriate allowances are being applied for the year following the annual budgetary increases in personal allowances with effect from April 2017;
- Checked Local Government Pension Scheme deduction rates for the two contributing employees to ensure they are in accord with the revisions to the bases of employee contributions, most latterly with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 (albeit relatively minor changes to the salary banding widths). At this interim stage we have not tested the Scottish widow's pension scheme deduction rates;
- Verified variable hours and expenses to individuals' timesheets and claim forms;
- Checked and agreed the net pay computations on pay slips to the payroll summaries and resultant bank statement and cashbook transactions; and
- Ensured that the appropriate month's deductions and contributions have been paid over to HMRC and the County Pension Fund in a timely manner.

Ordinarily, we would also verify the monthly return submissions to HMRC in accord with extant legislation (aka Real Time Initiative) but, in the absence of anything to the contrary, must assume this being done properly by the bureau provider.

### ***Conclusions and recommendation***

*As discussed with the Clerk during this interim visit, we noted that the two employees who are long-standing members of the local government pension scheme appeared to be suffering excess income tax deductions due to their pension contributions not being subtracted from gross pay prior, as is the “norm”. We did not test the application of the Scottish Widows contributions for other employees as we were verbally advised that their entitlement to tax relief was being computed by the pension provider “at source” instead of via the payroll. It was agreed that this would be reviewed as soon as practicable because the matter could involve prior year (s) and the amounts involved were in the region of £30 per person per month.*

- R9. *The apparent over-deductions of income tax arising from the failure to subtract LGPS contributions prior to computation should be reviewed with the bureau provider as soon as practicable, and, if agreed, necessary calculations of rebates and repayments be actioned accordingly.*
- R10. *Whilst not directly arising from our sample testing, we would suggest that the bureau provider’s computation of national insurance deductions for 2015-16 and earlier be checked to ensure that the two employees were also being given relief for the lower rate of contributions (aka Table D at 9.4%) applicable to LGPS members prior to the government’s abolition of same with effect from April 2016.*

## **Investments and Loans**

The Council has “invested” surplus funds in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund with monthly dividends added to the account as advised to the Council routinely. We have not undertaken any further work in this area other than to verify one sample month’s transactions at this first visit and will review transactions at our final visit ensuring both accuracy of recording of the monthly dividend deposits and disclosure of the year-end balance in the Annual Return.

The Council has three loans in place repayable at half-yearly intervals to the PWLB. We have reviewed payments made to date as part of our payment testing with no issues identified currently.

### ***Conclusions***

*No issues have been identified in this area currently: as indicated above, we shall examine transactions on the CCLA Deposit Fund for the year at our final visit. We shall also ensure check any further half-yearly repayments to the PWLB at our final visit and ensure that the residual loan liability on the three existing PWLB loans is recorded accurately in the year’s Annual Return.*

## Bar and Catering Stock Handling

Catering and bar facilities are available at Burnham Park duly managed by Council staff. Whilst we have not undertaken any detailed work in this area at this first visit to the Council, we note / understand that a physical formal check of stock is undertaken only once annually at the financial year-end by Council staff.

We have examined the record prepared as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, noting a total recorded bar stock value of £3,907.83. The closing Sage Trial Balance for 2017-18 records a stock value of £5,105.28: whilst this may relate to catering stocks, we have not seen documentation to support that value and will review the position for the financial year-end 2017-18 at our final visit.

Notwithstanding that, given the variety and value of bar stock holding and turnover, we consider and suggest that more frequent stock checks be introduced, say quarterly. Whilst we appreciate that there would be a potential cost implication, offset to a degree by savings in officer time, we also consider that, in line with best practice, the services of an external professional stock checker should be used at the least at the financial year-end to provide members with a more professional assessment of the bar's trading activities, profit margins and assurance that actual bar income is in line with that anticipated based on sales (i.e. through preparation of a Selling / Retail Price Control Account).

### *Conclusions and recommendation*

***We shall undertake more work in this area at our final visit, including ensuring the accuracy of the year-end bar and catering stock value as recorded in the Sage accounts and as also reflected in the Annual Return financial information. We do, however, suggest that consideration be given to more frequent stock checks during the year, ideally with input by a professional stock checker at least once annually.***

*R11. Bar and catering stock checks should be undertaken more frequently than at present, ideally quarterly.*

*R12. Consideration should be given to the employment of a professional stock-checker at least once annually to provide the Council with a more comprehensive report on the trading activity and profitability, etc.*

Rec. No.	Recommendation	Response
<b>Review of Corporate Governance</b>		
R1	The Council should consider setting a lower limit of £25,000 for formal tender action, bringing it into line with the NALC model Financial Regulations.	I will recommend to the Council that this be implemented at their review of their Financial Regulations at the May Council meeting.
R2	Detail posted on the Council's website should exclude detail of any officers' or members' signatures to protect against their potential copying and / or fraudulent misuse.	All signatures on the Council website have now been redacted.
<b>Budgetary Control and Reserves</b>		
R3	The Council minutes should identify the actual value of the approved annual precept; that for 2018-19 should be minuted retrospectively at the next full Council meeting.	This has been actioned at the Council meeting on Monday 12 <sup>th</sup> March 2018.
<b>Review of Income</b>		
R4	Regular hirers should be required to sign new hire agreements either at the start of each term / hire period or at least once annually.	Regular hirers are required to sign new hire agreements as and when the terms and conditions of the hire change. Otherwise, if the hire agreement meets our requirements, I would not insist on a new agreement being signed.
R5	Where casual bookings are taken by phone or e-mail, hirers should be required to sign a formal agreement form as and when they attend the venue to protect the Council's interests in the event of any damage arising during the hire period.	As the majority of booking forms are submitted by hirers by email, the form will be revised to state that returning / emailing the completed booking form to us will be taken as acceptance of the terms and conditions of hire. The email can then be used as a substitute for a physical signature.
R6	The Council should develop a more equitable approach to the provision of discounted hire rates for regular hirers to ensure greater equanimity of charges levied between the various types of hirer.	The various discounted rates are due to agreements made with longstanding hires over previous years. The discounts are being reduced gradually to bring in line with current rates, and a framework for delegating discount negotiations to the General Manager will be considered by the Management Committee at its annual rates review.

### Review of Petty Cash and Cash Handling Procedures

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R7	Consideration should be given to strengthening the cashing-up and cash handling procedures as detailed in the body of the report to further strengthen them and afford greater protection for officers in the event that any significant shortfall in cash occurs.	It is impractical for two staff members to be present for daily cashing-up. Also, as various staff members have individual access to tills throughout the day, changing the cashing-up process would not remove the opportunity for staff dishonesty. However, we have CCTV covering all tills. We also have several layers of checks, so any discrepancies are highlighted, and the source of any recurrent anomalies would be readily identified.
R8	The cashing-up sheets should be redesigned to record the total cash held at the close of trading / when tills are cashed-up and identify any variances to the tills "Z" totals, explanations for which should, if significant, be identified and recorded.	The cashing-up sheets already record variances between Z reading and total cash. Staff have been 'ironing-out' differences of a few pence using a small pot of change. However, I have highlighted that best practice is to record all differences then and there, and the system will be changed to reflect this. Any significant amounts are already flagged up and investigated.

Rec. No.	Recommendation	Response
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### Review of Staff Salaries

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R9	The apparent over-deductions of income tax arising from the failure to subtract LGPS contributions prior to computation should be reviewed with the bureau provider as soon as practicable, and, if agreed, necessary calculations of rebates and repayments be actioned accordingly.	We are extremely grateful to the auditor for highlighting this anomaly. We have investigated it, and concluded that the miscalculations has been occurring since our current provider, Stiles, took over the payroll in July 2014. Stiles have agreed with our assessment, and state it was due to being given incorrect information when the payroll was being set up. They are arranging for resubmissions of the figures and a rebate to the staff members of the over-deductions.
R10	Whilst not directly arising from our sample testing, we would suggest that the bureau provider's computation of national insurance deductions for 2015-16 and earlier be checked to ensure that the two employees were also being given relief for the lower rate of contributions (aka Table D at 9.4%) applicable to LGPS members prior to the government's abolition of same with effect from April 2016.	This recommendation has also been given to Stiles to confirm during their investigations.

### Bar and Catering Stock

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| R11 | Bar and catering stock checks should be undertaken more frequently than at present, ideally quarterly.   | The General Manager and I agree that, given a relatively low turnover, more regular café stock takes are unnecessary. However, given the continued increase in bar take, I agree with the recommendation that a more frequent programme of bar stock takes is needed, and this has been put to the General Manager. |
| R12 | Consideration should be given to the employment of a professional stock-checker at least once annually to provide the Council with a more comprehensive report on the trading activity and profitability, etc. | Given the increasing bar business I agree with the recommendation, and have asked the General Manager to investigate employing a professional stock-taker for the year-end stock take.  |