

Framsden Parish Council Meeting Friday 10 July 2015
Item 5: Clerk's report

Clerk's Report – progress of actions since last meeting

Actions minuted at last meeting

15.5.9 e Statement of Internal Control and Annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Control

The Clerk has been trialling the principles and processes set out in the draft Statement tabled at the last meeting. This is going well but needs more time before bringing a final recommendation to a future meeting (probably September).

15.5.11 Incremental introduction of Councillors' areas of responsibility

Any general matters for information or action have been sent to all Councillors as usual. There has not yet been a need to bring a specific topic as listed at the last meeting to an individual Councillor but as opportunities arise we will be able to develop the concept.

15.5.12 Councillor vacancies

The Clerk has promoted the Councillor vacancies on the PC web pages.

15.5.15 Grass cutting VH garden

Following the steer from IS, the Clerk clarified the grass cutting regime with Mr Mugleston who, since the April cut, had only been able to gain access to the VH garden after the May meeting. This, together with arrangements for additional cutting (later in the summer once the new grass areas had fully set) were agreed and confirmed in a letter dated 8 June.

5.5.17c Accounts and annual return

Following PC approval the accounts and annual return were submitted to Heelis and Lodge, our internal auditors. They noted that all the areas of concern raised in the previous year's internal and external audits had been addressed. Amongst their observations for improvement, they advised that the reimbursement of the former Clerk's overpayment should have appeared as an adjustment to the payments side rather than on the receipts side (something which the external auditor may ask us to correct). But overall it was a positive report. They noted the problems over the first nine months of the financial year and the 'breakdown in financial control during a challenging time within the Council..' They go on to say: 'However, considerable progress has been achieved since the appointment of the existing Clerk *and it is clear the Council is committed to continue the development process.*'[my italics].

Other actions

Future accounts preparation

I have discussed with SALC, and with SLCC, some of the challenges of reaching and maintaining proper standards of financial control within the resources available to us. At 5 hours per week (average) Framsdens Clerk's hours are at the lower end of the spectrum (SLCC-recommended minimum working week is 4hrs) but not exceptional. The reliance upon Clerks providing extra hours appears to be widespread and a growing cause for concern given the increasing legal, financial and regulatory burdens PCs face.

SALC are able to offer an internal audit service for £118 +VAT. Whilst more expensive than H&L (c£60) they are much more responsive to queries and accessible for advice and guidance.

Website

I have continued to work with Kerry Burn on making some minor changes and updates to the website to make it easier to find meetings minutes etc in accordance with our legal obligations around openness.

Laptop

Our refurbished ex-Government Lenovo laptop is now hard at work. Hoorah! We are currently using a free open-sourced software package (Apache Open Office) that is fully compatible with MS Office. There have been glitches but it's not yet clear if these are teething troubles (mine or its) or something more serious. If they become persistent and problematic I'll be recommending we pay the c£100 one-off costs of MS Office Home and Business.

SCC Highways grass verges on junctions

Following a concern raised by a resident about traffic hazards I've been liaising with SCC over verge cutting on the Pettaugh/Winston main road junction (agenda item 10c).

Councillors' register of interests

All our Councillors are now registered – four having used the online system provided by MSDC and which I countersign online, and one submitting a paper form which I countersigned and delivered to MSDC.

David Crowther
Parish Clerk and RFO
6 July 2015