

Internal Audit Report for Acton Parish Council for the period ending 31 March 2023

Clerk	Fiona Mullins
RFO (if different)	-
Chairperson	Graham Round
Precept	£49,300.00
Income	£72,072.89
Expenditure	£68,508.35
General reserves	£36.839
Earmarked reserves	£266,106
Audit type	Annual
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 2022/23 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		Internal auditor commentary
Is the ledger maintained and up to date?	Yes	The council uses an excel spreadsheet to produce reports on a Receipts and Payments basis and ensures that the financial transactions of the parish council are as accurate as reasonably practicable. All transactions are well referenced and provide an effective tool for the basis of the council's internal controls.
Is the cash book up to date and regularly verified?	Yes	Council follows Proper Practices in ensuring that its accounting procedure gives a more 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 used the full suite of accounting and reporting tools associated with the package to produce clear financial management information to the Council on both a monthly and annual basis.
Is the arithmetic correct?	Yes	A number of spot checks were carried out and the functionality of the cashbook was found to be in order. <i>Comment: The RFO has shown best practise by ensuring, for further transparency and scrutiny, that all payments and receipts are referenced with a description as to the expenditure and income being incurred to ensure the integrity of data being input and processed.</i>
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	The Standing Orders, as seen on the Parish Council's website, show an adopted date of 20 th May 2019 with a review date of 19 th July 2021. However it is noted that Council reviewed its Orders at the meeting of 30 th Ma7 2022. Council's Orders, are based on the latest model published by the National Association of Local Councils (2018) and contain the provisions of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct as adopted by the Council. The Standing Orders are compliant with legislation and have been adapted (where they are not statutory requirements) to ensure that they are relevant to the Parish Council. <i>Comment: Council is aware of the requirement to ensure that the SOs are fully tailored to the council and that in accordance with proper practices they need to be regularly reviewed, fit for purpose and adhered to.</i>
Are Financial Regulations up to date and reviewed annually?	Yes	Financial Regulations (FR), as seen on the Council's website show a review date of 30 th May 2022 and are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2019 with provisions included as outlined under LTN 87 - Procurement – March 2022. <i>Comment: at the next annual review, Council might wish to also review the Procurement Thresholds amendments (SI 2022/139) of the Public Contracts (Amendment) Regulations 2022 which came into force on 21st December 2022 and make the changes to the contract value limits from £25,000 to £30,000 for non-central government authorities. The contract value limits are to be calculated inclusive of VAT (effective from 1st January 2022).</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 (the Clerk) to be responsible for the administration of the financial affairs of the relevant authority. This was reconfirmed by full Council at its meeting 30 th May 2022.
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		Internal auditor commentary
Is there supporting paperwork for payments with appropriate authorisation?	Yes	A selection of random payments were cross checked against payment authorisation slips, cash book, bank statement and invoices and all were found to be recorded/ authorised in accordance with Proper Practices. A further spot check of items paid via the system from the Council's Accounts was also cross checked against cashbook, bank statements and invoices. All were found to be in order. 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. The Council's Transferwise prepaid card system was interrogated and found to be in order with Council's minutes providing evidence of approval of expenditure incurred. <i>Comment: The Parish Council shows good practice by ensuring that retrospective payments incurred for the month are submitted to and approved by full council in accordance with Council's Own Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.</i>
Where applicable, are internet banking transactions properly recorded and approved?	Yes	Internet banking is operated in accordance with the Council's own Financial Regulations and is used for the settlement of the Council's expenditure. The Internal Control Statement details the procedure to be followed for such payments.
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	Yes	VAT is identified in the cash book with the reclaim for the period covering the year 2021-2022 in the sum of £2759.03 being verified in the cashbook and bank statements. The year-end balance stands at £4,607.18 which is still to be claimed.

Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	Yes	The Internal Audit report for the year ending 31 st March 2022 confirms that the council has confirmed eligibility criteria to enable it to exercise the General Power of Competency and adopted the same at its meeting on 20 th May 2019.
Are payments under s.137 ³ separately recorded, minuted and is there evidence of direct benefit to electorate?	N/A	Council uses the discretionary power to do anything that an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law.
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:		

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 full Council at its meeting of 22 nd March 2023.
<i>Is there evidence that risks are being identified and managed?</i>	Yes	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.

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 £8.41 per elector) on purposes for the direct benefit of its area, or part of its area, or all or some of its inhabitants.

<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 under a specialist policy for local councils with BHIB Insurance which shows core cover for the following: Public liability: £10million; Public/Products Liability: £10million and Fidelity Guarantee of £500thousand. At renewal, Council entered into a long term agreement (expiry 30th September 2025) with BHIB. <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.</i> During the year, being 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 appropriate insurance, annual reviews of the Council's insurance were undertaken prior to renewal. The minutes of 28th September 2022 evidence that such a review was undertaken by the Clerk during the sourcing of three quotations prior to renewal.. <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>
<i>Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed⁴</i>	Yes	At the meeting of 22nd June 2022, 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.
<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>	Yes	In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Parish Council formally reviewed the scope and effectiveness of its internal audit arrangements, evidence of which is contained within its Internal Control Policy as adopted on 22nd June 2022.
Additional comments:		

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
Verify that budget has been properly prepared and agreed	Yes	The budget for the year 2022-2023 was approved at the Council meeting of 17th January 2022 although there is no clear confirmation within the minutes as to the final budget figure being set. However, budget papers have been as seen on the website provide details on the budget, precept and implications for Band D Council Tax. <i>Comment: to ensure transparency in the budgetary process followed by the Council might wish to evidence, by recording within the minutes, the budget being set alongside the reasoning for such a budget.</i>
Verify that the precept amount has been agreed in full Council and clearly minuted	Yes	The precept was set at £49,300 for 2022/2023, as confirmed at the above meeting, with the paperwork demonstrating that this was a 0.01% increase over that set the previous year.
Regular reporting of expenditure and variances from budget	Yes	The minutes evidence that Council carried out its six-monthly review covering the budget for the current year with a review of income and expenditure against budget along with forecasts for the remainder of the year <i>Comment: Council is advised to consider either implementing, in accordance with its own standing order 17c a quarterly statement 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 or amend Standing Order 17c to reflect the frequency with which budget monitoring exercises are carried out.</i> There are regular report submitted summarizing the Council's receipts and payments and aggregate receipts and payments for the year to date with balances held. <i>Comment: at the meeting of 19th October 2022, Council adopted the Acton Action Plan 2023 which, being an active plan, gives Councillors the ability to progress and track measurable objectives against budgeted outcomes.</i>

<i>Reserves held – general and earmarked⁶</i>	Yes	The Council, as at year-end, had Earmarked Reserves totalling £266,106 with the balance being General Reserves of £36,839. <i>Comment: in accordance with the comment made in the internal audit report for the year ending 31st March 2022, Council adopted a General Reserves Policy which would assist Council in determining the level of reserves that are appropriate to the Council given its size, situations, risks and budget thereby ensuring that an adopted level is maintained.</i>
Additional comments: in the main, Council has followed the recommended key stages as to the budgetary process for the year: decide the form and level of detail of the budget; review the current year budget and spending; determine the cost of spending plans; assess levels of income; bring together spending and income plans; provide for contingencies and consider the need for reserves; approve the budget; confirm the precept or rates and special levies; and review progress against the budget regularly throughout the year.		

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 number of items of income were cross 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. At the meeting of 28 th September 2022, following the submission of a report on the allotments, Council having reviewed its annual allotment tenancy fees agreed that fees should remain unchanged for the coming year.
<i>Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax Authority's notification?</i>	Yes	Council received precept in the sum of £49,300 from Babergh District Council for the period under review as reported to full Council within its Financial

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

		Reports at its meetings in April and September 2022. 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?</i> ⁷	Yes	During the year under review, Council received CIL receipts totalling £15,915.56. The RFO has created an Earmarked Reserve for retained CIL balances.
<i>Is CIL income reported to the council?</i>	Yes	CIL receipts received are reported to full Council within the financial reports submitted to full Council At the meeting of 20 th July 2022, the RFO provided the Council with a report detailing the CIL payments received by the Council to date along with timescales by which the monies should be expended.
<i>Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?</i>	Yes	The Draft CIL annual report for 2022/2023 shows that there is a retained balance of £136,559 which has been transferred into in an Earmarked Reserve specifically allocated, in accordance with the Regulations.
<i>Has an annual report been produced?</i>	Yes	The Annual CIL Statement is still to be presented to full Council for approval although a copy was submitted for internal audit review.
<i>Has it been published on the authority's website?</i>	Yes	The Annual CIL Statement for the year 2022 - 2023 has been uploaded onto the Council's website although it is unsigned.
Additional comments:		

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	

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010

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 2 employees on its payroll at the period end of 31 st March 2023. Employment contracts were not reviewed during the internal audit but the Clerk to the Council has confirmed that all staff have a Contract of Employment in place.
<i>Has the Council approved salary paid?</i>	Yes	All salary payments are presented to the Council for approval and payments made in accordance with Council's own Financial Regulations. The minutes of the Council meeting of 22 nd March 2023, confirm that the Council approved amendments to both the Clerk and Assistant Clerk's contracts covering salary points, working hours; budgets and support for training. <i>Comment: Council has noted the requirement to ensure that it formally approves amendments to any employee's pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment.</i>
<i>Minimum wage paid?</i>	No	No employee is paid the national 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 to Suffolk Association of Local Councils. Cross-checks were completed on three payments covering salary and PAYE were found to be in order. Deductions paid to HM Revenue and Customs during the year under review were made in accordance with timescales as set out in the regulations.

<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 payments are made in accordance with timescales agreed with the Council's Pension Provider. The internal audit for the year ending 31 st March 2022 notes that Council confirmed at a meeting on 20 th July 2020 that re-enrolment forms had been submitted to the <i>Comment: if the Council last carried out its re-enrolment duties in 2020, it will be aware that every three years further re-enrolment duties will apply. Council should ensure that it comply with any deadlines for 2023 as stated in communications from the Pension Regulator.</i>
<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 staff expenses claimed are approved in accordance with Council's Financial Regulations. It is also noted that the fixed monthly sum contributed by the Council to the Clerk for the use of their personal mobile phone on Council business is now paid through the payroll system in accordance with guidance as issued by HM Revenue and Customs. <i>Comment: The RFO is aware of the guidance as issued in the Practitioners Guide for 2022 on the treatment of what can be included as employment expenses and submitted within Box 4 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Guide - section 2.16 refers.</i>
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	

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

<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 viewed on the Council's website, and as approved at the meeting of 22 nd March 2023, was reviewed during the Internal Audit Visit for year-end and 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 (31.03.2023) is £135,611 which reflects overall movement in the asset register covering acquisitions and disposals.
<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 2022 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>	N/A	Records of deeds, articles, land registry title number were not reviewed during the internal audit which was carried out via remote means.
<i>Is the asset register up to date and reviewed annually?</i>	Yes	Whilst the asset register is still to be signed off by the council, it should be noted that the values submitted on the Draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return for Internal Audit show an asset value of £136,889. This differs from that which was approved by Council at its meeting of 22 nd March 2023 and should be reviewed to ensure that it accurately reflects items that have been purchased from the Council's revenue budget or disposed of. Recommendation: Council is advised to review the values stated above ensuring that the carried forward balance of £135,611 (as shown on the register) mirrors the declared value on the unaudited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2023.
<i>Cross checking of insurance cover</i>	Yes	Council has insurance under all risks cover for its assets as specified under generic headings on the insurance schedule.
Additional comments:		

Section 10 – bank reconciliation

⁹ Practitioners Guide

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.
<i>Do bank balances agree with bank statements?</i>	Yes	Bank balances agree with period end statements and, as at year end (31 st March 2023) the balance across the councils accounts stood at £302,944.14 as recorded in the Draft Statement of Accounts and on the Year-end Bank Reconciliation.
<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 Full Council meetings, demonstrate that a review of the bank reconciliation versus the bank statements has been undertaken. This is not only good practice but is also a safeguard for the RFO and fulfils one of the authority's internal control objectives.
Additional comments:		
Section 11 – year end procedures		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Are appropriate accounting procedures used?</i>	Yes	Accounts are produced on a receipts and expenditure basis, and all were found to be in order.
<i>Financial trail from records to presented accounts</i>	Yes	There is a full audit trail from records to presented accounts.
<i>Has the appropriate end of year AGAR¹⁰ documents been completed?</i>	Yes	As Council is a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 it will be required to complete Part 3 of the AGAR. Section 2 - Accounting Statements of the AGAR were completed but unsigned by the RFO at the time of Internal Audit.

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

<i>Did the Council meet the exemption criteria and correctly declare itself exempt?</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>	As the Parish Council had gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 it was not able to declare itself exempt from a limited assurance review.
<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	During the review of the publication requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, it is noted that, for the year 2021-2022, the Council correctly provided for the exercise of elector's rights during Summer 2022. The RFO had set the dates for the inspection of the Council's accounts and associated documents as 13 th June to 22 nd July 2022 with the date of the notice being 10 th June 2022.
<i>Have the publication requirements been met in accordance with the Regulations?¹¹</i>	Yes	In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, as a smaller authority with either income or expenditure exceeding £25,000 but not exceeding £6.5 million, it is confirmed that the Council did comply with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for the year ending 31 st March 2022 as it published the following on its website: Annual Internal Audit Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement Section 2 - Accounting Statements Section 3 - The External Auditor Report and Certificate Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and other information required by Regulation 15(2) Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. <i>Comment: Council might wish to note that there is a requirement to ensure that Sections 1, 2 and 3 are published and remain available for public access for a period of not less than 5 years from the date of publication.</i>
Additional comments:		
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>	

¹¹ Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

<i>Has the Council considered the previous internal audit report?</i>	Yes	The Internal Audit Report for the period ending 31st March 2022 was formally considered by and approved for adoption at the meeting of full Council of 30th May 2022. The RFO was authorised to conduct necessary actions in accordance with the recommendations and comments raised within the report which was monitored as the year progressed. The following recommendations as raised in the internal audit report for the period ending 31st March 2022, having been considered by the Council were approved for implementation and have been / are in the process of being implemented: 1. Review of Fidelity Guarantee to cover recommended guidelines for cover. 2. Adoption of a Public Website Accessibility Statement.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?</i>	Yes	Council is also taking action to address further comments that were raised within the internal audit report for the year ending 31st March 2022, none of which have a significant impact on the financial management of the council. <i>Comment: Council has understood the requirement to ensure that, having received a narrative internal audit report, it should minute its review of the work carried out and agree actions planned from the outcomes identified.</i>
<i>Has the Council confirmed the appointment of an internal auditor?</i>	Yes	SALC were appointed as the Council's internal auditors for the year ending 31st March 2023 at the meeting of 28th September 2022. <i>Comment: Council has understood the requirement to ensure that it has a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities for internal audit, audit planning and timing of visits, reporting requirements; access to information; 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	Internal auditor commentary
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<i>Has the Council considered the previous external audit report?</i> ¹²	Yes	At the meeting of full Council of 29 th August 2022, Council considered the report from the External Auditor for the year ending 31 st March 2022. The Notice of Conclusion was seen on the Council's website.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?</i>	N/A	There were no matters which come to the attention of the external auditor which have cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met.
Additional comments:		
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 and other Officers were elected on 30 th May 2022 in accordance with legislation in place at that time, at which the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020 was adopted.
<i>Is there evidence that Minutes are administered in accordance with legislation?</i> ¹⁴	Partly met	Council is aware that 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.
<i>Is there a list of members' interests held?</i>	Yes	Evidence was seen on the District Authority's website the Register of Interests for all current Parish Councillors with a direct link from the Council's own website.
<i>Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?</i>	None held	Council does not have any Trustee Responsibilities.

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.

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

<i>Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?</i>	See comment	Whilst the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 applies to local authorities, including parish councils with annual income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) over £200,000, Councils with income over £25,000 but under £200,000 are expected (but are not legally required to do so) to follow its recommendations. <i>Comment: Council might wish to review its provisions and consider whether it might be able to work towards ensuring compliancy with the requirements of publishing the following data on its website in accordance with the required timescales:</i> <i>Publish quarterly: Individual items of expenditure that exceed £500 (currently published on an annual basis); Government Procurement Card transactions; Invitations to tender for contracts over £5,000; Details of contracts that exceed £5,000.</i> <i>Publish annually: Details of all land and building assets; Grants to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations; Organisational Chart.</i>
<i>Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)?¹⁵</i>	Yes	The Council is correctly registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller in accordance with the Data Protection Legislation. It is noted that Council last reviewed its Model Publication Scheme detailing the type of information the Council holds and how it will make it available to the public in 2016. <i>Comment: Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, public authorities must provide access to information held which must be published proactively. The Freedom of Information Act requires every public authority to have a publication scheme and to publish information covered by the scheme. Council should seek to review the information it holds under its scheme and ensure that it is up to date and ensure that it is available to view on its website. NALC Legal Topic Note 37 provides further clarification.</i>
<i>Is the Council compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements?</i>	Yes	Council has taken active steps to ensure compliancy with the GDPR requirements and has adopted a number of GDPR Policies during the year that provides clear responsibilities and obligations of the Council in respect

¹⁵ Data Protection Act 2018

		of the collecting, using and protecting of personal information in accordance with the provisions of the GDPR. <i>Comment: The Privacy Policy on the Parish Council's website covers the framework that the public can expect for dealing with requests from individuals who have the right to know what data is held on them, why the data is being processed and whether it will be given to any third party.</i>
<i>Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations?¹⁶</i>	Yes	Council has accessibility tools on its website thereby allowing for the increased functionality of the council's website, along with 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 operates with a .gov.uk email address for the Clerk and Councillors, thereby complying with GDPR and demonstrating that the council has an official status thereby building trust, credibility and authenticity. <i>Comment: for the purposes of user management, Council has ensured that the Proper Officer can add and remove member and staff email accounts.</i>
<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 a committee system.
Additional comments:		

Signed: *U S Waples*

Date of Internal Audit Review: 23/04/2023 & 24/04/2023
On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils

Date of Internal Audit Report: 24/04/2023

¹⁶ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

¹⁷ Practitioners Guide