

Internal Audit Report for Hasketon Parish Council for the period ending 31 March 2025

Clerk	Stephen Leckie
RFO (if different)	
Chairperson	Councillor Ian Whyte
Precept	£ 8,895.05
Income	£13,337.86
Expenditure	£12,369.38
General reserves	£ 6,848.55
Earmarked reserves	£ 4,000.00
Audit type	Annual – exempt authority
Auditor name	Victoria Waples

Introduction

The primary objective of internal audit is to review, appraise and report upon the adequacy of internal control systems operating throughout the council. To achieve this SALC adopt a predominantly systems-based approach to audit.

The council's internal control system comprises the whole network of systems established within the council to provide reasonable assurance that the council's objectives will be achieved, with reference to:

- the effectiveness of operations
- the economic and efficient use of resources
- compliance with applicable policies, procedures, laws, and regulations
- the safeguarding of assets and interests from losses of all kinds, including those arising from fraud, irregularity, and corruption

- the integrity and reliability of information, accounts, and data

Methodology

When conducting the audit, the internal auditor may:

- conduct a selective assessment of compliance with relevant procedures and controls expected to be in operation during the financial year in order to be able to complete the Annual Internal Audit Report 2024/25 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)
- review the reliability and integrity of financial information and the means used to identify, measure, classify and report such information
- review the means of safeguarding assets and, as appropriate, verify the existence of such assets
- appraise the economy and efficiency with which resources are employed, identify opportunities to improve performance and recommend solutions to problems
- review the established systems to ensure compliance with those policies, procedures, laws, and regulations which could have a significant impact on operations, and determine whether the council complies
- review the operations and activities to ascertain whether results are consistent with objectives and whether they are being conducted as planned

Section 1 – proper bookkeeping		
The internal auditor will look at the methods and processes used to manage the council’s accounts and in particular that it provides clear data for reporting and monitoring purposes. This includes checking information is accurate, kept up to date, referenced and verified.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Is the ledger maintained and up to date?</i>	Yes	The council uses a Financial Software accounting package which produces a suite of tools to allow for reporting on a receipts and payments basis. The financial software used by the Council allows the automation of many of its transactions involving income and expenditure and employee payroll, as well as reports and financial statements.
<i>Is the ledger on the correct basis in relation to the gross income/expenditure?</i> (under Proper Practices, Councils are required to work on an Income & Expenditure basis when their gross income, or gross expenditure, exceeds £200,000 for 3 consecutive years)	Yes	Council’s gross income and expenditure level is below the threshold of £200,000 and has been for three (3) continuous years. Council’s operating under this limit may choose either to report on an income and expenditure basis or on a receipts and payments (R&P) basis. Council has elected to report its financial matters on a receipts and payments basis.
<i>Is the cash book up to date and regularly verified?</i>	Yes	The cashbook is reconciled on a regular basis. Council follows proper practices in ensuring that its accounting procedure gives an accurate presentation of an authority’s true financial position by focusing on the balance of economic benefits that it has under its control, rather than just its bank balance and the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) has ensured that there are clear financial management reports submitted to the council on a regular basis.
<i>Is the arithmetic correct?</i>	Yes	As council uses a financial package, the functionality of the cashbook was not reviewed but overall the reports produced were found to be in order.
Additional comments:		

Section 2 – Financial Regulation and Standing Orders		
The internal auditor will check the date the Council conducted its annual review of both Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and in particular check if these are based on NALC'S latest model which include legislative changes.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Have Standing Orders been adopted, up to date and reviewed annually?	Yes	Council's Standing Orders, as reviewed at the meeting of 8 th May 2025 and as seen on the website are based on the latest model published by the National Association of Local Councils (2025).
Are Financial Regulations up to date and reviewed annually?	Yes	Financial Regulations , as seen on the Council's website were reviewed at the meeting of 13 th March 2025 and are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2024. <i>Comment: it is assumed that at the next review, council will ensure that the revisions to the Model Financial Regulations as published on 13th March 2025 are incorporated.</i>
Has the Council properly tailored the Financial Regulations?	Yes	The Council's Financial Regulations have been tailored to the Parish Council.
Has the Council appointed a Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)? ¹	Yes	In accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972(d) (financial administration), the Council has appointed a person to be responsible for the administration of the financial affairs of the relevant authority. Council's Financial Regulation 1.5 confirms the appointment of such an officer.
Additional comments:		

¹ Section 151 Local Government Act 1972 (d)

Section 3 – Payment controls		
The internal auditor will specifically check bank reconciliation including credit/debit cards and management approval processes and evidence that internal Financial Regulations (FO) are being followed. The internal auditor will examine how regular payments are managed and specifically seek evidence that these have been brought back to the Council for verification purposes especially where the actual payment made differs from the amount previously agreed. VAT should be clearly identified including evidence that claims have been correctly managed. The internal auditor will check if the Council has a clear understanding on eligibility in relation to the General Power of Competence and that s.137 has been correctly applied and managed.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
Is there supporting paperwork for payments with appropriate authorisation?	Yes	<p>A selection of random payments were cross checked against authorisation slips, minutes , cash book, bank statement and invoices and all were found to be recorded/ authorised in accordance with Proper Practices.</p> <p>With regards to the use of online banking to settle council’s debts, council is operating in accordance with Financial Regulation 7.6 which states that “One councillor who is an authorised signatory shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment using the online banking system.</p> <p><i>Comment: council is aware of the authorisation procedures as set up under its adopted financial regulations as well as the internal controls that have been put in place to safeguard public finances.</i></p> <p>A spot check of payments made under contractual terms were further analysed and all were found to be in accordance with agreed schedules and sums approved.</p> <p><i>Comment: council ensures compliance with the mitigation of the risk associated with public finances as outlined in its risk register and ensures that any financial obligation is first resolved and clearly minuted before any commitment is entered into. All payments are notified, approved and clearly minuted by members at regular and quorate parish council meetings.</i></p>
Where applicable, are internet banking transactions properly recorded and approved?	Yes	<p>Internet banking was operated in accordance with the council’s own Financial Regulations and was used for the settlement of the council’s expenditure. The council’s risk assessment documentation and internal control statement detail the procedure to be followed for the making of payments which cover internet banking. Council operates with a complex</p>

		mandate which follows a dual authorization process. The bank mandate agreed by the council requires a minimum of two people will be involved in any online approval process. The Clerk may be an authorised signatory, but no signatory should be involved in approving any payment to themselves. <i>Comment: council follows the procedures as outlined and ensures that there is secondary authorisation before payment.</i>
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	Yes	VAT is identified in the cash book with the year-end Vat recoverable balance standing at £1,037.34 as identified in the year-end accounts. The VAT claim for the period 1 st April 2023 to 31 st March 2024 in the sum of £4,154.09 was settled in July 2024.
Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	No	The council has not confirmed that it is eligible to exercise the GPOC.
Are payments under s.137 ³ separately recorded, minuted and is there evidence of direct benefit to electorate?	Yes	Payments identified as being made under this power for the year under review totalled £220.00 and were separately recorded and deemed to be of a direct benefit of the electorate.
Where applicable, are payments of interest and principal sums in respect of loans paid in accordance with agreements?	N/A	Council has no such loans.
Additional comments: <i>in accordance with good practice, council might wish to ensure that the minutes and /or cashbook reference the powers used to incur expenditure. Statutory powers are granted by Parliament and give local councils the choice or opportunity to take action and are therefore discretionary. Local Councils must exercise their powers subject to the provisions of the general law.</i>		

² Localism Act

³ Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) enables local councils to spend a limited amount of money for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure. The basic power is for a local council to spend money (subject to the statutory limit – of £10.81 per elector) on purposes for the direct benefit of its area, or part of its area, or all or some of its inhabitants.

Section 4 – Risk management		
The internal auditor will expect to find evidence of the management of risks from identification of what those are for each individual Council through to how these will be managed and the controls in place to mitigate these and that these have been approved by the Council.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is there evidence of risk assessment documentation?</i>	Yes	The risk assessment documentation as reviewed provides details of the risks associated with the functioning of a smaller authority and the measures that the Council will undertake to mitigate such risks. The Risk Register for the year under review was considered and adopted by the council at its meeting of 9 th May 2024.
<i>Is there evidence that risks are being identified and managed?</i>		Council is aware that risk assessment needs to focus on the safety of the parish council's assets and in particular its money. There is evidence that overall the parish council has taken action to identify and assess those risks and has considered what actions or decisions it needs to take during the year to manage in order to avoid financial or reputational consequences. <i>Comment: council has in place monitoring documents which identify the risks involved with and the potential for improvements to its arrangements to protect public money. It provides the opportunity for reviews of operational as well as financial and governance reviews by members to ensure that it has mitigation measures in place to address the risks associated with the council's day to day operations.</i>
<i>Does the Council have appropriate and adequate insurance cover in place for employment, public liability and fidelity guarantee and has been reviewed on an annual basis?</i>	Yes	Council has insurance in place its main insurance under a Local Council Policy with Clear Councils. Core cover for the council's insurance policy is shown as: Public & Products Liability: £10million; Employer's Liability: £10million and Fidelity Guarantee of £250thousand. <i>Comment: Council has followed recommended guidance by ensuring that its Fidelity Cover is equal to at least the sum of the year-end balances plus 50% of the precept/grants to be received in the following April/May and/or during the year upon receipt of grants.</i> During the year under review, council is able to demonstrate, as evidenced from a review of the minutes, that it is aware that it is the responsibility of the Council as a whole to satisfy itself that insurances are adequate and that all steps have been taken to mitigate and manage identified risks with

		<p>appropriate insurance and that annual reviews of the Council's insurance were undertaken prior to renewal. Confirmation was given at the meeting in May 2024 that a review of the options available under the current insurer were adequate for the council as other providers would need to tailor a more bespoke policy which was likely to result in premiums higher than being offered with the current provider. At renewal council signed up to a 3-year long-term understanding which ends 31st May 2027.</p> <p><i>Comment: Council has ensured that it is able to demonstrate that it has reviewed the risks facing the Council in transacting its business and has taken out appropriate insurance to manage and reduce the risks relating to property, cash and legal liability (amongst other things).</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed⁴</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Council adopted its Internal Control Statement for the year ending 31st March 2025 at the meeting of 13th March 2025. It is evidenced from the document seen, that the council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, confirmed that the financial and management systems of the council were sound and adequate and internal control arrangements were efficient and effective to address the risks associated with the management of public finances.</p>
<p><i>Evidence that a review of the effectiveness of internal audit was conducted during the year, including consideration of the independence and competence of the internal auditor prior to their appointment⁵</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The council formally reviewed the scope and effectiveness of its internal audit arrangements at the meeting at which the internal control statement was adopted.</p> <p><i>Comment: Council is aware that in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulation 2015, the parish council must review the terms of reference and effectiveness of internal audit and demonstrate that it has understood that the role of internal audit is to evaluate and report on the adequacy of the system of internal control.</i></p>
<p>Additional comments:</p>		

⁴ Accounts and Audit Regulations

⁵ Practitioners Guide

Section 5 – Budgetary controls		
The internal auditor will seek verification that budgets are properly prepared, agreed and monitored. In particular they will look for evidence of good practice in that the key stages of the budgetary process have been followed		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Verify that budget has been properly prepared and agreed</i>	Yes	<p>The budget for the year 2024 - 2025 was approved at the Council meeting of 11th January 2024. From paperwork seen it is noted that the revenue budget would be set at £11,957 to be funded by the precept and known income.</p> <p>The budget for the year 2025 -2026 was approved at the meeting of 9th January 2025 with paperwork demonstrating that this would be set at £14,856 to be funded by the precept and known income.</p>
<i>Verify that the precept amount has been agreed in full Council and clearly minuted</i>	Yes	<p>The minutes of 11th January 2024, confirmed that the precept to be levied for the year 2024 – 2025 would be set at £8,895 which would result in an increase of 3.71% over that set for the previous year.</p> <p>The minutes of 8th January 2025 confirm that the precept to be levied would be £9,134.73 which would be a nil increase over that set for the prior year.</p> <p><i>Comment: in accordance with best practice, council has sought to ensure that it records, in the minutes, the impact the precept being set would have on a Band D Dwelling in percentage as well as monetary terms.</i></p>
<i>Regular reporting of expenditure and variances from budget</i>	Yes	<p>The minutes evidence that council conducted reviews covering the budget for the current year with a review of income and expenditure against budget at each meeting. A monitoring statement is produced which includes a breakdown of all receipts and payments balance with variances against budgets and details of virements as approved by the council to balance the budget set.</p> <p><i>Comment: Council in accordance with its own standing order 17c produces regular statements showing evidence of comparisons between budgeted and actual income and expenditure to form the basis of approval for virements in accordance with Council's own Standing Orders.</i></p>

<p><i>Reserves held – general and earmarked⁶</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Council, as at year-end, had overall reserves totalling £10,848.55 of which 4,000 were earmarked reserves with the balance being working general reserves.</p> <p><i>Comment: Council is made aware of guidance as issued by Proper Practices which states that it is regarded as acceptable for a council's general (non-earmarked revenue) reserves to be equal to 3 to 12 months of Net Revenue Expenditure and should ensure that the level of general reserves held is in accordance with an adopted General Reserve Policy. There is no upper limit for Earmarked Reserves, but they should be held for genuine and intended purposes and their level subject to regular review and justification (at least annually).</i></p> <p>At the meeting at which the year-end accounts are approved, the RFO provides the council with clarity as to the reserves held along with the manner as to how they might impact the predicted expenditure for the coming year. It is also confirmed that, in accordance with its own financial regulations, the level of reserves held are further discussed and reviewed during the discussions held regarding the setting of the budget for the next financial year and year end accounting processes and are based on a percentage of the precept and/or percentage of the average annual expenditure.</p>
<p><i>Additional comments: Council has shown good practice by ensuring the recommended key stages as to the budgetary process are followed for the year and has ensured that progress against the budget is reviewed regularly throughout the year.</i></p>		

⁶ In accordance with proper practices, the generally accepted minimum level of a Smaller Authority's General Reserve is that this should be maintained at between three (3) and twelve (12) months of Net Revenue Expenditure

Section 6 – income controls		
The internal auditor will seek evidence to ensure income is correct managed – recorded, banked, and reported and test mechanisms used to achieve this.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is income properly recorded and promptly banked?</i>	Yes	Income is recorded in accordance with Council’s Financial Regulations. A sample of receipts was checked against cash book and bank statement and found to be in order and recorded in accordance with Proper Practices. The RFO has ensured that the accounting records contain all day-to-day entries of all sums of money received.
<i>Is income reported to full council?</i>	Yes	Income received is reported to full Council within the financial reports submitted to full Council in accordance with council’s financial regulations.
<i>Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax Authority’s notification?</i>	Yes	Council received precept in the sum of £8,895.05 from East Suffolk Council in April 2024 as reported to full council within the Financial Reports at its meeting in May 2024. Evidence was provided showing a full audit trail from Precept being discussed and approved to being served on the Charging Authority to remittance advice showing the Precept to be paid and receipt of same in the council’s bank account.
<i>If appropriate, are CIL reporting schedules in accordance with the Regulations?⁷</i>	Yes	The CIL schedule for the year ending 31 st March 2024 showed a nil retained balance as at 31 st March 2024.
<i>Is CIL income reported to the council?</i>	Yes	During the year under review, council did not receive any CIL receipts.
<i>Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?</i>	Yes	The CIL report for 2023 - 2024 shows that there was a nil carry forward balance at the year ending 31 st March 2024.
<i>Has an annual report been produced?</i>	No	Council might wish to clarify with East Suffolk Council as to whether it is required to submit a report detailing for the year ending 31 st March 2025.
<i>Has it been published on the authority’s website?</i>	No	
Additional comments:		

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010

Section 7 – petty cash		
The Internal Auditor will seek evidence that the Council has followed its own policies, procedures, and verification processes and that these are up to date.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is petty cash in operation?</i>	N/A	Council does not operate a petty cash system.
<i>If appropriate, is there an adequate control system in place?</i>	N/A	
Additional comments:		

Section 8 – Payroll controls		
The Internal Auditor will check salaries were approved in accordance with PAYE, NI, Pension and that there is a clear understanding that the clerk is not self-employed. The Internal Auditor will also review how payroll is managed including evidence of approval of payslips.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Do all employees have contracts of employment?</i>	Yes	Council had 1 employee on its payroll at the period end of 31 st March 2025. Employment contracts were not reviewed during the internal audit, but the RFO has confirmed that a contract of employment is in place for both staff members.
<i>Has the Council approved salary paid?</i>	Yes	All salary payments are presented to full Council for approval and payment is made via internet banking in accordance with council’s own Financial Regulations. <i>Comment: Council ensures that there are suitable payroll arrangements in place which ensures the accuracy and legitimacy of payments of salaries and wages, and associated liabilities and as such the council has complied with its duties under legislation.</i>
<i>Minimum wage paid?</i>	No	No employee is paid the minimum wage.
<i>Are arrangements in place for authorising of the payroll and payments to the council? Does this include a verification process for agreeing rates of pay to be applied?</i>	Yes	There are suitable payroll arrangements in place which ensures the accuracy and legitimacy of payments of salaries and wages, and associated liabilities and as such the council has complied with its duties under legislation.
<i>Do salary payments include deductions for PAYE/NIC? Is PAYE/NIC paid promptly to HMRC?</i>	Yes	The payroll function for the year under review is operated in accordance with HM Revenue and Customs guidelines and outsourced. Cross-checks were completed on a sample of payments covering salary and all were found to be in order. Deductions due to be paid to HM Revenue and Customs during the year under review were made within the requisite time periods.
<i>Is there evidence that the Council is aware of its pension responsibilities? Are pension payments in operation?⁸</i>	Yes	Council is aware of its pension responsibilities and the member of staff is not enrolled into a pension scheme provided by the employer.

⁸ The Pension Regulator – [website click here](#)

<i>Have pension re-declaration duties been carried out</i>	Yes	From paperwork seen, the council completed its re-declaration of compliance with The Pensions Regulator on 9 th April 2025 as reported to full council at the meeting of 9 th May 2024.
<i>Are there any other payments (e.g.: expenses) and are these reasonable and approved by the Council?</i>	Yes	There is a satisfactory expense system in place and all expenses claimed are approved by full council with supporting paperwork in place and reimbursed in accordance with Council's Financial Regulations.

Additional comments:

Section 9 – Asset control		
The Internal Audit will be seeking to establish if there is a list of assets in accordance with proper practices including the date of acquisition, location, and value. This extends to checking policies (with evidence of review) and that the Council has applied the documented approach in practice. The Internal Auditor will check not only valuation processes but the existence of reserve budgets for depreciation and adequacy of insurance. A clear audit trail should be available when items are purchased including minutes to evidence approval.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Does the Council maintain a register of material assets it owns and manage this in accordance with proper practices?⁹</i>	Yes	The Asset Register, as submitted for internal audit review, reflects those items listed under insurance and within the parish council’s remit for maintenance and ownership. It is noted that the declared value for all assets at year-end (31.03.2025) is £63,128.38 which reflects movement during the year following the acquisition of new assets. For comparison, the declared value on the asset register as at 31.03.24 was £60,125.47.
<i>Is the value of the assets included? (Note value for insurance purposes may differ)</i>	Yes	Council is mindful of the guidance within the Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England March 2024 on the valuation of its assets and has ensured that where the acquisition value of the asset at the time of first recording is used, that method of valuation has been consistently applied.
<i>Are records of deeds, articles, land registry title number available?</i>	Yes	Records of deeds, articles, land registry title number were not reviewed during the internal audit which was conducted via remote means.
<i>Are copies of licences or leases available for assets sited at third party property?</i>	N/A	Council has not declared that it has assets located on third party property for which a formal lease is required.
<i>Is the asset register up to date and reviewed annually?</i>	Yes	The asset register seen has been annually reviewed and updated and it is confirmed that the values seen on the Asset Register – £63,128 (rounded) - matches those on the Accounting Statements.
<i>Cross checking of insurance cover</i>	Yes	Council has appropriate insurance under all risks cover for its assets as specified under the headings on the insurance schedule.
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

⁹ Practitioners Guide

Section 10 – bank reconciliation		
The internal auditor will seek to establish that the Council understands and can evidence good practice and internal control mechanisms in relation to bank reconciliation.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is bank reconciliation regularly completed and reconciled with the cash book and cover every account?</i>	Yes	Bank reconciliations are completed on a regular basis and reconcile with the cash sheets. Overall there is regular reporting of bank balances within the detailed financial reports submitted to full council. <i>Comment: council has understood that the bank reconciliation is a key tool for management as it assists with the regular monitoring of cash flows which aids decision-making, particularly when there are competing priorities.</i>
<i>Do bank balances agree with bank statements?</i>	Yes	Bank balances as of 31 st March 2025 agree with the year-end bank statements and at year end stood at £10,848.55 across the accounts held in the parish council's name. <i>Comment: the internal auditor is able to verify the year-end bank reconciliation detail and can ensure that the combined cash and bank balances as identified are included within the AGAR, section 2, line 8.</i>
<i>Is there regular reporting of bank balances at Council meetings?</i>	Yes	Balances across the Council's accounts are reported at each meeting of full Council. The minutes of council meetings, demonstrate that an internal review and verification of the bank reconciliation versus the bank statements has been undertaken. <i>Comment: this is not only good practice but is also a safeguard for the RFO and fulfils one of the authority's internal control objectives.</i>
<i>Additional comments: the RFO has confirmed that the financial accounting package contains software that provided an auditable record of all transactions and supports the submission of auditing reports. This includes reports that are monitored by mandated councillors who have been appointed to undertake the appropriate bank reconciliation checks.</i>		

Section 11 – year end procedures		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Are appropriate accounting procedures used?</i>	Yes	Accounts are produced on a receipts and payments basis..
<i>Financial trail from records to presented accounts</i>	Yes	The Internal Auditor confirms that having reviewed the year-end files, there is a full underlying financial trail from financial records to the accounts produced. The accuracy of the year-end bank reconciliation detail is verified along with the correct disclosure of the combined cash and bank balances in the AGAR, section 2, line 8.
<i>Has the appropriate end of year AGAR¹⁰ documents been completed?</i>	Yes	As Council is a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000 it will be able to declare itself exempt from a limited assurance review. The draft Accounting Statements from Form 2 were submitted for internal audit review.
<i>Did the Council meet the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt?</i>	No	As the Parish Council had gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 during 2023-2024, it was not able to declare itself exempt from a limited assurance review for the year ending 31 st March 2024.
<i>During the period in question did the small authority demonstrate that it correctly provided for the exercise of public right as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015?</i>	Yes	Council has demonstrated that during the year under review, it ensured that the period for the exercise of elector’s rights during Summer 2024 was in accordance with the period specified within the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The dates set were 28 th June to 8 th August 2024 with the Notice being dated 27 th June 2024 as seen on the council’s website. <i>Comment: within the Annual Internal Audit Report, internal control objective test M requires the internal auditor to establish whether the parish council correctly provided for the exercise and published a copy of the required “Public Notice” by ensuring that it clearly identified the statutory 30 working day period when the Authority’s records are available for public inspection. This is evidenced by the notice on the website which contains the period for the exercise of public right; details of the manner in which the documents can</i>

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

		<i>be inspected; the name and address of the external auditor and the provisions as contained under section 25 and section 27 of the Act.</i>
<i>Have the publication requirements been met in accordance with the Regulations?¹¹</i>	Yes	The Council has complied with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for smaller authorities with income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 for the year ending 31 st March 2024 as it has published the following on a public website: Annual Internal Audit Report Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement of the AGAR Section 2 – Annual Accounting Statements of the AGAR Section 3 – External Auditor Certificate / Report / Letter Conclusion of the Audit Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

¹¹ Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

Section 12 – internal audit		
The internal auditor will revisit weaknesses and recommendations previously identified to see if these have been addressed. They will also check if any changes introduced require further verification to ensure effectiveness of the corrective action taken.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Has the Council considered the previous internal audit report?</i>	Yes	The Internal Audit Report for the period ending 31 st March 2024 was formally considered by and approved for adoption at the meeting of full Council of 27 th June 2024.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?</i>	Yes	At the meeting in June 2024, council undertook a formal review of the report and provided clarifying commentary in relation to the comments raised therein.
<i>Has the Council confirmed the appointment of an internal auditor?</i>	Yes	The appointment of the person to act as the parish council’s independent internal auditor for the year 2024 – 2025 was approved at the council meeting of 13 th March 2025. <i>Comment: Council has understood the requirement to ensure that there is an appointed person to provide assurance that the financial and management systems of the council are sound and adequate and internal control arrangements are efficient and effective.</i>
<i>Has the letter of engagement been approved by full council?</i>		The letter of engagement was approved at the same meeting. <i>Comment: by approving the letter of engagement, Council will be following Proper Practices by ensuring it has clarity on the provision of internal audit including the roles and responsibilities, audit planning and timing of visits, reporting requirements, rights to access to information, members and officers, period of engagement and remuneration.</i>
Additional comments:		

Section 13 – external audit for the period under review		
The internal auditor will revisit the external audit so that previous weaknesses and recommendations can be considered.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Has the Council considered the previous external audit report?¹²</i>	Yes	<p>It is noted that the external auditors issued a report on 27th September 2024 detailing that they were unable to certify completion of the review at that time. The interim report as issued on 27th September 2024 drew the following matters to the attention of the authority “The smaller authority has submitted its AGAR and supporting documentation prior to 30 September 2024; however, we have not been able to complete our review work in time to enable to smaller authority to publish the required documentation in line with statutory requirements. Once we have completed our review a final report will be provided with the certificate of completion detailing any qualifications and ‘other’ matters.”</p> <p><i>Comment: council has ensured that it complied with the publication requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and published the interim report by the due dates. This was reported to council at the meeting of 21st November 2024.</i></p> <p>The minutes of 9th January 2025 confirm that the council received the external audit certificate and report, and that work was completed and there were no matters to be brought to the attention of the council.</p>
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?</i>	N/A	<p>On 4th December 2024, the external auditor’s confirmed that they had completed their review of the AGAR and stated that the external auditor report given in Section 3 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return of 27th September) required amending as follows:</p> <p>“On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other</p>

¹² Regulation 20 Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 – following completion of an audit the Council should note that it is the Council as a whole (i.e., All members) and not a committee that should receive and consider the audit letter (including Annual Return and Certificate) from the local auditor as soon as reasonably practicable and the minutes should reflect that these have been received.

	<p>matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.</p> <p>Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:</p> <p>In the prior year, the smaller authority was exempt from our review, thus we have not reviewed any evidence to support the prior year comparatives on the AGAR”</p> <p>It is confirmed that the report from the external auditors details a certification which was completed with no exceptions. There were no matters raised which need to be brought to the attention of the authority.</p>
<p><i>Additional comments:</i> <i>The Internal Auditor is able to verify that the external auditor report and certificate along with the conclusion of the external audit have been published on the Council's website in accordance with the prescribed timescales. Details as to how copies may be purchased have also been included. Council has noted Regulation 16 and 20 (in part) which states that the annual audit letter received from the auditor must be considered by the authority and published (including publication on the authority's website) and to permit copies to be purchased.</i></p>	

Section 14 – additional information		
The internal auditor will look for additional evidence of good record keeping, compliance with data protection regulations, freedom of information and website accessibility regulations.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Was the annual meeting held in accordance with legislation?</i> ¹³	Yes	Council held its Annual Meeting of the Parish Council at which the Chair was elected on 1 st May 2024 in accordance with legislation in place at that time.
<i>Is there evidence that Minutes are administered in accordance with legislation?</i> ¹⁴	Yes	Council is aware that under LGA 1972 schedule 12, paragraphs 41(1) and 44, the draft minutes of a meeting should be formally approved (with any necessary amendments) at the next meeting. At each meeting, the Chair is given formal approval to sign the minutes. Whilst Council has ensured that, in accordance with legislation, loose leaf minutes are signed by the Chair of the meeting on each page, it should be noted that they are still not numbered consecutively. Recommendation: council should ensure that the minutes are consecutively numbered month on month, year on year and not just for the meeting.
<i>Is there a list of members' interests held?</i>	Yes	A copy of the members' interests for all of the serving councillors was seen on the district council's website. <i>Comment: Council should ensure that access direct to the East Suffolk page should be gained from the Council's website. Whilst the monitoring officer of the District Council must arrange for the parish council's register of members' interests to be available for inspection in the district which must be published on the district council's website, where the parish council has its own website, its register of members' interests must also be published on that website. (Openness and transparency on personal interests - A guide for councillors – August 2012)</i>
<i>Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?</i>	N/A	Council has no declared trustee responsibility.

¹³ The Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12, paragraph 7 (2) and Schedule 15 (2)

¹⁴ Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, Local Government Act 1972, and the Localism Act 2011

<p><i>Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Council is aware that councils with gross income and expenditure under £25,000 are required to follow the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 for smaller authorities. For those authorities that fall between the Transparency Code 2014 and the Transparency Code 2015 (gross income and expenditure exceeding £200,000), as a barest minimum the provisions for publication under the 2014 Act should be followed.</p> <p>Council should ensure that the following are published on a public website in accordance with the dates prescribed by the relevant regulations (not later than 1 July):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Audit Report List of Councillors and Responsibilities Items of Expenditure Above £100 including recoverable and non-recoverable VAT End of Year Accounts Annual Governance Statement Asset Register <p>and that Agendas of Meetings; Associated Papers and Minutes should be published in accordance with the prescribed timescales as set out in the Transparency code for smaller authorities – December 2014</p>
<p><i>Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)?¹⁵</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Council is correctly registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller in accordance with the Data Protection Legislation.</p> <p>As defined under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, council, during the year under review, adopted and published a Publication Scheme, tailored to the council to accurately reflect council's activities undertaken and the manner in which information will be made available.</p>
<p><i>Is the Council compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements?</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Council has taken active steps to ensure compliancy with the GDPR requirements and has adopted GDPR Policies during the year ensuring that they provide clear responsibilities and obligations of the council in respect of the collection and usage of personal information. It is noted that policies dealing with the protection and retention of that information in accordance with the provisions of the GDPR have been adopted / updated during the year under review.</p>

¹⁵ Data Protection Act 2018

<i>Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations?¹⁶</i>	Yes	Council has published a website accessibility statement on the council operated website detailing the technical information of the website along with the methods used for testing the website; the steps being taken to improve accessibility and how the site is being improved to ensure that content meets the WCAG 2.1 Standard under Regulation 8 of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.
<i>Does the council have official email addresses for correspondence?¹⁷</i>	Yes	Council uses a .gov.uk domain with dedicated emails for the council's officers, Chair and Vice-Chair. <i>Comment: council might wish to be aware of the new Assertion in the Annual Governance Statement (effective April 2025) which, to warrant a positive response, requires the council to have a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain.</i> Sections 5.117 to 5.120 in the Proper Practices Guide (March 2025) provides clarity on the manner in which an authority owned email account satisfies GDPR principles, integrity, confidentiality, accountability and transparency.
<i>Is there evidence that electronic files are backed up?</i>	Yes	Council uses a system whereby a back-up of the council's data is taken and stored appropriately.
<i>Do terms of reference exist for all committees and is there evidence these are regularly reviewed?</i>	N/A	Council does not operate with standing committees
Additional comments:		

Signed: Victoria S Waples

Date of Internal Audit Review: 05.06.2025 & 06.06.2025

Date of Internal Audit Report: 07.06.2025

On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils

¹⁶ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

¹⁷ Practitioners Guide