

Internal Audit Report for Great Barton Parish Council

for the period ending 31 March 2024

Clerk	Amanda Jackson
RFO (if different)	As above
Chairperson	Maggie Dunn
Precept	£ 33,570
Income	£ 45,005.35
Expenditure	£ 45,847.71
General reserves	£ 10,563.00
Earmarked reserves	£ 65,211.45
Audit type	Annual
Auditor name	Julie Lawes

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 2023/24 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 its accounts and ensures that the financial transactions 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 ledger on the correct basis in relation to the gross income/expenditure? (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 operates its accounts on a receipts and payments basis.
Is the cash book up to date and regularly verified?	YES	Council follows Proper Practices in ensuring that its accounting procedure gives an accurate presentation of its financial position. The Responsible Financial Officer produces clear 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.
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 were reviewed by council at its meeting held 22 nd May 2023 and 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. 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 21 st 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 1 st January 2022).
Are Financial Regulations up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	Financial Regulations (FR), as seen on the council's website were approved at a meeting held 22 nd May 2023 and are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2019 with provisions included as outlined under LTN 87 - Procurement – March 2022. RECOMMENDATION: Revised Financial Regulations 2024 have been released by NALC and should be adopted at council's next review.
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.
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 the cash book, bank statement and invoices and all were found to be recorded and authorised in accordance with Proper Practices.
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 and the Internet Banking Risk Assessment policy ensures council has considered the risks effectively. Authorisation sheets are issued at each meeting detailing the payments to be made, the powers used and the information of those raising and approving payments, this is also detailed in council minutes.
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	YES	VAT is identified in the cash book for year end is recorded as £3,675.70 with 3 claims made during the course of the year to the following values: £1,936.86 on 20 th April 2023 £756.95 on 10 th October 2023 £1,502.42 on March 2024. The April and October 2023 payments were evidenced as received in the councils accounts.



Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	N/A	Council has not adopted the General Power of Competence.
Are payments under s.137 ³ separately recorded, minuted and is there evidence of direct benefit to electorate?	YES	Council recorded one s137 payment for the period under review to the value of £449.80. This was separately recorded within the accounts and was of direct benefit to 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 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
Is there evidence of risk assessment documentation?	YES	Council holds Land and Asset Risk Assessment and Internet Banking Pisk Assessment documentation which 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 Registers for the year under review was considered and adopted by full Council at its meeting of 22 nd May 2023.

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 £9.93 per elector) on purposes for the direct benefit of its area, or part of its area, or all or some of its inhabitants.



<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 the 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.
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?	YES	Council has insurance in place under a specialist policy for local councils with Ansvar Insurance which shows core cover for the following: Public/Products Liability £10m; Employers Liability £10m and Fidelity Guarantee of £100k. Council reviewed and approved its insurance at a meeting held 18 th September 2023. It is noted council also pays for the insurance for the church.
Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed ⁴	YES	At the meeting of 22 nd May 2023, 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. This was then amended and reconfirmed at a following meeting of council held 18 th September 2023.
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 appointment ⁵	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. This was evidenced as reviewed at meetings of council held 22 nd May and 17 th July 2023.
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 2023/2024 was approved at the Council meeting of 21 st November 2022.
Verify that the precept amount has been agreed in full Council and clearly minuted	YES	The precept was set at £33,570 for 2023/2024, as confirmed at the above meeting, with the paperwork demonstrating that this was a 0.03% decrease over that set the previous year.
Regular reporting of expenditure and variances from budget	YES	The council evidenced quarterly reviews covering the budget for the current year with a review of income and expenditure.
Reserves held – general and earmarked ⁶	YES	The Council, as at year-end, had Earmarked Reserves totalling $\pounds 65,211.45$ with the balance being General Reserves of $\pounds 10,563.00$.
Additional comments:		

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
Is income properly recorded and promptly banked?	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.
Is income reported to full council?	YES	In accordance with the Standing Orders, income received is reported to full Council within the financial reports.
Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax Authority's notification?	YES	Council received precept in the sum of £33,570 from West Suffolk Council for the period under review as reported to full Council within its Financial Reports. 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.
If appropriate, are CIL reporting schedules in accordance with the Regulations? ⁷	N/A	Council does not hold any CIL funds.
Is CIL income reported to the council?	N/A	
Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?	N/A	

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010



Has an annual report been produced?	N/A	
Has it been published on the authority's website?	N/A	
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
Is petty cash in operation?	N/A	Council does not operate a petty cash system.
If appropriate, is there an adequate control system in N/A place?		
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
Do all employees have contracts of employment?	YES	Council had 1 employee on its payroll at the period end of 31 st March 2024. During the period under review council also employed a locum clerk, who has now completed their term of employment. Employment contracts were not reviewed during the internal audit but the
Has the Council approved salary paid?	YES	Clerk to the Council has confirmed that all staff have a Contract of Employment in place. All salary payments are presented to the Council for approval and payments made in accordance with Council's own Financial Regulations. No employee is paid the national minimum wage.
Minimum wage paid?	N/A	
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?	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.
Do salary payments include deductions for PAYE/NIC? Is PAYE/NIC paid promptly to HMRC?	YES	The payroll function for the year under review is operated in accordance with HM Revenue and Customs. Cross-checks were completed on three payments covering salary and PAYE were found to be in order.



Is there evidence that the Council is aware of its pension responsibilities? Are pension payments in operation? ⁸	YES	Council is aware of its pension responsibilities with no payments made.
Have pension re-declaration duties been carried out	YES	Council recorded in its minutes of the meeting held 22 nd May 2023 that there is no action required with the Pension Regulator at this time.
Are there any other payments (e.g.: expenses) and are these reasonable and approved by the Council?	YES	There is a satisfactory expense system in place and all staff expenses claimed are approved 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
Does the Council maintain a register of material assets it owns and manage this in accordance with proper practices? ⁹	YES	The Asset Register, as viewed on the Council's website, and as approved at the meeting of 18 th September 2023, 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 is £142,267.80 which reflects overall movement in the asset register covering acquisitions and disposals.

⁸ The Pension Regulator – website click here

⁹ Practitioners Guide



Is the value of the assets included? (Note value for insurance purposes may differ)	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. Records of deeds, articles, land registry title number were not reviewed during the internal audit which was carried out via remote means.
Are records of deeds, articles, land registry title number available?	N/A	
Are copies of licences or leases available for assets sited at third party property?	N/A	Council did not detail any assets sited at third party property holding a licence or lease agreement.
Is the asset register up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	Whilst the asset register is still to be signed off by the council, it is noted that the values submitted for year-end 31 st March 2024 on the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is £142,268 in accordance with that reported.
Cross checking of insurance cover	YES	Council has insurance under all risks cover for its assets as specified under generic headings on the insurance schedule, and also detailed at its meeting held 18 th September 2023 that the insurance covered councils assets.
Additional comments:		1



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
Is bank reconciliation regularly completed and reconciled with the cash book and cover every account?	YES	Bank reconciliations are completed on a regular basis and reconcile with the cash sheets.
Do bank balances agree with bank statements?	YES	Bank balances agree with period end statements and, as at year end 31 st March 2024 the balance across the council's accounts stood at £83,826.41 as recorded in the Statement of Accounts and on the Year-end Bank Reconciliation.
Is there regular reporting of bank balances at Council meetings?	YES	Balances across the Council's accounts are reported at each meeting of council. The minutes 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



Section 11 – year end procedures		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Are appropriate accounting procedures used?	YES	Accounts are produced on a receipts and expenditure/ basis and all found to be in order.
Financial trail from records to presented accounts	YES	The end of year accounts and supporting documentation were well presented for the internal auditor review.
Has the appropriate end of year AGAR ¹⁰ documents been completed?	YES	As Council is a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 it has completed Part 3 of the AGAR. COMMENT: As noted in the External Audit Report, Section 2 of the Accounting Statements for 2022/2023 details the Responsible Financial Officer signed the form on 15 th May 2023, with the Accounting Statements approved by council 17 th April 2023 and the minute reference being that of the meeting held 22 nd May 2023. It is recorded at the May meeting that an amendment was made to the total value of the staff, and other payments boxes, however the RFO signed the return after presentation to council at the April meeting.
Did the Council meet the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt?	N/A	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.
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?	YES	During the review of the publication requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, it is noted that, for the year 2022-2023, the Council correctly provided for the exercise of elector's rights.

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)



		The RFO had set the dates for the inspection of the Council's accounts and associated documents as Monday 5 th July to Friday 14 th July 2023 with the date of the notice being 22 nd May 2023.
Have the publication requirements been met in accordance with the Regulations? ¹¹	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 2023 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.
Additional comments:		

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		Internal auditor commentary
Has the Council considered the previous internal audit report?	YES	The Internal Audit Report for the period ending 31 st March 2023 was formally considered council at a meeting held 22 nd May 2023.
Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?	YES	At its meeting held 19 th June 2023 council further discussed items raised within the report and took action where it felt appropriate.
Has the Council confirmed the appointment of an internal auditor?	YES	SALC were appointed as the Council's internal auditors for the year ending 31 st March 2024 at the meeting of 22 nd May 2023.
Additional comments:		



Section 13 – external audit for the period under review The internal auditor will revisit the external audit so that p Evidence		eaknesses and recommendations can be considered.
Has the Council considered the previous external audit report? ¹²	YES	At the meeting held 18 th September 2023, council considered the report from the External Auditor for the year ending 31 st March 2023. The Notice of Conclusion was seen on the Council's website.
Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?	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:		1

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.



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		Internal auditor commentary
Was the annual meeting held in accordance with legislation? ¹³	YES	Council held its Annual Meeting of the Parish Council at which the Chair and other Officers were elected on 22 nd May 2023 in accordance with legislation, at which the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020 was adopted.
Is there evidence that Minutes are administered in accordance with legislation? ¹⁴	YES	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.
Is there a list of members' interests held?	YES	Evidence was seen on the District Authority's website the Register of Interests for all current Parish Councillors.
Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?	N/A	Council does not have any Trustee Responsibilities.
Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?	YES	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.

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



Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)? ¹⁵	YES	The Council is correctly registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller in accordance with the Data Protection Legislation. Reference: Z2866452 Expiry: 25 th September 2024 COMMENT: Council detailed a data breach between 23 rd – 25 th September 2023 which was dealt with appropriately.
<i>Is the Council compliant with the General Data</i> <i>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 that provides clear responsibilities and obligations of the Council in respect of the collecting, using and protecting of personal information in accordance with the provisions of the GDPR.
Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations? ¹⁶	YES	Council has a website accessibility statement 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.
Does the council have official email addresses for correspondence? ¹⁷	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.
Is there evidence that electronic files are backed up?	YES	Once a month a copy of all files are loaded onto a password protected USB memory stick and given to the chairman.
Do terms of reference exist for all committees and is there evidence these are regularly reviewed?	YES	Council detailed a review of its Terms of Reference for its Planning Committee at a meeting held 22 nd May 2023.
Additional comments:		

¹⁵ Data Protection Act 2018

¹⁶ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

¹⁷ Practitioners Guide



Signed: J. Lawes

Date of Internal Audit Visit: N/A

On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils

Date of Internal Audit Report: Saturday 22nd June 2024