

MODEL FINANCIAL REGULATIONS FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

This Model Financial Regulations template was produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in April 2024 for the purpose of its member councils and county associations. Every effort has been made to ensure that the contents of this document are correct at time of publication. NALC cannot accept responsibility for errors, omissions and changes to information subsequent to publication.

Notes to assist in the use of this template:

- 1) This document is a model for councils of all sizes to use to develop their own financial regulations, suitable for the size of the council and the activities it undertakes.
- 2) Bold text indicates legal requirements, which a council cannot change or suspend.
- 3) For the rest, each council needs to adapt the model to suit its size and structure. For example, some councils have both a clerk and RFO, possibly with several more staff, while others have a single employee as clerk/RFO. Some councils have committees, some have a high level of delegation and some make all decisions at full council meetings. Many now use online payment methods, but others still rely on cheques.
- 4) Curly brackets indicate words, sentences or sections that can be removed if not applicable, or amended to fit the council's circumstances. An example of this is the phrase {or duly delegated committee}, which can be deleted if there are no committees.
- 5) Specific areas that may need adapting:
 - a) In 1.5 – is the Clerk the RFO?
 - b) In 3.3 and 3.4, the words “Governance and Accountability” do not apply in Wales
 - c) In section 4, does the council have committees and how many years are forecast?
 - d) In 5.6, does the council issue an open invitation to tender, or invite specific firms?
 - e) In 5.9, are online prices acceptable evidence?
 - f) In 5.13, 5.15 and 5.17, does the council have committees?
 - g) In 5.16, will a councillor ever be instructed to place an order?
 - h) In 5.20, is there a minimum level for official orders?
 - i) Section 6 includes several alternatives to cover delegation to committees or to officers, approval of invoices individually or in batches, or for approval of regular contractual payments at the beginning of the year.
 - j) Sections 7, 8 and 9 also includes several alternatives, including wording for where the clerk is a signatory. These are intended to allow a council's financial regulations to fit what they actually do, not to force any council to change what they do.
 - k) Section 10 gives two alternatives, with or without petty cash.
 - l) 13.6 has alternatives for VAT-registered and unregistered councils – only use one.
 - m) 13.7 and 13.8 are removable if they don't apply to the council.

- n) Much of Section 16 can be deleted if not applicable.
- o) 17.3, is the Clerk the RFO or will the RFO consult the Clerk?
- 6) Square brackets indicate where the council needs to specify who, or how much, or what the timescale is. For example [£500] might need to be £100, or [October] might need to be November, or [the council] might need to say the Policy and Resources Committee.
 - a) In 4.1 and 4.7, select the wording for England or Wales, based on your location.
 - b) In Section 4, the council needs to determine the timescale for its budget setting.
- 7) It is challenging to try to offer guidance on setting financial limits. A council spending £1,000 a year is unlikely to delegate authority to spend £500 to its proper officer, but one spending £5 million a year might regard £5,000 as a reasonable limit. Each council needs to determine its own limits, that help, rather than hinder, its operations.
- 8) Key limits to set:
 - a) In 5.6, at what limit will the council require a formal tender process to ensure fair competition, rather than just asking for quotes? If this is set too low, it may discourage suppliers. Many small councils might only use formal tenders once every few years.
 - b) In 5.8, at what limit will the council require fixed-price quotes rather than estimates?
 - c) In 5.9, at what level can smaller purchases be made without competition?
 - d) In 5.15, at what level can purchases be made under delegated authority (having complied with the rules about obtaining prices)?
 - e) In 5.18, how much can the clerk commit to spending in an emergency?
 - f) In 6.9, can payment of invoices (for purchases that have already been authorised) be authorised by an officer under delegated authority as a general principle, or only to avoid problems?
 - g) In Section 9, what are the limits for card payments?
 - h) In 16.5, what value of assets can be bought or disposed of, without seeking council approval?
- 9) The contents list is a table that extracts section headings from the document. It can be updated by clicking on the contents list, whereupon a tab saying "update table" appears at the top of the list.
- 10) Once this model has been tailored to fit the council's needs, the resulting Financial Regulations (with the insertion of the council's name at the top) should be adopted at a meeting of the full council. The date of adoption should be inserted below the Contents. Any subsequent proposal for amendment should also be made to the full council.
- 11) The council should keep abreast of developments in legislation that affect the local council sector and should review and update its Financial Regulations annually.
- 12) Please ensure that the latest approved version is published on the council's website.

[ENTER COUNCIL NAME] FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

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These Financial Regulations were adopted by the council at its meeting held on [enter date].

1. General

- 1.1. These Financial Regulations govern the financial management of the council and may only be amended or varied by resolution of the council. They are one of the council's governing documents and shall be observed in conjunction with the council's Standing Orders.
- 1.2. Councillors are expected to follow these regulations and not to entice employees to breach them. Failure to follow these regulations brings the office of councillor into disrepute.
- 1.3. Wilful breach of these regulations by an employee may result in disciplinary proceedings.
- 1.4. In these Financial Regulations:
 - 'Accounts and Audit Regulations' means the regulations issued under Sections 32, 43(2) and 46 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and then in force, unless otherwise specified.
 - "Approve" refers to an online action, allowing an electronic transaction to take place.
 - "Authorise" refers to a decision by the council, or a committee or an officer, to allow something to happen.
 - 'Proper practices' means those set out in *The Practitioners' Guide*
 - *Practitioners' Guide* refers to the guide issued by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) and published by NALC in England or Governance and Accountability for Local Councils in Wales – A Practitioners Guide jointly published by One Voice Wales and the Society of Local Council Clerks in Wales.
 - 'Must' and **bold text** refer to a statutory obligation the council cannot change.
 - 'Shall' refers to a non-statutory instruction by the council to its members and staff.
- 1.5. The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) holds a statutory office, appointed by the council. The Clerk has been appointed as RFO and these regulations apply accordingly. The RFO;
 - acts under the policy direction of the council;
 - administers the council's financial affairs in accordance with all Acts, Regulations and proper practices;
 - determines on behalf of the council its accounting records and control systems;
 - ensures the accounting control systems are observed;
 - ensures the accounting records are kept up to date;
 - seeks economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of council resources; and
 - produces financial management information as required by the council.
- 1.6. **The council must not delegate any decision regarding:**

- **setting the final budget or the precept (council tax requirement);**
- **the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of its internal controls**
- **approving accounting statements;**
- **approving an annual governance statement;**
- **borrowing;**
- **declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence; and**
- **addressing recommendations from the internal or external auditors**

1.7. In addition, the council shall:

- determine and regularly review the bank mandate for all council bank accounts;
- authorise any grant or single commitment in excess of [£5,000]; and

2. Risk management and internal control

- 2.1. The council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control, which delivers effective financial, operational and risk management.**
- 2.2. The Clerk shall prepare, for approval by the council, a risk management policy covering all activities of the council. This policy and consequential risk management arrangements shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.
- 2.3. When considering any new activity, the Clerk shall prepare a draft risk assessment including risk management proposals for consideration by the council.
- 2.4. At least once a year, the council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control, before approving the Annual Governance Statement.**
- 2.5. The accounting control systems determined by the RFO must include measures to:**
 - **ensure that risk is appropriately managed;**
 - **ensure the prompt, accurate recording of financial transactions;**
 - **prevent and detect inaccuracy or fraud; and**
 - **allow the reconstitution of any lost records;**
 - **identify the duties of officers dealing with transactions and**
 - **ensure division of responsibilities.**
- 2.6. At least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the council.
- 2.7. Regular back-up copies shall be made of the records on any council computer and stored either online or in a separate location from the computer. The council shall

put measures in place to ensure that the ability to access any council computer is not lost if an employee leaves or is incapacitated for any reason.

3. Accounts and audit

- 3.1. All accounting procedures and financial records of the council shall be determined by the RFO in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.2. **The accounting records determined by the RFO must be sufficient to explain the council's transactions and to disclose its financial position with reasonably accuracy at any time. In particular, they must contain:**
 - **day-to-day entries of all sums of money received and expended by the council and the matters to which they relate;**
 - **a record of the assets and liabilities of the council;**
- 3.3. The accounting records shall be designed to facilitate the efficient preparation of the accounting statements in the Annual {Governance and Accountability} Return.
- 3.4. The RFO shall complete and certify the annual Accounting Statements of the council contained in the Annual {Governance and Accountability} Return in accordance with proper practices, as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year. Having certified the Accounting Statements, the RFO shall submit them (with any related documents) to the council, within the timescales required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.5. **The council must ensure that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and internal control system in accordance with proper practices.**
- 3.6. **Any officer or member of the council must make available such documents and records as the internal or external auditor consider necessary for the purpose of the audit** and shall, as directed by the council, supply the RFO, internal auditor, or external auditor with such information and explanation as the council considers necessary.
- 3.7. The internal auditor shall be appointed by [the council] and shall carry out their work to evaluate the effectiveness of the council's risk management, control and governance processes in accordance with proper practices specified in the Practitioners' Guide.
- 3.8. The council shall ensure that the internal auditor:
 - is competent and independent of the financial operations of the council;
 - reports to council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one written report during each financial year;
 - can demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and
 - has no involvement in the management or control of the council

3.9. Internal or external auditors may not under any circumstances:

- perform any operational duties for the council;
- initiate or approve accounting transactions;
- provide financial, legal or other advice including in relation to any future transactions; or
- direct the activities of any council employee, except to the extent that such employees have been appropriately assigned to assist the internal auditor.

3.10. For the avoidance of doubt, in relation to internal audit the terms 'independent' and 'independence' shall have the same meaning as described in The Practitioners Guide.

3.11. The RFO shall make arrangements for the exercise of electors' rights in relation to the accounts, including the opportunity to inspect the accounts, books, and vouchers and display or publish any notices and documents required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

3.12. The RFO shall, without undue delay, bring to the attention of all councillors any correspondence or report from internal or external auditors.

4. Budget and precept

4.1. **Before setting a precept, the council must calculate its council tax (England) requirement for each financial year by preparing and approving a budget, in accordance with The Local Government Finance Act 1992 or succeeding legislation.**

4.2. Budgets for salaries and wages, including employer contributions shall be reviewed by the council at least annually in **October** for the following financial year and the final version shall be evidenced by a hard copy schedule signed by the Clerk and the Chair of the Council. The RFO will inform committees of any salary implications before they consider their draft budgets.

4.3. No later than **October** each year, the RFO shall prepare a draft budget with detailed estimates of all income and expenditure for the following financial year along with a forecast for the following **two** financial years, taking account of the lifespan of assets and cost implications of repair or replacement.

4.4. Unspent budgets for completed projects shall not be carried forward to a subsequent year. Unspent funds for partially completed projects may only be carried forward by placing them in an earmarked reserve with the formal approval of the full council.

4.5. The draft budget and **further two-year** forecast, including any recommendations for the use or accumulation of reserves, shall be considered by the council.

4.6. Having considered the proposed budget and **two-year** forecast, the council shall determine its council tax (England) requirement by setting a budget. The council

shall set a precept for this amount no later than the end of January for the ensuing financial year.

- 4.7. **Any member with council tax unpaid for more than two months is prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and must and must disclose at the start of the meeting that Section 106 applies to them.**
- 4.8. The RFO shall **issue the precept to the billing authority no later than the end of February** and supply each member with a copy of the agreed annual budget.
- 4.9. The agreed budget provides a basis for monitoring progress during the year by comparing actual spending and income against what was planned.
- 4.10. Any addition to, or withdrawal from, any earmarked reserve shall be agreed by the council.

5. Procurement

- 5.1. **Members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times.** Any officer procuring goods, services or works should ensure, as far as practicable, that the best available terms are obtained, usually by obtaining prices from several suppliers.
- 5.2. The RFO should verify the lawful nature of any proposed purchase before it is made and in the case of new or infrequent purchases, should ensure that the legal power being used is reported to the meeting at which the order is authorised and also recorded in the minutes.
- 5.3. Every contract shall comply with these the council's Standing Orders and these Financial Regulations and no exceptions shall be made, except in an emergency.
- 5.4. **For a contract for the supply of goods, services or works where the estimated value will exceed the thresholds set by Parliament, the full requirements of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or any superseding legislation ("the Legislation"), must be followed in respect of the tendering, award and notification of that contract.**
- 5.5. Where the estimated value is below the Government threshold, the council shall (with the exception of items listed in paragraph 6.12) obtain prices as follows:
- 5.6. For contracts estimated to exceed £60,000 including VAT, the Clerk shall ~~seek formal tenders from at least [three] suppliers agreed by [the council]] OR {advertise an open invitation for tenders in compliance with any relevant provisions of the Legislation. Tenders shall be invited in accordance with Appendix 1.~~
- 5.7. **For contracts estimated to be over £30,000 including VAT, the council must comply with any requirements of the Legislation¹ regarding the advertising of contract opportunities and the publication of notices about the award of contracts.**

¹ The Regulations require councils to use the Contracts Finder website if they advertise contract opportunities and also to publicise the award of contracts over £30,000 including VAT, regardless of whether they were advertised.

- 5.8. For contracts **£5,000** - £30,000 excluding VAT the Clerk shall seek at least 3 fixed-price quotes;
- 5.9. where the value is **between £1,000 and £5,000** excluding VAT, the Clerk shall try to obtain 3 estimates which might include evidence of online prices, or recent prices from regular suppliers.
- 5.10. For smaller purchases **below £1000**, the clerk shall seek to achieve value for money.
- 5.11. **Contracts must not be split into smaller lots to avoid compliance with these rules.**
- 5.12. The requirement to obtain competitive prices in these regulations need not apply to contracts that relate to items (i) to (iv) below:
- i. specialist services, such as legal professionals acting in disputes;
 - ii. repairs to, or parts for, existing machinery or equipment;
 - iii. works, goods or services that constitute an extension of an existing contract;
 - iv. goods or services that are only available from one supplier or are sold at a fixed price.
- 5.13. When applications are made to waive this financial regulation to enable a price to be negotiated without competition, the reason should be set out in a recommendation to the council {or relevant committee}. Avoidance of competition is not a valid reason.
- 5.14. The council shall not be obliged to accept the lowest or any tender, quote or estimate.
- 5.15. Individual purchases within an agreed budget for that type of expenditure may be authorised by:
- the Clerk, under delegated authority, for any items below **£1000** excluding VAT.
 - the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Council for any items below **£3,000?** excluding VAT.
 - the council for all items over **£3,000;**
- Such authorisation must be supported by a minute (in the case of council or committee decisions) or other auditable evidence trail.
- 5.16. No individual member, or informal group of members may issue an official order unless instructed to do so in advance by a resolution of the council or make any contract on behalf of the council.
- 5.17. No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the budget for that type of expenditure other than by resolution of the council except in an emergency.
- 5.18. In cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises, the clerk may authorise expenditure of up to **£3,000?** excluding VAT on repair, replacement or other work that in their judgement is necessary, whether or not there is any budget for such expenditure. The Clerk shall report such

action to the Chair as soon as possible and to [the council] as soon as practicable thereafter.

5.19. No expenditure shall be authorised, no contract entered into or tender accepted in relation to any major project, unless the council is satisfied that the necessary funds are available and that where a loan is required, Government borrowing approval has been obtained first.

~~5.20. An official order or letter shall be issued for all work, goods and services (above [£250] excluding VAT) unless a formal contract is to be prepared or an official order would be inappropriate. Copies of orders shall be retained, along with evidence of receipt of goods.~~

5.21. Any ordering system can be misused and access to them shall be controlled by the RFO.

6. Banking and payments

6.1. The council's banking arrangements, including the bank mandate, shall be made by the RFO and authorised by the council; banking arrangements shall not be delegated to a committee. The council has resolved to bank with **Unity Trust and NatWest**. The arrangements shall be reviewed annually for security and efficiency.

6.2. The council must have safe and efficient arrangements for making payments, to safeguard against the possibility of fraud or error. **As** more than one person should be involved in any payment, **the council has** dual online authorisation or dual cheque signing. Even where a purchase has been authorised, the payment must also be authorised and only authorised payments shall be approved or signed to allow the funds to leave the council's bank.

6.3. All invoices for payment should be examined for arithmetical accuracy, analysed to the appropriate expenditure heading and verified to confirm that the work, goods or services were received, checked and represent expenditure previously authorised by the council before being certified by the RFO. ~~{Where the certification of invoices is done as a batch, this shall include a statement by the RFO that all invoices listed have been 'examined, verified and certified' by the RFO}.~~

6.4. Personal payments (including salaries, wages, expenses and any payment made in relation to the termination of employment) may be summarised to avoid disclosing any personal information.

6.5. All payments shall be made by online banking/cheque, in accordance with a resolution of the council unless the council resolves to use a different payment method.

6.6. **Each month** the RFO **will** draw up a schedule of regular payments due in relation to a continuing contract or obligation (such as Salaries, PAYE, National Insurance, pension contributions, rent, rates, regular maintenance contracts and similar items), **for the council to** ~~authorise in advance for the year~~.

6.7. A copy of this schedule of regular payments **will be included in the monthly payment list to be** signed by **the two authorising** members on each and every occasion when payment is made - to reduce the risk of duplicate payments.

~~6.8. {A list of such payments shall be reported to the next appropriate meeting of the council or Finance Committee} for information only.~~

6.9. The Clerk and RFO shall have delegated authority to authorise payments in the following circumstances:

- i. any payments of up to **£1,000** excluding VAT, within an agreed budget}.
- ii. payments of up to **£3,000** excluding VAT in cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises.
- iii. any payment necessary to avoid a charge under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 or to comply with contractual terms, where the due date for payment is before the next scheduled meeting of the council, where the Clerk certify that there is no dispute or other reason to delay payment, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of council.
- ~~iv. Fund transfers within the councils banking arrangements up to the sum of £10,000, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of council.~~

6.10. The RFO shall present a schedule of payments requiring authorisation, forming part of the agenda for the meeting, together with the relevant invoices, to the council. The council shall review the schedule for compliance and, having satisfied itself, shall authorise payment by resolution. The authorised schedule shall be initialled immediately below the last item by the person chairing the meeting. A detailed list of all payments shall be disclosed within or as an attachment to the minutes of that meeting.

7. Electronic payments

- 7.1. Where internet banking arrangements are made with any bank, the RFO shall be appointed as the Service Administrator. The bank mandate agreed by the council shall identify **all** councillors who will be authorised to approve transactions on those accounts and a minimum of two people will be involved in any online approval process
- 7.2. All authorised signatories shall have access to view the council's bank accounts online.
- 7.3. No employee or councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the council or its banking, to anyone not authorised in writing by the council or a duly delegated committee.
- 7.4. The Service Administrator shall set up all items due for payment online. A list of payments for approval, together with copies of the relevant invoices, shall be sent by email to two authorised signatories.
- 7.5. In the prolonged absence of the Service Administrator [an authorised signatory] shall set up any payments due before the return of the Service Administrator.

- 7.6. Two councillors who are authorised signatories shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment using the online banking system.
- 7.7. Evidence shall be retained showing which members approved the payment online ~~and a printout of the transaction confirming that the payment has been made shall be appended to the invoice for audit purposes}.~~
- 7.8. A full list of all payments made in a month shall be provided to the next council meeting and appended to the minutes.
- 7.9. With the approval of the council in each case, regular payments (such as gas, electricity, telephone, broadband, water, National Non-Domestic Rates, refuse collection, pension contributions and HMRC payments) may be made by variable direct debit, provided that the instructions are signed/approved online by two authorised members. The approval of the use of each variable direct debit shall be reviewed by the council at least every two years.
- 7.10. Payment may be made by BACS or CHAPS by resolution of the council provided that each payment is approved online by two authorised bank signatories, evidence is retained and any payments are reported to the council at the next meeting. The approval of the use of BACS or CHAPS shall be renewed by resolution of the council at least every two years.
- 7.11. If thought appropriate by the council, regular payments of fixed sums may be made by banker's standing order, provided that the instructions are signed or approved online by two members, evidence of this is retained and any payments are reported to council when made. The approval of the use of a banker's standing order shall be reviewed by the council at least every two years.
- 7.12. Account details for suppliers may only be changed upon written notification by the supplier verified by the Clerk and two members. This is a potential area for fraud and the individuals involved should ensure that any change is genuine. Data held should be checked with suppliers every two years.
- 7.13. Members and officers shall ensure that any computer used for the council's financial business has adequate security, with anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software installed and regularly updated.
- 7.14. Remembered password facilities other than secure password stores requiring separate identity verification should not be used on any computer used for council banking.

8. Cheque payments

- 8.1. Cheques or orders for payment in accordance with a resolution or delegated decision shall be signed by two members.
- 8.2. A signatory having a family or business relationship with the beneficiary of a payment shall not, under normal circumstances, be a signatory to that payment.

- 8.3. To indicate agreement of the details on the cheque with the counterfoil and the invoice or similar documentation, the signatories shall also initial the cheque counterfoil and invoice.
- 8.4. Cheques or orders for payment shall not normally be presented for signature other than at, or immediately before or after a council meeting. Any signatures obtained away from council meetings shall be reported to the council at the next convenient meeting.

9. Payment cards

- 9.1. Any Debit Card issued for use will be specifically restricted to the Clerk and the RFO and will also be restricted to a single transaction maximum value of £500 unless authorised by council or finance committee in writing before any order is placed.
- 9.2. A pre-paid debit card may be issued to employees with varying limits. These limits will be set by the council. Transactions and purchases made will be reported to the council and authority for topping-up shall be at the discretion of the council.
- 9.3. Any corporate credit card or trade card account opened by the council will be specifically restricted to use by the Clerk and RFO and any balance shall be paid in full each month.
- 9.4. Personal credit or debit cards of members or staff shall not be used except for expenses of up to £250 including VAT, incurred in accordance with council policy.

10. Petty Cash

- 10.1. The council will not maintain any form of cash float. All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the Clerk (for example for postage or minor stationery items) shall be refunded on a regular basis, at least quarterly.

11. Payment of salaries and allowances

- 11.1. **As an employer, the council must make arrangements to comply with the statutory requirements of PAYE legislation.**
- 11.2. **Councillors allowances (where paid) are also liable to deduction of tax under PAYE rules and must be taxed correctly before payment.**
- 11.3. Salary rates shall be agreed by the council, or a duly delegated committee. No changes shall be made to any employee's gross pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment without the prior consent of the council {or relevant committee}.
- 11.4. Payment of salaries shall be made, after deduction of tax, national insurance, pension contributions and any similar statutory or discretionary deductions, on the dates stipulated in employment contracts.
- 11.5. Deductions from salary shall be paid to the relevant bodies within the required timescales, provided that each payment is reported, as set out in these regulations above.
- 11.6. Each payment to employees of net salary and to the appropriate creditor of the statutory and discretionary deductions shall be recorded in a payroll control account or other separate confidential record, with the total of such payments each calendar

month reported in the cashbook. Payroll reports will be reviewed by [the finance committee] to ensure that the correct payments have been made.

11.7. Any termination payments shall be supported by a report to the council, setting out a clear business case. Termination payments shall only be authorised by the full council.

11.8. Before employing interim staff, the council must consider a full business case.

12. Loans and investments

12.1. Any application for Government approval to borrow money and subsequent arrangements for a loan must be authorised by the full council and recorded in the minutes. All borrowing shall be in the name of the council, after obtaining any necessary approval.

12.2. Any financial arrangement which does not require formal borrowing approval from the Secretary of State (such as Hire Purchase, Leasing of tangible assets or loans to be repaid within the financial year) must be authorised by the full council, following a written report on the value for money of the proposed transaction.

12.3. The council shall consider the requirement for an Investment Strategy and Policy in accordance with Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments, which must be written in accordance with relevant regulations, proper practices and guidance. Any Strategy and Policy shall be reviewed by the council at least annually.

12.4. All investment of money under the control of the council shall be in the name of the council.

12.5. All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the RFO.

12.6. Payments in respect of short term or long-term investments, including transfers between bank accounts held in the same bank, shall be made in accordance with these regulations.

13. Income

13.1. The collection of all sums due to the council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the RFO.

13.2. The council will review all fees and charges for work done, services provided, or goods sold at least annually as part of the budget-setting process, following a report of the Clerk. The RFO shall be responsible for the collection of all amounts due to the council.

13.3. Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the council by the RFO and shall be written off in the year. The council's approval shall be shown in the accounting records.

13.4. All sums received on behalf of the council shall be deposited intact with the council's bankers, with such frequency as the RFO considers necessary. The origin of each receipt shall clearly be recorded on the paying-in slip or other record.

13.5. Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the council.

13.6. Any repayment claims under section 33 of the VAT Act 1994 shall be made at least annually at the end of the financial year.

~~13.7. {Where significant sums of cash are regularly received by the council, the RFO shall ensure that more than one person is present when the cash is counted in the first instance, that there is a reconciliation to some form of control record such as ticket issues, and that appropriate care is taken for the security and safety of individuals banking such cash.}~~

~~13.8. {Any income that is the property of a charitable trust shall be paid into a charitable bank account. Instructions for the payment of funds due from the charitable trust to the council (to meet expenditure already incurred by the authority) will be given by the Managing Trustees of the charity meeting separately from any council meeting.}~~

14. Payments under contracts for building or other construction works

14.1. Where contracts provide for payment by instalments the RFO shall maintain a record of all such payments, which shall be made within the time specified in the contract based on signed certificates from the architect or other consultant engaged to supervise the works.

14.2. Any variation of, addition to or omission from a contract must be authorised by [the Clerk] to the contractor in writing, with the council being informed where the final cost is likely to exceed the contract sum by 5% or more, or likely to exceed the budget available.

15. Stores and equipment

~~15.1. {[The officer in charge of each section] shall be responsible for the care and custody of stores and equipment [in that section].}~~

~~15.2. Delivery notes shall be obtained in respect of all goods received into store or otherwise delivered and goods must be checked as to order and quality at the time delivery is made.~~

15.3. Stocks shall be kept at the minimum levels consistent with operational requirements.

15.4. The RFO shall be responsible for periodic checks of stocks and stores, at least annually.

16. Assets, properties and estates

16.1. The Clerk shall make arrangements for the safe custody of all title deeds and Land Registry Certificates of properties held by the council.

16.2. The RFO shall ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets and Investments is kept up to date, with a record of all properties held by the council, their location, extent, plan, reference, purchase details, nature of the interest, tenancies granted, rents payable and purpose for which held, in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations.

16.3. The continued existence of tangible assets shown in the Register shall be verified at least annually, possibly in conjunction with a health and safety inspection of assets.

16.4. No interest in land shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law. In each case a written report shall be provided to council in respect of valuation and surveyed condition of the property (including matters such as planning permissions and covenants) together with a proper business case (including an adequate level of consultation with the electorate where required by law).

No tangible moveable property shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of, without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law, except where the estimated value of any one item does not exceed £500. In each case a written report shall be provided to council with a full business case.

17. Insurance

17.1. The RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the council and the property and risks covered, reviewing these annually before the renewal date in conjunction with the council's review of risk management.

~~17.2. The Clerk shall give prompt notification to [the RFO] of all new risks, properties or vehicles which require to be insured and of any alterations affecting existing insurances.~~

17.3. The RFO shall be notified of any loss, liability, damage or event likely to lead to a claim, and shall report these to [the council] at the next available meeting. The RFO shall negotiate all claims on the council's insurers {in consultation with the Clerk}.

17.4. All appropriate members and employees of the council shall be included in a suitable form of security or fidelity guarantee insurance which shall cover the maximum risk exposure as determined annually by the council.

18. [Charities]

~~18.1. Where the council is sole managing trustee of a charitable body the Clerk and RFO shall ensure that separate accounts are kept of the funds held on charitable trusts and separate financial reports made in such form as shall be appropriate, in accordance with Charity Law and legislation, or as determined by the Charity Commission. The Clerk and RFO shall arrange for any audit or independent examination as may be required by Charity Law or any Governing Document.]~~

19. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations

19.1. The council shall review these Financial Regulations annually and following any change of clerk or RFO. The Clerk shall monitor changes in legislation or proper practices and advise the council of any need to amend these Financial Regulations.

19.2. The council may, by resolution duly notified prior to the relevant meeting of council, suspend any part of these Financial Regulations, provided that reasons for the suspension are recorded and that an assessment of the risks arising has been presented to all members. Suspension does not disapply any legislation or permit the council to act unlawfully.

19.3. The council may temporarily amend these Financial Regulations by a duly notified resolution, to cope with periods of absence, local government reorganisation, national restrictions or other exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 1 - Tender process

- 1) Any invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the Clerk shall obtain the necessary technical assistance to prepare a specification in appropriate cases.
- 2) The invitation shall in addition state that tenders must be addressed to the Clerk in the ordinary course of post, unless an electronic tendering process has been agreed by the council.
- 3) Where a postal process is used, ~~each tendering firm shall be supplied with a specifically marked envelope in which the tender is to be sealed and remain sealed until the prescribed date for opening tenders for that contract.~~ all sealed tenders shall be opened at the same time on the prescribed date by the Clerk in the presence of at least one member of council.
- 4) Where an electronic tendering process is used, the council shall use a specific email address that will be monitored to ensure that nobody accesses any tender before the expiry of the deadline for submission.
- 5) Any invitation to tender issued under this regulation shall be subject to Standing Order 5.6 and shall refer to the terms of the Bribery Act 2010.
- 6) Where the council does not accept any tender, quote or estimate, the work is not allocated and the council requires further pricing, no person shall be permitted to submit a later tender, estimate or quote who was present when the original decision-making process was being undertaken.



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

Pucklechurch Parish Council Risk Assessment Schedule 2024/25

INSURANCE

Risk Description	Measures Taken	Recommendations/Controls	Action as required
Damage to third party property or individuals	Employers' Liability and Public and Products Liability insurance	Annual check prior to renewal on level of cover in place by council and RFO recorded in minutes.	15/5/24
Risk to third party as a consequence of providing a service	Regular checks and maintenance of physical assets.	Complaints/issues actioned and reported to council Agreed delegation for emergency repairs and expenditure by the Clerk	Records held by clerk Emergency repairs reported to council
Protection of Council properties, furniture and equipment	Appropriate Insurance Asset Register	Annual review of risk and adequacy of Insurance cover at annual meeting. Register of Assets maintained in accordance with Proper Practices and reviewed annually	15/5/24 Physical check April 2024
Insolvency of insurance company	Use of one of the largest companies providing specialist cover for Local Councils, as recommended by Avon Local Councils Association (ALCA)	Free legal service and advice from National Association of Local Councils and Avon Local Councils Association	Appointed Clear councils
Loss through theft or dishonesty of staff or members	Appropriate Fidelity insurance	Annual review of Fidelity Guarantee and adequacy of cover Thorough vetting of job applicants, references taken up and staff reviews. Internal financial controls	15/5/24
Personal Accident to Members and Officers Assault to Officers	Appropriate Employers' Liability and Public and Products Liability insurance	Annual check on level of cover in place by council and RFO	15/4/24

ASSETS

Risk Description	Measures Taken	Recommendations/Controls	Action as required
Playgrounds	Weekly play equipment checks by qualified person	Play equipment and defibrillators checked by Maintenance Contractor on a weekly basis and faults reported to Clerk.	Checklist held by clerk



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

	Annual independent inspection by qualified professional	ROSPA qualified professional commissioned Play area working group	Reported to council Report on website
Damage to and safety of seats, bins and fencing etc.,	Regular maintenance by appointed contractor Reports from members of the public	Councillors/ contractor report any problems to Clerk Reported, investigated and actioned as needed	Records held by clerk Reports to council
Emergency situations when using public buildings e.g. fire	Mobile phone on-hand to summon assistance Location of fire exits made known	Procedures in place to deal with this in the Council's Standing Orders.	ongoing
Disturbance by member of public in a Council meeting	Managed in line with Standing Orders	Members trained in conflict resolution	
Allotments	Work with Allotment Association affiliated to National Allotment Society	Annual tenancy agreements and handbook with safe operating practices. Dedicated allotment page on council website Independent allotment committee H&S and risk review of allotment site	Website
Health and Safety	Dedicated Councillor with relevant H&S knowledge to lead on H&S matters	Risk assessments of burial ground Liaise with Pucklechurch Community Association to meet lease requirements for H&S matters Where required professional advice will be sought.	Minutes

FINANCIAL RISKS AND CONTROLS

Risk Description	Measures Taken	Recommendations/Controls	Action as required
Awareness of and annual review of Financial & Standing Orders	Review of Financial & Standing Orders in line with legislation	At annual council meeting	recorded in minutes
Review of contracts and performance (where appropriate)	Review in line with agreed contracts	Council review and approve actions	recorded in minutes



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

Procedures in place for recording and monitoring members' interests, gifts and hospitality received	Register of Interest completed by each Member of the Council Gifts and hospitality are not accepted Disclosure of interests	Registers of Interest held by South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) NB – This is the responsibility of individual Councillors. Recorded every meeting	Link from council website to SGC
Compliance with Code of Conduct	Signing the acceptance of office commits to adhering to Code.	Council signatory to Civility and Respect pledge Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors published on website	In minutes Reaffirm at annual meeting
Keeping proper financial records in accordance with statutory requirements	Regular scrutiny of financial records and approval of pending expenditure every month Records kept in accordance with Proper Practice and relevant legislations including Accounts and Audit Regulations	Financial regulations adopted and reviewed annually Annual Internal Audit by suitable professional Annual External Audit Officer training	15/5/24
Payments supported by invoices, authorised and minuted.	Invoices supplied to authorising councillors for checks prior to approving on-line payments set up by the clerk/RFO	Payment schedule approved by council prior to payment Payments recorded in minutes	Recorded in monthly minutes
Scrutiny of internet bank payments including authorisation procedures	Payments made in line with agreed on-line payment process	Clerk inputs details & 2 councillors authorise payments according to approved schedule and invoices	monthly
Scrutiny of grants awarded by the Council	Payment list presented after grants awarded	Grants paid in line with agreed on-line payment process	Recorded in minutes and on accounts page of council website
Banking Arrangements	Monthly bank reconciliations Unity online banking All payments in line with Financial Regulations	Formal approval of reconciliation to bank statements Reconciliations periodically verified and signed off by a non-authorising Councillor Payments made in line with agreed on-line payment process above.	Recorded in minutes



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

Failure to collect rents from Council's leases and allotments	Regular monitoring of income received Annual allotment agreements issued 1 st April.	Reports to council Annual Internal and External Audit Register maintained and monitored	In minutes
Budget setting process in accordance with Proper Practices	Budget process commences October Adequate reserves in line with proper practice	Detailed consideration of proposed budgets in line with business planning, Budget approved by council Formal notification of precept to South Gloucestershire council.	In minutes
CIL income and expenditure	Recorded appropriated in accounts in accordance with legislation	Unspent funds retained in earmarked reserves Annual return to South Gloucestershire Council	In minutes
Budget monitoring	Quarterly statements to Parish Council comparing income/expenditure to budget	Council approval Recorded in minutes and in accounts information on website	In minutes
Delegated Powers	Identified and approved by council	Annual review	Published on website
Complying with restrictions on borrowing	Borrowing approval authorised by Council in line with current restrictions	Guidance from National Association of Local Councils and ALCA	Currently N/A
Payroll Fair pay for staff	Payroll outsourced to professional payroll company Salaries set in accordance with NALC/SLCC recommended scales	PAYE/NIC/Pension produced by PATA Payroll checked, approved and authorised by council Regular reviews to ensure salary meets changing demands of role	In minutes Last review 2024/04/10 5e.
Unfair dismissal claims	Grievance and Appeals procedure	Grievance and Appeals procedure in place	website
Exercise of public rights of inspection	Accounts published in accordance with proper practice Publication scheme	Advertising of end of year accounts and available for inspection to the public as required under the Accounts and Audit Regulations	website
Loss of Income, or the need to provide essential services	Reserve in the budget	Levels agreed by council as part of annual risk assessment process	Minutes website
VAT	VAT identified and recorded	Record keeping in accordance with legislation VAT returns reported to council	Minutes Internal audit



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

	VAT reclaimed as a minimum on an annual basis		
Supplies and Services provided to the Council	Contract for services advertised and awarded in line with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Use of Contract Finder for contracts over £30K in line with legislation Ensure Contractors have adequate insurance and public liability cover	All contracts ratified by Council Copy of insurance certificate supplied before award of contract	website

OTHER CONTROLS

Risk Description	Measures Taken	Recommendations/Controls	Action as required
Ensuring all requirements met under employment law	Employment contracts for all staff	Councillors made aware of their responsibilities as an Employer. Councillor training	Staffing working group
Ensuring all business activities are within legal powers applicable to local council	Councillor and staff training All expenditure referenced to appropriate legislation	Provide adequate training budget Council resolved it meets the conditions of the general powers of competence 17/5/23.	Internal audit / External audit
Failure of Computer system	Remote hosting Virus protection	via Microshade and password protected Microshade provided virus protection	Ongoing contract
Compliance with Data Protection Legislation	Annual review	ICO registration Review of FOI and SAR requests	March 2024 15/5/24
Model Publication Scheme up to date	Annual review	Annual review	15/5/24
Annual review of GDPR policies	Annual review	Annual review	15/5/24
Compliance with Website Accessibility Requirements:	Annual review	.gov.uk website and dedicated .gov.uk email addresses for councillors and officers Website Security Certificate Accessibility statement on website	See website



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

Responding to consultation invitations, including commenting on planning applications	Consultation documents presented at Council meeting to formulate response	Agreed action minuted Delegated powers in place	minutes
Breach of Confidentiality	Procedures for dealing with confidential data Password protected computer systems	Appropriate use of Standing Orders for taking in private session with resolution to exclude the public	minutes
Proper, timely and accurate reporting of Council business in minutes	Draft minutes circulated to councillor Minutes approved by council at next meeting of Council and signed by chair	Draft minutes on website until replaced by approved minutes Signed copy held by clerk Remote backup	Internal Audit
Document control – correspondence, storage and filing, etc.	Correspondence held in accordance to legislation Filing systems maintained in lockable metal cabinets.	Remote back up for electronic papers The production and storage of physical documents is restricted as far as possible. Storage of old documents at Gloucester Archives	Remote hosting
Changes to legislation and procedures	Provide effective training for Staff and Councillors	Professional membership of SLCC by Clerk Provide adequate budget for training Training record	Renewed April 2024 In budget Website

Reviewed and re-approved 15/5/24

Fixed Assets owned by Pucklechurch Parish Council as at 31st March 2024

Date Acquired	Description	Value at time of purchase	Value for Insurance purposes	Land	Allocated for agreed reserve
11.12.1998	St Aldam's Drive land Received from HM Prison Services	1.00		1.00	
09.07.1968	Burial Ground Purchased from Vicarage	2150.00		2150.00	
17.07.1958	Parkfield Rank Land used for play area date and value taken from only Registration documents found on file	50.00		50.00	
18.08.1936	Recreation Field	945.00		945.00	
	Scout Hut (No deeds found)	1.00			Valued By leaseholder
	Village Hall (no deeds found)	1.00			Valued By leaseholder
07.07.1980	Land Received from Secretary of Defence Eagle Crescent	1500.00		1500.00	
01.12.1895	Allotments & Woodlands (no deeds found)	1.00		1.00	
	2 planters		582.80		
	Bus shelter Abson Road O/S Church		5540.55		
	Bus shelter Oaktree Avenue South Side		5540.55		
	Bus shelter Abson Road O/S Village hall		5320.48		
	Bus shelter Oaktree Avenue North Side		5320.48		
	Bus shelter Shortwood Road		2640.89		
	Bus shelter Shortwood Road		2640.89		
	Bus shelter Main Road Shortwood		2640.89		
	Bus shelter Goldfinch Way		4913.50		
	Bus shelter Kestrel Drive/Merlin		4492.16		
	Community Defibrillator & Box Village hall		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator & Box Village Café		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator & box Pucklechurch Social Club		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator, stand & box Eagle Crescent		3286.60		
01/10/2022	Community Defibrillator broken and removed from service		-974.95		
	Community Defibrillator & Box Shortwood Road		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator, stand & box Parkfield Rank		3286.60		
	Telephone Box purchased for £1.00		1.00		
	Play Equipment Shortwood see below		1.00		
	Play equipment St Aldams see below		1.00		

	Play equipment Recreation field see below		1.00		
	Play equipment Becket Court see below		1.00		
	Concrete shed		3700.34		
	Memorials Millennium stone		1.00		
	Trees		1.00		
	Other ground surfaces was insured for and play equipment		22495.08		
	Natural Sports Surface		2575.00		
22.01.15	Community Centre and Shortwood Noticeboards		6645.48		
05.09.18	Tree seat Recreation ground		890.00		
27/08/2021	Playground signage		927.75		
20/09/2022	Eagle Crescent play equipment		62525.00		
19/10/2022	Replaecment defibrillator Eagle Crescent		974.95		
19/12/2022	Signage Parkfield turning circle		240.00		
27/03/2023	HP laptop FQ4006NA and printer 7220 bundle		620.00		
09/05/2023	Dog bin Partridge Road		618.50		

	4649.00	156596.94
Total Assets	161245.94	

All assets checked and reviewed Cllr Freestone - April 2024

Approved by council 15th May 2024

Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24

PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

www.pucklechurchparishcouncil.gov.uk

During the financial year ended 31 March 2024, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2023/24 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

Internal control objective	Yes	No*	Not covered**
A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.	✓		
B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.	✓		
D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	✓		
E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.	✓	N/A Applicable	
G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	✓		
H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	✓		
I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	✓		
J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	✓		
K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick "not covered")			✓
L. The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	✓		
M. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (during the 2023-24 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2022-23 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).	✓		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	✓		
O. (For local councils only)	Yes	No	Not applicable
Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.			✓

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

12/03/2024

28/04/2024

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit

Date

28/04/2024

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

**Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).

Pucklechurch Parish Council

Internal Audit Report: 2023-24

Stuart J Pollard

*Director
Auditing Solutions Ltd*

Background

Statute requires all town and parish councils to arrange for an independent Internal Audit (IA) examination of their accounting records and systems of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2023-24 financial year during our interim & final reviews of the records undertaken on 12th March 2024 following collection of the records from the Clerk and remotely on 28th April 2024. We thank the Clerk for assisting the process, providing all necessary documentation in electronic or hard copy format to facilitate completion of this year's review. We have duly signed-off of the IA Certificate in the year's AGAR assigning positive assurances in each relevant area.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our review for the year, we have again had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential misrecording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts / AGAR. Our programme of cover is designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council has robust financial systems in place that operate in a manner to ensure effective probity of transactions and to afford a reasonable probability of identifying any material errors or possible abuse of the Council's own and the national statutory regulatory framework. The programme is also designed to facilitate our completion of the "IA Certificate" as part of the Council's AGAR process, which requires independent assurance over several control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We are pleased to again conclude that, based on the satisfactory conclusions drawn from our programme of work for the year, the Clerk and Council have again maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements. Whilst there are no significant concerns arising, we identified one or two minor errors in the cashbook at our interim review which we discussed with the Clerk who has made appropriate amendments before the final closedown for the year. Detail of these issues is set out in the body of the following report with any resultant recommendations further summarised in the appended Action Plan.

Based on the satisfactory conclusions drawn from our review, we have duly signed-off the IA Certificate in the year's AGAR assigning positive assurances in each relevant area.

We take this opportunity to draw the Clerk and Council's attention to the guidance notes in the preface to the year's AGAR in relation to the documentation that should be displayed on the Council's website together with the need to ensure compliance with the timing requirements for publication of the Notice of Public Rights to examine the Council's documentation for the financial year.

Detailed Report

Review of Accounting Arrangements & Bank Reconciliations

Our objective here is to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers. The Clerk records financial transactions in a spreadsheet cashbook with two bank accounts in place at NatWest plc, together with an account with Unity Bank which is now used for all bar regular direct debit and standing order payments. We have: -

- Ensured that an appropriate analysis of receipts and payments exists in the spreadsheet cashbook;
- Ensured the accurate carry forward of the 2022-23 closing balances to the 2023-24 spreadsheet cashbook detail;
- Ensured that the cashbook remains in balance at the financial year-end;
- Checked and agreed the full year's transactions on the NatWest Current and Unity bank accounts to the supporting bank statements (as indicated in the preface to this report;
- Verified the accurate recording of detail on the combined account bank reconciliations throughout the year with no long-standing uncleared transactions existing at the year-end; and
- Ensured the accurate disclosure of the combined account balances at 31st March 2024 in the AGAR at Section 2, Box 8.

In undertaking our pre-year-end review, we noted that VAT on the payment of £1,664.50 to Andrea Pellegram on 20th November 2023 had not been identified in the cashbook and, secondly, that VAT on the refund received from Plusnet on February 2024 had not been identified in the cashbook: as the Council's year-end Accounts and AGAR are prepared on an Income & Expenditure basis, this refund should be recorded in the cashbook as a negative payment. We also note that the pension payment in January 2024 was incorrectly analysed in the spreadsheet cashbook as "Clerk's expenses" rather than as a Pension payment. We have drawn these details to the attention of the Clerk who has duly amended the cashbook prior to the year-end closedown.

We are also pleased to note that bank reconciliations continue to be subjected to independent scrutiny and sign-off throughout the year and that the Clerk sets up the Unity account payments online with two councillors then going online to release them.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no residual concerns arise in this area at the financial year-end. However, we suggest that, as a minimum, the dormant (apart from addition of annually earned interest) Nat West Business Reserve account should be closed with funds transferred to the Unity Account with a view to investing them in a different bank offering a more beneficial rate of interest. Similarly, we urge that the NatWest Current account be closed with the existing standing order and direct debit payments set up for release from the Unity Bank account.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective here is to ensure that the Council has robust corporate governance documentation and procedures in place; that Council meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing

Orders (SOs) and that, as far as we are reasonably able to ascertain as we do not attend meetings, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation.

We have examined the Council's minutes for the year to determine as far as we are able as we do not attend meetings whether any issues exist that may have an adverse effect, through litigation or other causes, on the Council's future financial stability and are pleased to report that no such matters appear to exist currently.

We note that both the SOs and Financial Regulations (FRs) have again been reviewed and re-adopted at the Council meeting in May 2023, both including appropriate reference to the requirements relating to tendering and compliance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

We again note that payment detail is submitted to the Council monthly and formally incorporated in the minutes, including detail of payees' names, cheque numbers and the payments due to each.

We are also pleased to note that the external auditors signed-off the 2022-23 AGAR without recommendation other than endorsing our 2022-23 report recommendations: we also note that the Council has published an appropriate Notice of Public Rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 affording the requisite 30 working days for the public to examine the Council's financial records.

Conclusions

No issues arise in this area this year warranting formal comment or recommendation. We shall continue to consider the effectiveness of the Council's approach to governance issues, also reviewing the minutes of meetings, at our future years' reviews.

Review of Expenditure & VAT

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and approved budgets;
- Payments are supported by appropriate documentation, either in the form of an original trade invoice or other appropriate form of document confirming the payment as due and/or an acknowledgement of receipt, where no other form of invoice is available;
- All payments are being reported to Council;
- VAT has been calculated correctly for periodic recovery; and
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount.

We have reviewed the procedures for the approval and processing of trader and other payments and consider them generally sound, although we consider that, to afford a greater degree of protection to the Clerk in the event of any untoward externally generated fraudulent transactions occurring on the bank accounts, members should, ideally in line with best practice and to demonstrate the effective discharge of their fiduciary responsibilities, formally review and initial the original individual invoices / supporting payment documentation.

The 2023-24 VAT reclaim was prepared and submitted to HMRC with repayment received in May 2023. We have reviewed the 2023-24 reclaim agreeing detail to the year's cashbook (as amended following our initial review).

Conclusions and recommendation

We are pleased to record that no significant issues have been identified in this area, although, as indicated above, we urge that to further strengthen and demonstrate members involvement in the payment approval process, invoices and other payment supporting documentation should be initialled by members.

R1. To demonstrate the effective discharge of their fiduciary responsibilities and afford further protection to the clerk, members releasing payments online should examine and initial the original documentation supporting all payments throughout the year.

Assessment and Management of Risk

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

We are pleased to note that a formal Risk Register remains in place and that it has been reviewed and formally re-adopted by the Council at its meeting in May 2023: we have reviewed the resultant document and consider that it remains appropriate for the Council's present requirements.

The Council's insurance cover has again been provided through the Local Council's scheme: we have examined the year's schedule and consider that appropriate cover is in place with Employer's and Public Liability both set at £10 million, together with Fidelity Guarantee cover at £250,000.

Conclusions

No issues arise in this area. We shall continue to monitor the Council's approach to governance at future reviews.

Precept Determination and Budgetary Control

We aim in this review area to ensure that the Council has appropriate procedures in place to determine its future financial requirements leading to the adoption of an approved budget and formal determination of the amount to be precepted on the parent Council; that effective arrangements are in place to monitor budgetary performance throughout the financial year and that the Council has identified and retains appropriate reserve funds to meet future spending plans.

We note that the 2024-25 budget and precept were debated appropriately and approved at the January 2024 full Council meeting with the latter set at £121,896.

We are again pleased to note that the Clerk provides members with detail of the Council's budgetary performance quarterly during the year and have examined the year-end outturn with no significant concerns identified.

We have reviewed the level of reserves retained by the Council, which have increased to £137,990 (£135,000 as at 31st March 2023) including earmarked reserves (EMRs).

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues arise in this area warranting formal comment or recommendation this year.

Review of Income

In considering the Council's income streams, we aim to ensure that robust systems are in place to ensure the identification of all income due to the Council, to ensure that income is invoiced, where appropriate, in a timely manner and that effective procedures are in place to pursue recovery of any outstanding monies due to the Council.

To gain assurance that appropriate controls are in place, we have examined income arising from allotment rents, noting that a formal register of tenants is again in place with a proportion of the rents for 2024-25 received and banked appropriately in March 2024.

Eight interments occurred during the year: we have examined the underlying paperwork (undertaker applications and the legally required burial / cremation certificates), together with documentation supporting the headstone / additional inscription requests from stonemasons. In each case, we have ensured that the appropriate fees have been received and banked accordingly with no issues arising.

Finally in this review area, we note that cemetery fees were formally reviewed at the May 2023 meeting, members determining that they remain unchanged for 2023-24.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues arise in this area this year warranting formal comment or recommendation.

Petty Cash Account

No petty cash account has been in operation during 2023-24.

Review of Staff Salaries

In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the requirements of HMRC legislation and the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions. We have note previously that the Council approved an increase in the Clerk's contracted weekly hours to 30 per week in 2022. We also note approval for implementation of the 2023-24 national pay award which was applied to the November 2023 salary payment together with arrears backdated to 1st April 2023. We have consequently: -

- Ensured that the Clerk's monthly gross pay for a sample of two months during the year (November and December 2023) has been calculated in accordance with the approved spinal salary scale point and contracted weekly hours, including the backdated arrears paid in November 2023;
- Ensured that Income Tax codes and National Insurance Tables are being applied correctly;
- Noted that the Clerk contributes to the NEST pension scheme; and
- Ensured that payments to HMRC and NEST are made appropriately each month.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that the procedures in place for the determination and physical payment of the Clerk's salary continue to operate soundly.

Fixed Asset Register

The Practitioner's Guide requires all Councils to maintain a comprehensive register of all assets owned and leased by the Council. We are pleased to note the continued existence of an appropriate register with no new Council equipment / assets acquired nor any disposals occurring during 2023-24. Consequently, the asset value to be reported in the year's AGAR at Section 2, Box 9 has remained unchanged to that reported in the 2022-23 AGAR.

Conclusions

No matters of concern have been identified in this review area this year.

Investments and Loans

The Council has no "investments" in place currently, all funds being held in the two NatWest and single Unity bank accounts. Similarly, there are no loans in place either repayable by, or to the Council. We have noted previously the development and adoption of a formal Investment Policy, which we also now note was reviewed and re-adopted in May 2023.

Statement of Accounts and AGAR

The Accounts and Audit Arrangements require councils to submit their annual Accounts in the form of a summarised financial statement in the AGAR. We are again pleased to note that the Clerk has prepared a more detailed Statement of Accounts for the year adjusting the cashbook values accordingly to reflect the few debtors and creditors existing at the financial year-end, full detail of which is reported accordingly in the detailed Statement of accounts. We have agreed the entries recorded in the detailed Statement of Accounts to the cashbook values as adjusted by the disclosed year-end debtors and creditors and then transferred to the AGAR at Section 2.

Conclusions

Based on the satisfactory conclusions drawn from our review programme for the year, we have duly signed off the Internal Audit Certificate in the year's AGAR assigning positive assurances in each relevant area.

Rec. No.	Recommendation	Response
Review of Payments & VAT		
R1	To demonstrate the effective discharge of their fiduciary responsibilities and afford further protection to the clerk, members releasing payments online should examine and initial the original documentation supporting all payments throughout the year.	

Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24 for

PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2023 £	31 March 2024 £	
1. Balances brought forward	122,038	135,014	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	87,026	96,896	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	82,831	13,955	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	24,010	29,323	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	132,871	78,553	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	135,014	137,989	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	134,903	134,805	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	160,627	161,246	The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.
10. Total borrowings	0	0	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)				The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)			✓	The figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2024 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval

Daphne Dunning

Date

02/05/2024

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

15/05/2024

as recorded in minute reference:

2024/05/15 7: (ii)

Signed by Chair of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Bank reconciliation - Template

This reconciliation should include all bank and building society accounts, including short term investment accounts. It must agree

Name of smaller authority: PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

County area (local councils and parish meetings only): AVON

Financial year ending 31 March 2024

Prepared by (Name and Role): Daphne Dunning Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Date: 15/04/2024

	£	£
Balance per bank statements as at 31/3/24		
NatWest current	62,649.73	
NatWest reserve	30,687.25	
Unity Trust	41,468.38	
		134,805.36
Petty cash float (if applicable)	-	-
Less: any unpresented cheques as at 31/3/24 (enter these as negative numbers)		
0	0.00	-
Add: any un-banked cash as at 31/3/24		
0	-	-
Net balances as at 31/3/24		134,805.36
What is the figure in Box 8 in the Accounting Statement?		134,805
Does the bank reconciliation above agree to Box 8?		Yes

Name of smaller authority:

PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

County area (local councils and parish meetings only):

AVON

	2023 £	2023 £	2024 £	2024 £
Box 7: Balances carried forward		135,014		137,989
Deduct: Debtors (enter these as negative numbers)				
VAT	(1,710.13)		(5,576.68)	
	(1,710.13)		(5,576.68)	
Deduct: Payments made in advance (prepayments) (enter these as negative numbers)				
None	0.00		0.00	
	-		-	
Total deductions		(1,710.13)		(5,576.68)
Add: Creditors (must not include community infrastructure levy (CIL) receipts)				
C Hall	180.00		180.00	
A S Hall	468.00		504.00	
NEST	106.19		138.64	
HMRC	522.20		727.71	
EDF	1.96			
Pucklechurch News			415.00	
ALCA			32.00	
BT			35.94	
	1,278.35		2,033.29	
Add: Receipts in advance (must not include deferred grants/loans received)				
Plot 18a	20.00		20.00	
Plot 3	20.00		20.00	
Plot 19a	20.00		20.00	
Plot 13	20.00			
Plot 15	20.00		20.00	
Plot 4	20.00		20.00	
Plot 20	20.00		20.00	
Plot 9a	20.00		20.00	
Plot 18b	20.00			
Plot 25	20.00			
Plot 10	20.00		20.00	
Plot 19b	20.00		20.00	
Plot 21b	20.00		20.00	
Plot 23	20.00			
Plot11	20.00		20.00	
Plot 9b	20.00		20.00	
Plot 5a			20.00	
plot 7			20.00	
plot 6b			20.00	
plot 17			20.00	
plot 12			20.00	
plot 21c			20.00	
	320.00		360.00	
Total additions		1,598.35		2,393.29
Box 8: Total cash and short term investments		134,902.56		134,805.36

Debtors

2022/23

1710.13

2023/24

5576.68

Use the table below to breakdown your explanation

2022/23 £	2023/24 £	Difference £	Explanation (Ensure
1710.13	5576.68	3866.55	VAT to reclaim for 23/24
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
		0	
Total	1710.13	5576.68	3866.55

Enter more lines as appropriate

Creditors

2022/23 1598.35 2023/24 2393.29

Use the table below to breakdown your explanation

2022/23 £	2023/24 £	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)
180.00	180.00	0	Shortwood play area rent
468.00	504.00	36	Shortwood play area maintenance as per lease agreement
106.19	138.64	32.45	March pension contribution
522.20	727.71	205.51	March tax and NI contributions
1.96		-1.96	VAT owing on electricity for the Millennium Green light
0	415.00	415	March edition of Pucklechurch News
0	32.00	32	ALCA councillor training
0	35.94	35.94	March BT broadband service
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 18a allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 3 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 19a allotment rent 24_25
20.00	-	-20	Plot 13 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 15 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 4 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 20 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 9a allotment rent 24_25
20.00	-	-20	Plot 18b allotment rent 24_25
20.00	-	-20	Plot 25 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 10 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 19b allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 21b allotment rent 24_25
20.00	-	-20	Plot 23 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot11 allotment rent 24_25
20.00	20.00	0	Plot 9b allotment rent 24_25
0	20.00	20	Plot 5a allotment rent 24_25
0	20.00	20	plot 7 allotment rent 24_25
0	20.00	20	plot 6b allotment rent 24_25
0	20.00	20	plot 17 allotment rent 24_25
0	20.00	20	plot 12 allotment rent 24_25
0	20.00	20	plot 21c allotment rent 24_25
Total	1,598.35	2,393.29	794.94

Enter more lines as appropriate

Accounting statements 2023-24

By completing this box, the figures will pull through to the relevant tabs of the workbook to assist you in reporting on the significant variances

	Year ending 31-Mar-23	31-Mar-24	Variance £	Variance %	Notes and guidance Please round all figures to nearest £1. Do not leave any boxes blank and report £0 or Nil balances. All figures must agree to underlying financial records.	Explanation required
1. Balances brought forward	122,038	135,014			Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year	
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	87,026	96,896	9870	11%	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.	No explanation required
3. (+) Total other receipts	82,831	13,955	-68875.92	-83%	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.	Please explain within the relevant tab
4. (-) Staff costs	24,010	29,323	5312.59	22%	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.	Please explain within the relevant tab
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	-	-	0	0%	Total expenditure of payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).	No explanation required
6. (-) All other payments	132,871	78,553	-54318	-41%	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).	Please explain within the relevant tab
7. (=) Balances carried forward	135,014	137,989			Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).	Please explain in the Reserves tab
	Bal c/f checker	Bal c/f checker				
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	134,903	134,805			The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March - to agree with bank reconciliation.	
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	160,627	161,246	619	0%	The value of all the property the authority owns - it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.	No explanation required
10. Total borrowings	-	-	0	0%	The outstanding capital balances as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).	No explanation required

Other receipts

2022/23 82831 2023/24 13955.08

Difference -68875.92

% Change -83% yes explain

Use the table below to breakdown your explanation

(consider any fixed assets that have been sold and ensure reflected in explanation in box 9 fixed assets)

Please ensure you complete the value for both years, please do not provide the movement only.

2022/23	£	2023/24	£	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)
132.61		406.87		274.26	increase in bank interest
3250		2050		-1200	fewer burials
845		845		0	pitch hire
60000		0		-60000	s106 funding only received in 2022/23
3510		2060.76		-1449.24	Reduced CIL monies in current year
8091		0		-8091	Donation only received in 2022/23
5843		7592		1749	increase in Locality grant
500		0		-500	bank compensation only received in 2022/23
560		590		30	Increase in number of allotments and therefore increase in rental
92.95		92.95		0	Wayleave
6		7		1	nominal rents
		310.5		310.5	insurance claim for vandalised zip wire
				0	
				0	
				0	
Total	82830.56	13955.08		-68875.48	

Enter more lines as appropriate

Staff costs

2022/23	24010	2023/24	29322.59
		Difference	5312.59
		% Change	22%
		Yes explain	

Use the table below to breakdown your explanation

Identify and quantify, changes in head count, pay awards, change in hours, please provide a value

2022/23	£	2023/24	£	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)
17692.14		20586.6		2894.46	2023/24 full year working 30hr/week = 1560hrs compared to 2022/23 when clerk worked 25hrs/week April - October 2022 and 30hrs/week November 2022 - March 2023 = 1408hrs . Increase of 152hrs@£16.67/hr gross Annual pay rise to £16.67/hr from 22/23 £15.67.
5233.63		7329.46		2095.83	Increase in NI and tax due to increased hours and salary
1084.23		1406.94		322.71	increase in pension due to increased hours and salary
Total	24010	29323		5313	

All other payments

2022/23 132871 2023/24 78553

Difference -54318
% Change -41% Yes explain

Use the table below to breakdown your explanation
(consider any fixed assets that have been purchased and reflect in explanation in box 9 fixed assets)
Please ensure you complete the value for both years, please do not provide the movement only.

2022/23	£	2023/24	£	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)	Is this purchase an asset and reflected in Box 9
410		900		490	22/23 balance of internal audit (£110) and external audit (£300). 23/24 costs full internal audit (£480) and external audit (£420)	
7122		7078		-44	consultancy fees	
1464		1177.95		-286.05	new defibrillator cabinet 23/24	
69060		0		-69060	new play equipment	
2878.16		5022.92		2144.76	Refund unspent Locality grant	
1121		3676		2555	increase in playground maintenance	
5197		6679.87		1482.87	increase in grounds maintenance	
6029		7429.95		1400.95	increase in grants	
61		101		40	bank charges	
0		3910		3910	May 2023 election costs	
9648		11130		1482	Additional dog bin purchased (£618.50) and increased localism charges for emptying dog bins and increased charges for waste disposal.	
5520		6285		765	Cost of grass cutting increased	
702		1592		890	23/24 5 editions of Pucklechurch News compared to 3 in 22/23	
23659		23570		-89	All other spending reduces	
				0		
Total	132871.16	78552.69		-54318.47		

Enter more lines as appropriate

Reserves

Box 7 137989.49 Precept 96896

	£	£	£
Earmarked reserves:			
CIL	7892		
Play equipment Reserve	47600		
Neighbourhood Plan	2724		
Village hall project reserve	5000		
Woodland/ tree/ash die back	7500		
Parkfield turning circle	12500		
Professional /legal fees	5000		
Financial contingency	45000		
			133216
General reserve	4773		
			4773
Total reserves (must agree to Box 7)			137989



PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2024

CONTENTS OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2024

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**PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL INFORMATION FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST
MARCH 2024**

COUNCILLORS

All councillors were elected in May 2023

Chair

Cllr. Gail Boyle

Vice chair

Cllr. Lynne English

Cllr. Richard Dunning

Cllr Nathan Anscombe (until April 23)

Cllr Mike Pibworth (from May 23)

Cllr Andy Hemmings

Cllr Tina Symons (from May 23)

Cllr Jon Bailey

Cllr Jayne Hawkins

Cllr Dean Freestone

Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Daphne Dunning

PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Table 1 Financial account for year ending 31st March 2024

	2024		2023	
Income	£	£	£	£
Precept	96896		87026	
Interest Received	406.87		132.61	
Grants	0		0	
Cemetery	2050		3250	
Allotments	590		560	
Rec Hire	845		845	
Hall/Scout rent	7		6	
Wayleave	92.95		92.95	
CIL	2060.76		3510.46	
S106 monies	0		60000	
Donation	0		8091	
Bank compensation	0		500	
Neighbourhood plan grant	7592		5843	
Insurance claim	310.50		0	
		110851		169857
	2024		2023	
Expenditure	£	£	£	£
Staff Costs	29323		24010	
home working/expenses	328		360	
Payroll Administration	148		129	
Bank fees	101		61	
Audit Fees	900		410	
Consultancy fees	12101		7122	
Election costs	3910		0	
Insurance	736		747	
Print/Stationery/post	202		216	
Broadband	264		206	
Pucklechurch News	1592		702	
office equipment & Software	933		1737	
Subscriptions	1066		954	
Telephone	134		281	
Training	204		140	
Dog bins/ waste / litter	11130		9648	
Rent Shortwood	360		360	
Defibs	1178		1464	
Room Hire	48		250	
Planned / capitol work	0		69060	
Grants	7430		6029	
Electricity defibs and lights	647		517	
Ground Maintenance	6680		5197	
Grass cutting / gardening	6285		5520	
Play area maintenance	3676		1121	

sundry	0	2878	
Maintenance contract	18500	17760	
		107876	156881
SURPLUS (DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR		2975	12976
PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31.03.24			
	2024		2023
CURRENT ASSETS	£		£
NatWest current account	62649.73		65503.25
NatWest savings account	30687.25		30280.38
Unity Bank	41468.38		39118.93
Debtors	5576.68		1710.13
	140382.04		136612.69
CURRENT LIABILITIES (Creditors)			
Amounts falling due within one year	2393		1598
CURRENT NET ASSETS	137989		135014
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES			
REPRESENTED BY			
Income & Expenditure a/c Bal, B/fwd	135014		122038
Add surplus (Deficit) for 23/24	2975		12976
	137989		135014
RESERVES			
Earmarked reserves	133216		123582
Income and Expenditure account	4773		11432
	137989		135014

These statements of accounts represent fairly the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2024 and reflects its income and expenditure for the year.

The accounts have been approved by the Council on 15th May 2024

Cllr Gail Boyle
Chair of council Date: 15/05/24

Daphne Dunning
Responsible Financial Officer Date: 15/04/24

These notes form part of these financial statements

PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL BANK RECONCILIATION

Table 2 Bank reconciliation to 31st March 2024

Prepared by (Name and Role): Daphne Dunning Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Date:	15/04/2024		
		£	£
Balance per bank statements as at 31/3/24			
	NatWest current	62,649.73	
	NatWest reserve	30,687.25	
	Unity Trust	41,468.38	
			134,805.36
Petty cash float (if applicable)		-	-
Less: any unpresented cheques as at 31/3/24 (enter these as negative numbers)			
	0	0.00	
			-
Add: any un-banked cash as at 31/3/24			
	0	-	
			-
Net balances as at 31/3/24			134,805.36
What is the figure in Box 8 in the Accounting Statement?			134,805
Does the bank reconciliation above agree to Box 8?			Yes

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN BOX 7 AND BOX 8 IN SECTION 2

Table 3 reconciliation between box 7 and box 8 in section 2

		2023	2023	2024	2024
		£	£	£	£
Box 7: Balances carried forward			135,014		137,989
Deduct:	Debtors (enter these as negative numbers)				
	VAT	(1,710.13)		(5,576.68)	
		(1,710.13)		(5,576.68)	
Deduct:	Payments made in advance				
	(prepayments) (enter these as negative numbers)				
	None	0.00		0.00	
		-		-	
Total deductions			(1,710.13)		(5,576.68)
Add:	Creditors (must not include community infrastructure levy (CIL) receipts)				
	C Hall	180.00		180.00	
	A S Hall	468.00		504.00	
	NEST	106.19		138.64	
	HMRC	522.20		727.71	
	EDF	1.96			
	Pucklechurch News			415.00	
	ALCA			32.00	
	BT			35.94	
		1,278.35		2,033.29	
Add:	Receipts in advance (must not include deferred grants/loans received)				
	Plot 18a	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 3	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 19a	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 13	20.00			

	Plot 15	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 4	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 20	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 9a	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 18b	20.00			
	Plot 25	20.00			
	Plot 10	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 19b	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 21b	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 23	20.00			
	Plot11	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 9b	20.00		20.00	
	Plot 5a			20.00	
	plot 7			20.00	
	plot 6b			20.00	
	plot 17			20.00	
	plot 12			20.00	
	plot 21c			20.00	
		320.00		360.00	
Total additions			1,598.35		2,393.29
Box 8: Total cash and short-term investments			134,902.56		134,805.36

EXPLANATION OF VARIANCES

Table 4 Explanation of variances

	Year ending				Notes and guidance	Explanation required
	31-Mar-23	31-Mar-24	Variance £	Variance %	Please round all figures to nearest £1. Do not leave any boxes blank and report £0 or Nil balances. All figures must agree to underlying financial records.	
1. Balances brought forward	122,038.00	135,014.00			Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year	
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	87,026.00	96,896.00	9870	11%	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.	No explanation required
3. (+) Total other receipts	82,831.00	13,955.00	-68876	-83%	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.	Please explain within the relevant tab
4. (-) Staff costs	24,010.00	29,323.00	5313	22%	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.	Please explain within the relevant tab
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	-	-	0	0%	Total expenditure of payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).	No explanation required
6. (-) All other payments	132,871.00	78,553.00	-54318	-41%	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).	Please explain within the relevant tab
7. (=) Balances carried forward	135,014.00	137,989.00			Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).	Please explain in the Reserves tab
	Bal c/f checker	Bal c/f checker				

8. Total value of cash and short-term investments	134,903.00	134,805.00			The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short-term investments held as at 31 March - to agree with bank reconciliation.	
9. Total fixed assets plus long-term investments and assets	160,627.00	160,627.00	0	0%	The value of all the property the authority owns - it is made up of all its fixed assets and long-term investments as at 31 March.	No explanation required
10. Total borrowings	-	-	0	0%	The outstanding capital balances as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).	No explanation required

Other receipts

Table 5 Box 3 Other receipts

2022/23	82831	2023/24	13955.08
		Difference	-68875.92
		% Change	-83%

2022/23£	2023/24£	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)
132.61	406.87	274.26	increase in bank interest
3250	2050	-1200	fewer burials
845	845	0	pitch hire
60000	0	-60000	s106 funding only received in 2022/23
3510	2060.76	-1449.24	Reduced CIL monies in current year
8091	0	-8091	Donation only received in 2022/23
5843	7592	1749	increase in Locality grant
500	0	-500	bank compensation only received in 2022/23
560	590	30	Increase in number of allotments and therefore increase in rental
92.95	92.95	0	Wayleave
6	7	1	nominal rents
	310.5	310.5	insurance claim for vandalised zip wire
82830.56	13955.08	68875.48	

Staff costs

Table 6 Box 4 staff costs

2022/23	24010	2023/24	29322.59	
		Difference	5312.59	
		% Change	22%	Yes explain

	2022/23£	2023/24£	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)
	17692.14	20586.6	2894.46	2023/24 full year working 30hr/week = 1560hrs compared to 2022/23 when clerk worked 25hrs/week April - October 2022 and 30hrs/week November 2022 - March 2023 = 1408hrs. Increase of 152hrs@£16.67/hr gross. Annual pay rise to £16.67/hr from 22/23 £15.67.
	5233.63	7329.46	2095.83	Increase in NI and tax due to increased hours and salary
	1084.23	1406.94	322.71	increase in pension due to increased hours and salary
Total	24010	29323	5313	

All other payments

Table 7 Box 6 All other payments

2022/23	132871	2023/24	78553		
		Difference	-54318		
		% Change	-41%	Yes explain	
	2022/23£	2023/24£	Difference	Explanation (Ensure each explanation is quantified)	Is this purchase an asset and reflected in Box 9
	410	900	490	22/23 balance of internal audit (£110) and external audit (£300). 23/24 costs full internal audit (£480) and external audit (£420)	
	7122	7078	-44	consultancy fees	
	1464	1177.95	-286.05	new defibrillator cabinet 23/24	
	69060	0	-69060	new play equipment	
	2878.16	5022.92	2144.76	Refund unspent Locality grant	
	1121	3676	2555	increase in playground maintenance	
	5197	6679.87	1482.87	increase in grounds maintenance	
	6029	7429.95	1400.95	increase in grants	
	61	101	40	bank charges	
	0	3910	3910	May 2023 election costs	
	9648	11130	1482	Additional dog bin purchased (£618.50) and increased localism charges for emptying dog bins and increased charges for waste disposal.	
	5520	6285	765	Cost of grass cutting increased	
	702	1592	890	23/24 5 editions of Pucklechurch News compared to 3 in 22/23	
	23659	23570	-89	All other spending reduces	
Total	132871.16	78552.69	54318.47		

Reserves

Table 7 Reserves

<u>Reserves</u>			
Box 7	137989	Precept	96896

			£	£	£
Earmarked reserves:					
	CIL		5832		
	Play equipment Reserve		50000		
	Neighbourhood Plan		2724		
	Village hall project reserve		5000		
	Woodland/ tree/ash die back		7500		
	Professional /legal fees		5000		
	Financial contingency		50000		
	Parkfield turning circle		12500	126056	
General reserve			11933		
				11933	
Total reserves (must agree to Box 7)					137989

PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCILLOR ATTENDANCE AT MEETING BETWEEN 01/04/23 – 31/03/24

Table 10: councillor attendance

Date	Cllr G Boyle	Cllr L English	Cllr M Pibworth	Cllr R Dunning	Cllr N Anscombe	Cllr A Hemmings	Cllr T Symons	Cllr J Bailey	Cllr D Freestone	Cllr J Hawkins
19/04/23	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
17/05/23	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not elected	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
21/06/23	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies
19/07/23	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
August	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled	cancelled
20/09/23	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
18/10/23	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
15/11/23	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies
13/12/23	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies
17/01/24	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	Apologies	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
21/02/24	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	Apologies	Apologies	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>
20/03/24	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Not a councillor	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies	<i>In attendance</i>	<i>In attendance</i>	Apologies

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR 2023-2024

Interest and investment interest

	2023 £	2024 £
Interest income – general funds	132.61	406.87

Tenancies

During the year the Council did not hold any tenancies

Publicity

Under section 5 of the Local Government Act 1986 the council did not incur any expenditure for publicity.

Pension

	2023 £	2024 £
Contributions made on behalf of employees	464.68	602.98

Freedom of information

The Council received no requests under the freedom of information for the period 01/04/23 – 31/03/24.

Staffing Costs

The total staffing costs for the year amounted to £29323 (2023: £24,010)

GRANTS AND DONATIONS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31/03/24

Table 8 Breakdown of grants and donations as at 31/03/24

Revel	Solar Christmas lights	£599.99
Pucklechurch playgroup grant	Multicultural/environments resource	£400.00
Revel grant	Donation to costs	£1,000.00
Rainbow grant	Craft materials	£260.00
Tower playgroup grant	Pre-school insurance	£500.00
Allotment Association grant	Secure area of composting toilet	£600.00
Pucklechurch cricket club grant	Training nets	£900.00
Green Community travel grant	Improved lighting in yard	£169.96
Great Western Air Ambulance grant	Donation	£2,000.00
Citizens advice	Donation	£1,000.00
Total		£7429.95

BANK STATEMENTS AS AT YEAR END 31/03/24:

NatWest general account

Table 9 NatWest current account as at 31/03/24

Welcome to your NatWest Statement

Why file and store your statements when we can do it for you? Manage your statements online at www.natwest.com
If you have changed your address or telephone number please let us know.

Date	Description	Paid In(£)	Withdrawn(£)	Balance(£)
06 MAR 2024	BROUGHT FORWARD			62,870.98
	Direct Debit O2 05412111/001		13.20	62,857.78
14 MAR	Direct Debit 707 LIMITED C-PUC001		57.76	62,800.02
15 MAR	Direct Debit ICO ZA105729		35.00	62,765.02
21 MAR	Direct Debit NEST IT000000793489		115.29	62,649.73
02 APR	Direct Debit EDF ENERGY 671063327375		18.00	62,631.73

NatWest Savings account

Table 10 Business reserve account as at 31/03/24

Welcome to your NatWest Statement

Why file and store your statements when we can do it for you? Manage your statements online at www.natwest.com
If you have changed your address or telephone number please let us know.
Interest paid for this account during TAX year 2022/23 was Gross interest £132.61
Interest rate: 1.45% Gross / 1.46% AER

Date	Description	Paid In(£)	Withdrawn(£)	Balance(£)
01 APR 2023	BROUGHT FORWARD			30,280.38
28 APR	Interest 28APR GRS 25234021	23.64		30,304.02
31 MAY	Interest 31MAY GRS 25234021	29.43		30,333.45
30 JUN	Interest 30JUN GRS 25234021	28.67		30,362.12
31 JUL	Interest 31JUL GRS 25234021	34.15		30,396.27
31 AUG	Interest 31AUG GRS 25234021	36.18		30,432.45
29 SEP	Interest 29SEP GRS 25234021	35.06		30,467.51
31 OCT	Interest 31OCT GRS 25234021	38.73		30,506.24
30 NOV	Interest 30NOV GRS 25234021	36.36		30,542.60
29 DEC	Interest 29DEC GRS 25234021	35.19		30,577.79
31 JAN 2024	Interest 31JAN GRS 25234021	40.09		30,617.88
29 FEB	Interest 29FEB GRS 25234021	35.27		30,653.15
28 MAR	Interest 28MAR GRS 25234021	34.10		30,687.25

Unity Bank account

Table 11 Unity balance as at 31/03/24

Your Current T2 account transactions:					
Date	Type	Details	Payments Out	Payments In	Balance
26/03/2024	Credit	██████████	£0.00	£20.00	£41,491.63
28/03/2024	Fee	Manual Credit Handling Charge	£0.30	£0.00	£41,491.33
31/03/2024	Fee	Service Charge	£22.95	£0.00	£41,468.38

FIXED ASSETS OWNED BY PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL AS AT 31.03.24

Table 12 list of fixed assets

Date Acquired	Description	Value at time of purchase	Value for Insurance purposes	Land	Allocated for agreed reserve
11.12.1998	St Aldam's Drive land Received from HM Prison Services	1.00		1.00	
09.07.1968	Burial Ground Purchased from Vicarage	2150.00		2150.00	
17.07.1958	Parkfield Rank Land used for play area date and value taken from only Registration documents found on file	50.00		50.00	
18.08.1936	Recreation Field	945.00		945.00	
	Scout Hut (No deeds found)	1.00			Valued By leaseholder
	Village Hall (no deeds found)	1.00			Valued By leaseholder
07.07.1980	Land Received from Secretary of Defence Eagle Crescent	1500.00		1500.00	
01.12.1895	Allotments & Woodlands (no deeds found)	1.00		1.00	
	2 planters		582.80		
	Bus shelter Abson Road O/S Church		5540.55		
	Bus shelter Oaktree Avenue South Side		5540.55		
	Bus shelter Abson Road O/S Village hall		5320.48		
	Bus shelter Oaktree Avenue North Side		5320.48		
	Bus shelter Shortwood Road		2640.89		
	Bus shelter Shortwood Road		2640.89		
	Bus shelter Main Road Shortwood		2640.89		
	Bus shelter Goldfinch Way		4913.50		
	Bus shelter Kestrel Drive/Merlin		4492.16		
	Community Defibrillator & Box Village hall		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator & Box Village Café		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator & box Pucklechurch Social Club		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator, stand & box Eagle Crescent		3286.60		
01/10/2022	Community Defibrillator broken and removed from service		-974.95		

	Community Defibrillator & Box Shortwood Road		2286.60		
	Community Defibrillator, stand & box Parkfield Rank		3286.60		
	Telephone Box purchased for £1.00		1.00		
	Play Equipment Shortwood see below		1.00		
	Play equipment St Aldams see below		1.00		
	Play equipment Recreation field see below		1.00		
	Play equipment Becket Court see below		1.00		
	Concrete shed		3700.34		
	Memorials Millennium stone		1.00		
	Trees		1.00		
	Other ground surfaces was insured for and play equipment		22495.08		
	Natural Sports Surface		2575.00		
22.01.15	Community Centre and Shortwood Noticeboards		6645.48		
05.09.18	Tree seat Recreation ground		890.00		
27/08/2021	Playground signage		927.75		
20/09/2022	Eagle Crescent play equipment		62525.00		
19/10/2022	Replacement defibrillator Eagle Crescent		974.95		
19/12/2022	Signage Parkfield turning circle		240.00		
27/03/2023	HP laptop FQ4006NA and printer 7220 bundle		620.00		
09/05/2023	Dog bin Partridge Road		618.50		
		4649.00	156596.94		
	Total Assets	161245.94			

Name of Smaller authority: PUCKLECHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS AND PUBLICATION OF UNAUDITED
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN**

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 Sections 26 and 27

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)

NOTICE	NOTES
<p>1. Date of announcement 3rd June 2024 (a)</p> <p>2. Each year the smaller authority's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) needs to be reviewed by an external auditor appointed by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd. The unaudited AGAR has been published with this notice. As it has yet to be reviewed by the appointed auditor, it is subject to change as a result of that review.</p> <p>Any person interested has the right to inspect and make copies of the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records must be made available for inspection by any person interested. For the year ended 31 March 2024, these documents will be available on reasonable notice by application to:</p> <p>(b) Daphne Dunning, Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer clerk@pucklechurchparishcouncil.gov.uk Tel: 07525 842095</p> <p>commencing on (c) 4th June 2024</p> <p>and ending on (d) 15th July 2024</p> <p>3. Local government electors and their representatives also have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The opportunity to question the appointed auditor about the accounting records; and• The right to make an objection which concerns a matter in respect of which the appointed auditor could either make a public interest report or apply to the court for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful. Written notice of an objection must first be given to the auditor and a copy sent to the smaller authority. <p>The appointed auditor can be contacted at the address in paragraph 4 below for this purpose between the above dates only.</p> <p>4. The smaller authority's AGAR is subject to review by the appointed auditor under the provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the NAO's Code of Audit Practice 2015. The appointed auditor is:</p> <p>BDO LLP Arcadia House Maritime Walk Ocean Village Southampton SO14 3TL ✉ councilaudits@bdo.co.uk</p> <p>5. This announcement is made by (e) Daphne Dunning Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer</p>	<p>(a) Insert date of placing of the notice which must be not less than 1 day before the date in (c) below</p> <p>(b) Insert name, position and address/telephone number/ email address, as appropriate, of the Clerk or other person to which any person may apply to inspect the accounts</p> <p>(c) Insert date, which must be at least 1 day after the date of announcement in (a) above and at least 30 working days before the date appointed in (d) below</p> <p>(d) The inspection period between (c) and (d) must be 30 working days inclusive and must include the first 10 working days of July.</p> <p>(e) (e) Insert name and position of person placing the notice – this person must be the responsible financial officer for the smaller authority</p>

LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNTS: A SUMMARY OF YOUR RIGHTS

Please note that this summary applies to all relevant smaller authorities, including local councils, internal drainage boards and 'other' smaller authorities.

The basic position

The [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#) (the Act) governs the work of auditors appointed to smaller authorities. This summary explains the provisions contained in Sections 26 and 27 of the Act. The Act and the [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#) also cover the duties, responsibilities and rights of smaller authorities, other organisations and the public concerning the accounts being audited.

As a local elector, or an interested person, you have certain legal rights in respect of the accounting records of smaller authorities. As an interested person you can inspect accounting records and related documents. If you are a local government elector for the area to which the accounts relate you can also ask questions about the accounts and object to them. You do not have to pay directly for exercising your rights. However, any resulting costs incurred by the smaller authority form part of its running costs. Therefore, indirectly, local residents pay for the cost of you exercising your rights through their council tax.

The right to inspect the accounting records

Any interested person can inspect the accounting records, which includes but is not limited to local electors. You can inspect the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records. You can copy all, or part, of these records or documents. Your inspection must be about the accounts, or relate to an item in the accounts. You cannot, for example, inspect or copy documents unrelated to the accounts, or that include personal information (Section 26 (6) – (10) of the Act explains what is meant by personal information). You cannot inspect information which is protected by commercial confidentiality. This is information which would prejudice commercial confidentiality if it was released to the public and there is not, set against this, a very strong reason in the public interest why it should nevertheless be disclosed.

When smaller authorities have finished preparing accounts for the financial year and approved them, they must publish them (including on a website). There must be a 30 working day period, called the 'period for the exercise of public rights', during which you can exercise your statutory right to inspect the accounting records. Smaller authorities must tell the public, including advertising this on their website, that the accounting records and related documents are available to inspect. By arrangement you will then have 30 working days to inspect and make copies of the accounting records. You may have to pay a copying charge. The 30 working day period must include a common period of inspection during which all smaller authorities' accounting records are available to inspect. This will be 1-12 July 2024 for 2023-24 accounts. The advertisement must set out the dates of the period for the exercise of public rights, how you can communicate to the smaller authority that you wish to inspect the accounting records and related documents, the name and address of the auditor, and the relevant legislation that governs the inspection of accounts and objections.

The right to ask the auditor questions about the accounting records

You should first ask your smaller authority about the accounting records, since they hold all the details. If you are a local elector, your right to ask questions of the external auditor is enshrined in law. However, while the auditor will answer your questions where possible, they are not always obliged to do so. For example, the question might be better answered by another organisation, require investigation beyond the auditor's remit, or involve disproportionate cost (which is borne by the local taxpayer). Give your smaller authority the opportunity first to explain anything in the accounting records that you are unsure about. If you are not satisfied with their explanation, you can question the external auditor about the accounting records.

The law limits the time available for you formally to ask questions. This must be done in the period for the exercise of public rights, so let the external auditor know your concern as soon as possible. The advertisement or notice that tells you the accounting records are available to inspect will also give the period for the exercise of public rights during which you may ask the auditor questions, which here means formally asking questions under the Act. You can ask someone to represent you when asking the external auditor questions.

Before you ask the external auditor any questions, inspect the accounting records fully, so you know what they contain. Please remember that you cannot formally ask questions, under the Act, after the end of the period for the exercise of public rights. You may ask your smaller authority other questions about their accounts for any year, at any time. But these are not questions under the Act.

You can ask the external auditor questions about an item in the accounting records for the financial year being audited. However, your right to ask the external auditor questions is limited. The external auditor can only answer 'what' questions, not 'why' questions. The external auditor cannot answer questions about policies, finances, procedures or

anything else unless it is directly relevant to an item in the accounting records. Remember that your questions must always be about facts, not opinions. To avoid misunderstanding, we recommend that you always put your questions in writing.

The right to make objections at audit

You have inspected the accounting records and asked your questions of the smaller authority. Now you may wish to object to the accounts on the basis that an item in them is in your view unlawful or there are matters of wider concern arising from the smaller authority's finances. A local government elector can ask the external auditor to apply to the High Court for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful, or to issue a report on matters which are in the public interest. You must tell the external auditor which specific item in the accounts you object to and why you think the item is unlawful, or why you think that a public interest report should be made about it. You must provide the external auditor with the evidence you have to support your objection. Disagreeing with income or spending does not make it unlawful. To object to the accounts you must write to the external auditor stating you want to make an objection, including the information and evidence below and you must send a copy to the smaller authority. The notice must include:

- confirmation that you are an elector in the smaller authority's area;
- why you are objecting to the accounts and the facts on which you rely;
- details of any item in the accounts that you think is unlawful; and
- details of any matter about which you think the external auditor should make a public interest report.

Other than it must be in writing, there is no set format for objecting. You can only ask the external auditor to act within the powers available under the [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#).

A final word

You may not use this 'right to object' to make a personal complaint or claim against your smaller authority. You should take such complaints to your local Citizens' Advice Bureau, local Law Centre or to your solicitor. Smaller authorities, and so local taxpayers, meet the costs of dealing with questions and objections. In deciding whether to take your objection forward, one of a series of factors the auditor must take into account is the cost that will be involved, they will only continue with the objection if it is in the public interest to do so. They may also decide not to consider an objection if they think that it is frivolous or vexatious, or if it repeats an objection already considered. If you appeal to the courts against an auditor's decision not to apply to the courts for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful, you will have to pay for the action yourself.

For more detailed guidance on public rights and the special powers of auditors, copies of the publication Local authority accounts: A guide to your rights are available from the NAO website.	If you wish to contact your authority's appointed external auditor please write to the address in paragraph 4 of the <i>Notice of Public Rights and Publication of Unaudited Annual Governance & Accountability Return</i> .
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