



Mr R Doughty
New Alresford Town Council
Alresford Recreation Ground
The Avenue
Alresford
Hampshire
SO24 9EP

22 January 2026

Dear Richard

Re: New Alresford Town Council
Internal Audit for Financial Year Ended 31 March 2026 – Interim Audit report

Executive summary

Following completion of our interim internal audit on 22 January 2026 we enclose our report for your kind attention and presentation to the council. The audit was conducted in accordance with current practices and guidelines, and testing was risk based. Whilst we have not tested all transactions, our samples have where appropriate covered the entire year to date.

Our report is presented in the same order as the assertions on the internal auditor report within the published Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The start of each section details the nature of the assertion to be verified. Testing requirements follow those detailed in the audit plan previously sent to the council, a copy of which is available on request. The report concludes with an opinion as to whether each assertion has been met or not at this point in the year. **Recommendations for action are shown in bold text and are summarised in the table at the end of the report.**

Our sample testing did not uncover any errors or misstatements that require reporting to the external auditor at this time, nor did we identify any significant weaknesses in the internal controls such that public money would be put at risk.

It is clear the council takes governance, policies and procedures seriously and I am pleased to report that overall, the systems and procedures you have in place are fit for purpose and whilst my report may contain recommendations to change these are not indicative of any significant failings, but rather are pointers to improving upon an already well-ordered system.

It is therefore our opinion that the systems and internal procedures at New Alresford Town Council are well established and followed.

Regulation

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require smaller authorities, each financial year, to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts. In addition to this, a smaller authority is required by Regulation 5(1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to “undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.”

Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance activity designed to improve an organisation’s operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. The purpose of internal audit is to review and report to the authority on whether its systems of financial and other internal controls over its activities and operating procedures are effective.

Internal audit’s function is to test and report to the authority on whether its specific system of internal control is adequate and working satisfactorily. The internal audit reports should therefore be made available to all Members to support and inform them when they considering the authority’s approval of the annual governance statement.

Independence and competence

Your audit was conducted by Andy Beams of Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd, who has over 35 years’ experience in the financial sector with the last 15 years specialising in local government.

Your auditor is independent from the management of the financial controls and procedures of the council and has no conflicts of interest with the audit client, nor do they provide any management or financial assistance to the client.

Engagement Letter and inherent risk assessment

An engagement letter was previously issued to the council covering the 2025/26 internal audit assignment, which includes the scope and plan of works and fee structure. Copies of this document are available on request from anna@mulberrylas.co.uk

In summary, our work will address each of the internal control objectives as stated on the Annual Internal Audit Report of the AGAR.

It is our opinion that the inherent risk of error or misstatement is low, and the controls of the council can be relied upon and as such substantive testing of individual transactions is not required. Testing to be carried out will be “walk through testing” on sample data to encompass the period of the council year under review.

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A. BOOKS OF ACCOUNT

Internal audit requirement

Appropriate accounting records have been kept properly during the year.

Audit findings

This is the first internal audit conducted by Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd having been appointed by the council at the meeting held on 25 November 2025 (minute ref 25-096c).

The audit was conducted on site with the Clerk, who also acts as the council's Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and the other office staff. The information advised in advance of the visit had been prepared and forwarded for review in advance of the onsite visit, and overall, I have the impression that accounting records are neatly maintained and easily accessible. Other information was reviewed through discussion with the officers and a review of the council website www.newalresford-tc.gov.uk

The council has moved this financial year to use the Scribe accounting package for recording the council's finances. This is an accounting package widely used in the local council sector. The accounting package is updated regularly and used to produce management information reports for review at council meetings.

The system requires the population of key data fields to enable the user to record a transaction. This is a clear and easy to follow system and a review of the cashbook shows that all data fields are being entered with sufficient narrative detail to identify the source and purpose of each transaction.

B. FINANCE REGULATIONS, GOVERNANCE AND PAYMENTS

Internal audit requirement

This authority complied with its Finance Regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

Audit findings

Check the publication and minuting of the prior year audited AGAR and notice of conclusion of audit

The External Auditor's Report for 2024/25 is not yet complete. The interim certificate has been published on the website by the statutory deadline, and the council are aware that the final certificate and Notice of Conclusion must be published on the council website once received.

The progress with the External Audit was reported to the council at the meeting held on 14 October 2025 (minute ref 25/067e).

I note the council received and considered the previous internal auditor report at the council meeting held on 24 June 2025 (minute ref 25/024 b and c).

Confirm by sample testing that councillors sign statutory office forms

I confirmed by sample testing that councillors sign "Acceptance of Office" forms. **I recommend that the Acceptance of Office forms are amended to include formal acceptance to receive information by electronic means in the form "As per Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, I consent to the receipt of all council meeting papers by electronic methods. I understand I may withdraw this consent at any time."**

The council website includes a councillor page where a link to the individual Register of Members' Interests forms is available, with the full detail on the Winchester City Council website.

Confirm that the council is compliant with GDPR

The council is fully aware of GDPR and has undergone training. It was noted the council has established common email addresses for all councillors. This is recommended because it gives a natural segregation between work and personal lives, making it clear beyond doubt in what capacity a councillor is acting. In addition to this it gives control to the council, adds a degree of professionalism and in the event of a FOI request limits access to personal computers.

The Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Practitioner's Guide (March 2025) contains updated guidance on the matter as below, including details of the new Governance Assertion to be included in the 2025/26 AGAR:

Assertion 10 - Digital and data compliance

To warrant a positive response to this assertion, the authority needs to have taken the following actions:

1.47 Email management - Every authority must have a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain, for example clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk rather than abcparishclerk@gmail.com or abcparishclerk@outlook.com for example.

1.48 All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must meet legal requirements for all existing websites regardless of what domain is being used.

1.49 All websites must meet the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA](#) and the [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#) (where applicable).

1.50 All websites must include published documentation as specified in the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) and the [Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities](#) (where applicable).

1.51 All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must follow both the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\) 2016](#) and the [Data Protection Act \(DPA\) 2018](#).

1.52 All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must process personal data with care and in line with the principles of data protection.

1.53 The [DPA 2018](#) supplements the [GDPR](#) and classifies an authority as both a Data Controller and a Data Processor.

1.54 All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must also have an IT policy. This explains how everyone - clerks, members and other staff - should conduct authority business in a secure and legal way when using IT equipment and software. This relates to the use of authority-owned and personal equipment.

The council has a Privacy Notice, Website Accessibility Statement and FOI Publication Scheme published on its website.

I note that the Website Accessibility Statement refers to partial compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA. The current standard is 2.2 AA, and the website provider should be consulted and the Website Accessibility Statement updated accordingly.

The council also needs to adopt and publish an IT Policy by 31 March 2026 to meet the requirements of Governance Assertion 10.

Confirm that the council is compliant with the relevant transparency code

As the council's income and expenditure exceeds £25,000, it is not a statutory requirement to follow the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code, although it is recommended best practice to do so.

Confirm that the council meets regularly throughout the year

In addition to full council, the council has a committee structure in place, with terms of reference published on the council website, along with details of future meeting dates and historic agendas and minutes for meetings.

Check that agendas for meetings are published giving 3 clear days' notice

The Clerk confirmed that at least 3 clear days' notice is given on agendas. **I note that the publication date is not included on the agendas, and recommend this is added to provide clear evidence that the statutory notice period is provided.**

I note the council also publishes the non-confidential supporting papers for meetings on the council website with the agendas in accordance with the requirements of the Information Commissioner's Office.

Check the draft minutes of the last meeting(s) are on the council's website

Minutes are uploaded to the council website and clearly annotated as draft where applicable.

Confirm that the Parish Council's Standing Orders have been reviewed within the last 12 months

The Standing Orders are based on the current NALC model and were most recently reviewed and adopted by council on 13 May 2025 (minute ref 25/012a).

Confirm that the Parish Council has adopted and recently reviewed Financial Regulations

Financial Regulations are based on the current NALC model and were last reviewed and adopted by council on 13 May 2025 (minute ref 25/012b) with a further review and updated completed at the meeting held on 24 June 2025 (minute ref 25/024h).

The regulations contain provisions for the approval of spending, setting of budgets, reconciliation of the bank and reporting to council.

Check that the council's Financial Regulations are being routinely followed

The council has thresholds in place at which authorisations to spend must be obtained as below:

FR 5.15 Individual purchases within an agreed budget for that type of expenditure may be authorised by:

- *the Town Clerk, under delegated authority, for any items below £2,000 excluding VAT*
- *a duly delegated committee of the council for all items of expenditure within their delegated budgets for items under £5,000 excluding VAT*
- *the council for all items over £5,000*

Such authorisation must be supported by a minute (in the case of council or committee decisions) or other auditable evidence trail.

FR 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 £5,000 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 Town Clerk shall report such action to the Chair as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter.

Based on the level of financial activity of the council, and through discussion with the Clerk, these authorisation thresholds appear appropriate although the council may wish to consider increasing the Clerk's authorisation limit within FR 5.15 to a higher figure based on their experience level and the financial size of the council.

The council's adopted Financial Regulations include a section covering the making of electronic payments, and state:

FR 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 (for non-regular payments), shall be sent by email to authorised signatories.

FR 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.

FR 7.6 Two authorised signatories shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment using the online banking system.

FR 7.7 Evidence shall be retained showing which members approved the payment online.

FR 7.8 A full list of all payments made in a month shall be provided to the next council meeting.

The council has in place a system to segregate duties in terms of the setting up and subsequent release of payments made via online banking in accordance with the council's adopted Financial Regulations.

Confirm the council has adopted the General Power of Competence (GPC) and met the eligibility criteria at the time of adoption, or if GPC not adopted, confirm all section 137 expenditure meets the guidelines and does not exceed the annual per elector limit of £11.10 per elector

The council has section 137 expenditure for the year within the allowable threshold.

Check receipt of VAT refund matches last submitted VAT return

The council submits its VAT return on a quarterly basis. I reviewed the submission for the period ending 30 September 2025 which showed a refund amount due of £8,711.82 and was fully supported by the required details. I was able to confirm receipt of this amount to the council's bank account on 22 October 2025. The council is up to date with its VAT submissions.

Confirm that checks of the accounts are made by a councillor

The system noted above details internal review takes place and I am under no doubt that council properly approves expenditure.

C. RISK MANAGEMENT AND INSURANCE

Internal audit requirement

This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.

Audit findings

The council's adopted Financial Regulations include a section covering Risk Management and state:

- FR 2.1 The council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control, which delivers effective financial, operational and risk management.*
- FR 2.2 The Town 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.*
- FR 2.3 At least once a year, the council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control, before approving the Annual Governance Statement.*

The council has a risk assessment process in place, which was last reviewed and approved by council on 25 March 2025 (minute ref 24/149d) and is due for further review this quarter.

I reviewed the financial risk assessment record, which lists the different areas of potential risk, identifies the hazards, lists who may be affected by the risk, determines a risk level, details the mitigation measures put in place by the council and then the residual risk.

The risk assessment includes a risk matrix to assess the overall risk based on the severity and probability of a risk occurring.

This is a comprehensive approach and includes analysis of all risks typically associated with a council of this size with its range of services and facilities.

I note the council also has an adopted Internal Control Policy published on its website, although the latest review date of this is recorded as 2022 and I recommend the policy is reviewed and updated.

I confirmed that the council has a valid insurance policy in place with Zurich Insurance which covers the year under review. The policy includes Public Liability cover of £15 million, Employers Liability cover of £10 million and a Fidelity Guarantee level of £1 million which is sufficient for a council of this size.

D. BUDGET, PRECEPT AND RESERVES

Internal audit requirement

The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.

Audit findings

The council set a precept of £360,000 for 2025/26. With a tax base of 2,417.5, this equates to a band D equivalent of £148.91 (compared to the average in England of £92.92).

The Clerk confirmed that the 2026/27 budget and precept were approved by the council at the meeting held in December 2025 (minute ref 25/103b).

The budget report dated 20 January 2026 shows income reported as 157.3% of budget, largely due to significant amounts of unbudgeted Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) income being received during the year.

Expenditure is reported at 71.3%, suggesting that the budget has been accurately set and carefully monitored throughout the year. There is evidence within the minutes of meetings that councillors regularly receive budget reports for review, providing them with sufficient financial information to make informed decisions.

At the date of the interim internal audit, the council held circa £448,400 in earmarked reserves, spread across a range of clearly identifiable projects, including amounts received from CIL which are identified separately. I checked the purpose of these earmarked reserves with the Clerk and am satisfied they are all for legitimate future planned projects of the council.

The Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Practitioner's guide provides updated guidance on the appropriate level of general reserves that councils should retain as below:

5.33 The general reserve of an authority comprises its cash flow and contingency funds to cover unexpected inflation, unforeseen events and unusual circumstances.

5.34 The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a smaller authority's general reserve is that this should be maintained at between three and twelve months of net revenue expenditure.

5.35 The reason for the wide range is to cater for the large variation in activity level between individual authorities. The smaller the authority, the closer the figure may be to 12 months expenditure, the larger the authority, the nearer to 3 months. In practice, any authority with income and expenditure in excess of £200,000 should plan towards 3 months equivalent general reserve.

5.36 In all of this it is important that each authority adopt, as a general reserve policy, the level appropriate to their size, situation, risks and plan their budget so as to ensure that the adopted level is maintained. Consideration of the minimum level of reserves requires not only consideration of level of income and expenditure but also the risks to that income.

5.37 Authorities with significant self-generated income (other than the precept or levy) should take into account situations that may lead to a loss in revenue as well as increased costs and adapt their general reserve accordingly.

I note the council has an adopted Reserves Policy published on its website, although this is dated 2019 and I recommend the council review and update the policy.

A review of the general reserve balance will be conducted at the final internal audit, and the council is advised to follow the recommended guidance in determining an appropriate level.

E. INCOME

Internal audit requirement

Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.

Audit findings

Apart from the precept, the council receives income from a range of sources including allotments, room hires, sports pitch hires and tenant income.

From a review of the accounting records, income appears to be recorded with sufficient narrative detail to identify the source and allocated to the most appropriate nominal code. I tested a sample of invoices issued for each aspect of the council's operations and was able to confirm rates charged were consistent with the council's published charging schedule.

FR 12.2 states *'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 Town Clerk shall be responsible for the collection of all amounts due to the council.'*

The fees have not been reviewed for some time, and I recommend the council reviews its fees and ensures this happens annually in future in accordance with FR 12.2.

F. PETTY CASH

Internal audit requirement

Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts; all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.

Audit findings

The council maintains a small petty cash float used for incidental expenditure. The petty cash is locked in a safe and petty cash vouchers are completed for each transaction. The petty cash is checked and balanced monthly.

The council has Financial Regulations covering the use of Petty Cash, and these state:

FR 9.1 The Town Clerk shall maintain a petty cash of no more than £100 and may provide petty cash to officers for the purpose of defraying operational and other expenses.

a) Vouchers for payments made from petty cash shall be kept, along with receipts to substantiate every payment.

b) Cash income received must not be paid into the petty cash float but must be separately banked, as provided elsewhere in these regulations.

c) Payments to maintain the petty cash float shall be shown separately on any schedule of payments presented for approval.

The council is reminded that the use of any corporate debit card must also be in accordance with the adopted Financial Regulations.

G. PAYROLL

Internal audit requirement

Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with the authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.

Audit findings

The latest payroll reports show five employees of the council. All staff members have a signed contract of employment, based on the NALC template, and the council is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). Performance reviews for staff members are completed annually by the Clerk, with their review conducted by the Chair and Chair of Staffing Committee.

Payroll is processed is outsourced to a third party, who complete all the PAYE calculations and provide the information to the council each month. I reviewed the payroll summary and payslips provided for the interim audit and the payroll deductions appear correct.

I remind the council that box 4 on the AGAR (staff costs) is for actual salaries, HMRC payments and pension contributions only. The officers confirmed they are aware that expenses paid through payroll will need to be reallocated within the accounting software to ensure they are reported in box 6 (all other payments) of the AGAR.

There are no councillor allowances, although the Clerk is aware if paid to eligible (elected) members, these must be processed through payroll and assessed for tax and national insurance.

H. ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS

Internal audit requirement

Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.

Audit findings

The Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Practitioner's guide provides updated guidance on assets and asset registers as below:

5.58 The asset register should contain in its most simple form the date of acquisition, cost of acquisition, useful life estimate and location along with value held for investments; however, it is desirable for the register to contain other such supplementary information to enable the user to better understand the nature and scope of the use of the fixed asset. It is therefore recommended to show insurance value, replacement value, custodian, date last physically vouched.

5.59 Each authority may choose an appropriate minimum value for deciding between fixed assets and general consumables. The limit chosen will relate to expected useful life, whether the item would be included on an insurance claim and whether it is included in the risk assessment of the authority in any way. This minimum level is to be minuted and reviewed at least annually. The rationale and methodology should be recorded in the minutes.

5.60 One item or group of similar items shall be regarded for inclusion in the fixed asset register.

5.61 Assets should be first recorded in the asset register at their actual purchase cost.

5.62 *Assets that are either under construction or have not been brought into use should be included on the asset register only once complete and they benefit the community.*

5.63 *Obsolete assets that are no longer in use or are awaiting disposal should be clearly recorded as such.*

5.64 *Where an authority receives an asset as a gift at zero cost, for example by community asset transfer, it should be included with a nominal one-pound (£1) value as a proxy for the zero cost.*

5.65 *Assets that do not have a functional purpose or any intrinsic resale value (for example, a village pond or war memorial) are often referred to as 'community assets'. Authorities should record community assets in the asset register in the same way as gifted assets.*

5.66 *The particular method of asset valuation is not specified in proper practices so authorities may use any reasonable approach to be applied consistently from year to year. The method of asset valuation adopted should be set out in a policy approved by the authority and recorded in the authority's minutes and in the asset register.*

5.67 *For authorities covered by this guide, the most appropriate and commonly used method of fixed asset valuation for first registration on the asset register is at acquisition cost. This means that the recorded value of the asset will not change from year to year, unless it is materially enhanced.*

5.68 *Commercial concepts of depreciation, impairment adjustments, and revaluation are not required nor appropriate for this method of asset valuation.*

5.69 *The total value of an authority's assets recorded on the asset register as at 31 March each year is reported at Line 9 on the authority's AGAR. Authorities should be able to track and explain fully any changes in the asset register from year to year.*

The council has a fixed asset register in place, maintained in a tabular format, which includes details of asset location, description, date of acquisition, value, comments and insurance category.

Assets are correctly listed at cost/proxy cost, or where gifted/donated, given a nominal £1 value for the purpose of the asset register.

The asset register is updated at the end of each financial year, and a further check will be conducted at the final internal audit to confirm the total being included on the AGAR, and to sample test invoices for new items added during the year to ensure they have been accurately recorded as the original net purchase price.

The Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Practitioner's guide provides updated guidance on investments, and defines a long-term investment as below:

2.23 *Short-term investments, which mainly include deposit and savings accounts typically provided by banks, are those that display the following characteristics:*

- a. are denominated in pounds Sterling;*
- b. be realisable at full value on demand or have a maturity end date of not more than 12 months;*
- c. the whole of the original sum invested can, from the time that the investment is made, be accessed for use by the authority without any reduction; and*
- d. the authority has assessed the counterparty and is satisfied that the original sum invested is not subject to unreasonable risk.*

2.26 *A long-term investment arises where the authority invests money in anything other than a short-term investment.*

1.11 *Arrangements need to be in place to ensure that the authority's funds are managed properly and that any amounts surplus to requirements is invested appropriately, in accordance with an approved strategy which needs to have regard to the government's [Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments](#). If total investments are to exceed the threshold specified in the statutory guidance at any time during a financial year, the authority needs to produce and approve an annual Investment Strategy in accordance with the guidance.*

The council has adopted an Investment Policy and Strategy to support its future decision making on placement of funds in accordance with the statutory guide. The policy and strategy are published on the council website, although the last recorded review date is 2019, and I recommend the council review and update the policy.

The council currently has no long-term investments.

The council has borrowing through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and confirmation of the figures for in year payments (box 5) and year-end balance (box 10) will be completed at the final internal audit against the PWLB statement and remittance advices.

I. BANK AND CASH

Internal audit requirement

Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.

Audit findings

Financial Regulation 2.5 states *'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 Town Clerk. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the council.'*

Bank reconciliations are completed monthly. I reviewed the latest bank reconciliation for all accounts and was able to confirm the balances to the bank statements and found no errors.

I was able to confirm that the bank reconciliations have been signed but the bank statements have not been signed and I will need to see evidence of this at the final internal audit to achieve a positive sign-off for this internal control objective.

As the council's annual budget is below the €500,000 (£430,950 as of 3 July comparative date) threshold, it is protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

The council holds accounts with Lloyds Bank, Unity Trust and Redwood. At the date of the interim audit, the balances held with Lloyds exceed the £120,000 protection limit offered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) and the council may wish to consider transferring funds to maximise the protection available to it.

J. YEAR END ACCOUNTS

Internal audit requirement

Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and, where appropriate, debtors and creditors were properly recorded.

Audit findings

To be tested at the final internal audit.

K. LIMITED ASSURANCE REVIEW

Internal audit requirement

IF the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in the previous year, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt.

Audit findings

The council did not certify itself exempt in 2024/25 due to exceeding the income and expenditure limits and this test does not apply.

L: PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION

Internal audit requirement

The authority publishes information on a free to access website/webpage, up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with relevant legislation

Audit findings

The council is reminded that the following requirements apply.

For councils with a turnover over £25,000, it is recommended best practice to follow the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, but not a statutory requirement and therefore not subject to verification during the internal audit.

All councils are required to follow The Accounts and Audit Regulations which include the following requirements:

13(1) An authority must publish (which must include publication on that authority's website)

- (a) the Statement of Accounts together with any certificate or opinion entered by the local auditor in accordance with section 20(2) of the Act; and
- (b) the Annual Governance Statement approved in accordance with regulation 6(3)

13(2) Where documents are published under paragraph (1), the authority must

- (a) keep copies of those documents for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum; and
- (b) ensure that those documents remain available for public access for a period of not less than five years beginning with the date on which those documents were first published in accordance with that paragraph.

Testing for publication to meet this requirement will be completed at the final internal audit.

M: EXERCISE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS - INSPECTION OF ACCOUNTS**Internal audit requirement**

The authority, during the previous year, correctly provided for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

Audit findings

Inspection – key dates	2024/25 Actual
Date AGAR signed by council	24 June 2025
Date inspection notice issued	26 June 2025
Inspection period begins	30 June 2025
Inspection period ends	8 August 2025
Correct length (30 working days)	Yes
Common period included (first 10 working days of July)	Yes

I am satisfied the requirements of this control objective were met for 2024/25, and assertion 4 on the Annual Governance Statement can therefore be signed yes by the council.

N: PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS**Internal audit requirement**

The authority complied with the publication requirements for the prior year AGAR.

Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website / webpage.

Before 1 July 2025 authorities must publish:

- *Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and a declaration that the accounting statements are as yet unaudited*
- *Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2024/25, approved and signed, page 4*
- *Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2024/25, approved and signed, page 5*

Not later than 30 September 2025 authorities must publish:

- *Notice of conclusion of audit*
- *Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate*
- *Sections 1 and 2 of AGAR including any amendments as a result of the limited assurance review.*

It is recommended as best practice, to avoid any potential confusion by local electors and interested parties, that you also publish the Annual Internal Audit Report, page 3.

Audit findings

I was able to confirm that the Notice of the Period of Public Rights and Section 1 (Annual Governance Statement) and Section 2 (Accounting Statement) were published on the council's website before 1 July 2025.

I was able to confirm that the interim Notice of Conclusion of Audit and External Auditor Report and Certificate were published on the council's website before 30 September 2025, as the external Audit is yet to be concluded. The council has therefore met the publication requirements for 2024/25.

O. TRUSTEESHIP

Internal audit requirement

Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.

Audit findings

The council is the trustee of Colonel Stratton Bates Recreation Ground Charity (charity number 301895). I reviewed the information available on the Charity Commission website and was able to confirm that all reporting is up to date and that the council is correctly listed as the sole trustee.

I was able to confirm that trustee meetings are recorded separately from those of the council, although the trust finances are currently managed through the council accounts, which is not in accordance with the guidelines.

By 31 March 2026, the council must either open a separate bank account for the trust and record all trust transactions through this account or agree a Memorandum of Understanding between the council and the trust that the council manages all the financial activities of the council.

Achievement of control assertions at final internal audit date

Based on the tests conducted during the interim audit, our conclusions on the achievement of the internal control objectives to date are summarised in the table below.

	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 Finance Regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for	✓		
C	This authority assesses 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	✓		
G	Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with the 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), supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and, where appropriate, debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	To be tested at final internal audit		
K	If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in the previous year, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt.			✓
L	The authority publishes information on a free to access website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	To be tested at final internal audit		
M	The authority, during the previous year correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		
N	The authority complied with the publication requirements for prior year AGAR.	✓		
O	Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.		✓	

Should you have any queries please contact me directly on andy@mulberrylas.co.uk or 07428 647069.

Yours sincerely



Andy Beams

Director, Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd

Interim Internal Audit - Points Carried Forward

Audit Point	Interim Audit Findings	Council comments
<p>B. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, GOVERNANCE AND PAYMENTS</p>	<p>I recommend that the Acceptance of Office forms are amended to include formal acceptance to receive information by electronic means in the form “As per Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, I consent to the receipt of all council meeting papers by electronic methods. I understand I may withdraw this consent at any time.”</p> <p>I note that the Website Accessibility Statement refers to partial compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA. The current standard is 2.2 AA, and the website provider should be consulted and the Website Accessibility Statement updated accordingly.</p> <p>The council also needs to adopt and publish an IT Policy by 31 March 2026 to meet the requirements of Governance Assertion 10.</p> <p>I note that the publication date is not included on the agendas, and recommend this is added to provide clear evidence that the statutory notice period is provided.</p> <p>Based on the level of financial activity of the council, and through discussion with the Clerk, these authorisation thresholds appear appropriate although the council may wish to consider increasing the Clerk’s authorisation limit within FR 5.15 to a higher figure based on their experience level and the financial size of the council.</p>	

C. RISK MANAGEMENT AND INSURANCE	I note the council also has an adopted Internal Control Policy published on its website, although the latest review date of this is recorded as 2022 and I recommend the policy is reviewed and updated.	
D. BUDGET, PRECEPT AND RESERVES	I note the council has an adopted Reserves Policy published on its website, although this is dated 2019 and I recommend the council review and update the policy.	
E. INCOME	The fees have not been reviewed for some time, and I recommend the council reviews its fees and ensures this happens annually in future in accordance with FR 12.2.	
H. ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS	The council has adopted an Investment Policy and Strategy to support its future decision making on placement of funds in accordance with the statutory guide. The policy and strategy are published on the council website, although the last recorded review date is 2019, and I recommend the council review and update the policy.	
I. BANK AND CASH	<p>I was able to confirm that the bank reconciliations have been signed but the bank statements have not been signed and I will need to see evidence of this at the final internal audit to achieve a positive sign-off for this internal control objective.</p> <p>The council holds accounts with Lloyds Bank, Unity Trust and Redwood. At the date of the interim audit, the balances held with Lloyds exceed the £120,000 protection limit offered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) and the council may wish to consider transferring funds to maximise the protection available to it.</p>	
O. TRUSTEESHIP	By 31 March 2026, the council must either open a separate bank account for the trust and record all trust transactions through this account or agree a Memorandum of Understanding between the council and the trust that the council manages all the financial activities of the council.	

