

Internal Audit Report for Elmsett Parish Council

for the year ending 31st March 2023

Clerk	Andrea Newman
RFO (if different)	As above
Chairperson	Mr A Newman
Precept	£10,640.00
Income	£15,140.32
Expenditure	£10,899.76
General reserves	£0.00
Earmarked reserves	£87,000.00
Audit type	Annual
Auditor name	Julie Lawes

Introduction

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

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

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



Methodology

When conducting the audit, the internal auditor may:

- conduct a selective assessment of compliance with relevant procedures and controls expected to be in operation during the financial year in order to be able to complete the Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)
- review the reliability and integrity of financial information and the means used to identify, measure, classify and report such information
- review the means of safeguarding assets and, as appropriate, verify the existence of such assets
- appraise the economy and efficiency with which resources are employed, identify opportunities to improve performance and recommend solutions to problems
- review the established systems to ensure compliance with those policies, procedures, laws, and regulations which could have a significant impact on operations, and determine whether the council complies
- review the operations and activities to ascertain whether results are consistent with objectives and whether they are being conducted as planned



Section 1 – proper bookkeeping

The internal auditor will look at the methods and processes used to manage the council's accounts and in particular that it provides clear data for reporting and monitoring purposes. This includes checking information is accurate, kept up to date, referenced and verified.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary			
Is the ledger maintained and up to date?	YES	The council uses an excel spreadsheet to form the basis of their accounting system. It provides data for analysis allowing the RFO to produce clear financial management reports detailing receipts and payments and ensures that the financial transactions of the parish council are accurately recorded.			
Is the cash book up to date and regularly verified?	YES	The cash book provides good evidence to support the council's underlying statements. Regular reports are generated and circulated to councillors detailing payments and receipts and the accounts reconciled to the bank statements showing good internal control.			
Is the arithmetic correct?	YES	The accounts were spot checked and were all found to be correct.			
Additional comments: The ledger and the minutes clearly identify the spending power used for each item, evidencing the council is operating within its mandate.					



Section 2 – Financial Regulation and Standing Orders

The internal auditor will check the date the Council conducted its annual review of both Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and in particular check if these are based on NALC'S latest model which include legislative changes.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Have Standing Orders been adopted, up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	At a meeting on 13 th September 2022 the council carried out an annual review of its Standing Orders, these are available to view on the council's website and are based on the Model Standing Orders produced by NALC IN 2018 which take into account changes in legislation from those produced in 2013.
Are Financial Regulations up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	Financial Regulations were reviewed and agreed at a council meeting held 13 th September 2022. These are available to view on the council's website and are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2019.
Has the Council properly tailored the Financial Regulations?	YES	The Financial Regulations have been tailored to the council.
Has the Council appointed a Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)? ¹	YES	In accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972(d) (financial administration), the Council has appointed a person to be responsible for the administration of the financial affairs of the relevant authority. Council's own Financial Regulations (1.8) state that the Clerk is the RFO.
Additional comments:	1	

¹ Section 151 Local Government Act 1972 (d)



Section 3 – Payment controls

The internal auditor will specifically check bank reconciliation including credit/debit cards and management approval processes and evidence that internal Financial Regulations (FO) are being followed. The internal auditor will examine how regular payments are managed and specifically seek evidence that these have been brought back to the Council for verification purposes especially where the actual payment made differs from the amount previously agreed. VAT should be clearly identified including evidence that claims have been correctly managed. The internal auditor will check if the Council has a clear understanding on eligibility in relation to the General Power of Competence and that s.137 has been correctly applied and managed.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Is there supporting paperwork for payments with appropriate authorisation?	YES	A selection of expenditure items was made, and cross checked against the cash book, invoices and bank statements. A list of payments is presented to councillors ensure formal approval of expenditure and this is correctly minuted. This demonstrates good practice in that there are measures in place that help safeguard public money.
Where applicable, are internet banking transactions properly recorded and approved?	N/A	The council does not use internet banking
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	YES	VAT is clearly identified in the cash book with the year-end total of £566.03. Two claims were made during the course of the year to HMRC for the values of £2,235.55 and £566.03.
Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	N/A	The council has not adopted the General Power of Competence.
Are payments under s.137 ³ separately recorded, minuted and is there evidence of direct benefit to electorate?	YES	There was one s137 payment made during the period under review totalling $\pounds100.00$. This was recorded and minuted and are within the statutory limits of the s137 allocations

² Localism Act

³ Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the 1972 Act") enables local councils to spend a limited amount of money for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure. The basic power is for a local council to spend money (subject to the statutory limit – of £8.82 per elector) on purposes for the direct benefit of its area, or part of its area, or all or some of its inhabitants.



Where applicable, are payments of interest and principal sums in respect of loans paid in accordance with agreements?	N/A	The council has no loans.
Additional comments:		

Section 4 – Risk management

The internal auditor will expect to find evidence of the management of risks from identification of what those are for each individual Council through to how these will be managed and the controls in place to mitigate these and that these have been approved by the Council.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Is there evidence of risk assessment documentation?	YES	This was considered for the period under review at the meeting of the council on 13 th September 2022 and covers in general terms the matters which would prevent a smaller relevant body from functioning.
Is there evidence that risks are being identified and managed?	YES	The council has taken steps to identify, assess and record the risks associated with its actions and decisions that could have financial or reputational consequences.
Does the Council have appropriate and adequate insurance cover in place for employment, public liability and fidelity guarantee and has been reviewed on an annual basis?	YES	Council has insurance in place under a Zurich Municipal Policy which shows core cover for the following: Public Liability: £12m; Employers Liability £10m; All Risks Cover £34k and Fidelity Guarantee of £250k. The level of Fidelity Guarantee meets the recommended guidelines which provides that the cover should be at least the sum of the year-end balances plus 50% of the precept/grants. This was discussed and agreed at a meeting of full council 13 th September 2022.
Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed ⁴	YES	At a full council meeting on 13 th September 2022, it was evidenced that the council reviewed its Internal Control Check. This clearly demonstrates public finances are adequately protected and managed and evidence

⁴ Accounts and Audit Regulations



		necessary steps have been taken to mitigate any risks identified. Documentation to support control procedures adopted by the council for payments helps protect the RFO and fulfils an internal control objective. These are published on the council's website.
Evidence that a review of the effectiveness of internal audit was conducted during the year, including consideration of the independence and competence of the internal auditor prior to their appointment ⁵	YES	The effectiveness of the internal audit was discussed by full Council at a meeting held 13 th September 2022 within the Internal Control Statement. By reviewing the terms of reference and effectiveness for internal audit the council has followed guidance and demonstrates that it recognises that the function of internal audit is to test and report to the authority on whether its system of internal control is adequate.
Additional comments:	•	•

⁵ Practitioners Guide



Section 5 – Budgetary controls

The internal auditor will seek verification that budgets are properly prepared, agreed and monitored. In particular they will look for evidence of good practice in that the key stages of the budgetary process have been followed

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Verify that budget has been properly prepared and agreed	YES	A budget was agreed and set at a meeting of full council held 7 th December 2021 at £10,640.
Verify that the precept amount has been agreed in full Council and clearly minuted	YES	The precept was set at £10,640 and formally approved at a meeting of full council on 7 th December 2022. Evidence of the submission to Babergh and Mid-Suffolk District Council was provided.
Regular reporting of expenditure and variances from budget	YES	 Expenditure v Budget reporting was conducted at a meeting of council held 6th December 2022 when considering the coming budget / precept. RECOMMENDATION: In accordance with the councils own Standing Orders 17. Accounts and Accounting Statements, council should look to provide quarterly reviews of expenditure against budget and report this as reviewed within council minutes. <i>c)</i> The Responsible Financial Officer shall supply to each councillor as soon as practicable after <u>30 June, 30 September and 31 December</u> in each year a statement to summarise: <i>i.</i> the Council's receipts and payments (or income and expenditure) for each quarter; <i>iii.</i> the Council's aggregate receipts and payments (or income and expenditure) for the year to date; <i>iiii.</i> the balances held at the end of the quarter being reported and which includes a <u>comparison with the budget for the financial year and highlights any actual or potential overspends</u>

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Reserves held – general and earmarked ⁶	YES	The councils accounts show no general reserve and an earmarked reserve of £87,000 which includes a £45k allocation for the village hall, £30k for pavilion, and £12k CIL funds.
Additional comments:		

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



Section 6 – income controls

The internal auditor will seek evidence to ensure income is correct managed – recorded, banked, and reported and test mechanisms used to achieve this.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Is income properly recorded and promptly banked?	YES	Income is recorded in accordance with Council's Financial Regulations. A number of income items were cross checked against the cash book and bank statements and found to be in order.
Is income reported to full council?	YES	Income is reported to full council and recorded within the minutes.
Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax Authority's notification?	YES	The bank statements and minutes evidence the receipt of the precept of \pounds 10,640 as per the Council Tax Authority notification.
If appropriate, are CIL reporting schedules in accordance with the Regulations? ⁷	YES	A CIL report for the year ended 31 st March 2023 is provided on the council's website, detailing no income received during the year with
Is CIL income reported to the council?	YES	expenditure of £730 and a final balance of £11,949.08.
Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?	YES	
Has an annual report been produced?	YES	
Has it been published on the authority's website?	YES	
Additional comments:		·

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010



Section 7 – petty cash

The Internal Auditor will seek evidence that the Council has followed its own policies, procedures, and verification processes and that these are up to date.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Is petty cash in operation?	N/A	The council does not operate a petty cash system.
If appropriate, is there an adequate control system in place?	N/A	
Additional comments:		



Section 8 – Payroll controls

The Internal Auditor will check salaries were approved in accordance with PAYE, NI, Pension and that there is a clear understanding that the clerk is not self-employed. If the Clerk was recruited after 1st April 201, evidence will be required to show compliance with the new requirements for the statement of employment, Induction, probation periods and training requirements. The Internal Auditor will also review how payroll is managed including evidence of approval of payslips.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Do all employees have contracts of employment?	YES	The council had 1 employee on its payroll at the period end of 31st March 2023.
Has the Council approved salary paid?	YES	Salary is approved by full council, with evidence minuted of back pay and
Minimum wage paid?	N/A	- new salary pay scales approved.
Are arrangements in place for authorising of the payroll and payments to the council? Does this include a verification process for agreeing rates of pay to be applied?		The payroll function is operated in accordance with HM Revenue and Custom guidelines.
Do salary payments include deductions for PAYE/NIC? Is PAYE/NIC paid promptly to HMRC?	YES	The payroll function for the year under review was carried out by SALC and is operated in accordance with HM Revenue and Customs guidelines.
Is there evidence that the Council is aware of its pension responsibilities? Are pension payments in operation? ⁸	YES	Council completed its declaration of compliance to the Pension Regulator in October 2020. COMMENT: This is to be completed on a three-year basis, with the next redeclaration due in October 2023.
Are there any other payments (e.g.: expenses) and are these reasonable and approved by the Council?	YES	Council approves all expenses as and when occurred.
Additional comments: There are suitable payroll arrang and wages, and associated liabilities and as such the cou		n place which ensures the accuracy and legitimacy of payments of salaries complied with its duties under legislation.

⁸ The Pension Regulator – <u>website click here</u>



Section 9 – Asset control

The Internal Audit will be seeking to establish if there is a list of assets in accordance with proper practices including the date of acquisition, location, and value. This extends to checking policies (with evidence of review) and that the Council has applied the documented approach in practice. The Internal Auditor will check not only valuation processes but the existence of reserve budgets for depreciation and adequacy of insurance. A clear audit trail should be available when items are purchased including minutes to evidence approval.

′ES	The dealared value for all appets at year and 21 st March 2022 was reported
	The declared value for all assets at year-end 31 st March 2023 was recorded at £31,344 with the item and value recorded. COMMENT: Council might look to increase the information held within the
′ES	asset register detailing the date of acquisition / disposal, insurance value, location of items. Deeds, articles and land registry documents were not viewed at the time of
′ES	the audit.
Partly Aet	It is clear that the Asset Register has been reviewed during the financial year, however there are no details within the minutes of council meetings that this has taken place. RECOMMENDATION: That council records the annual review of its Asset Register.
⁄ES	At a meeting of council held 13 th September 2022 a new insurer was agreed at which it was agreed covered all assets held.
	ES artly et

⁹ Practitioners Guide



Section 10 – bank reconciliation

The internal auditor will seek to establish that the Council understands and can evidence good practice and internal control mechanisms in relation to bank reconciliation.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Is bank reconciliation regularly completed and reconciled with the cash book and cover every account?	YES	Bank Reconciliations are conducted on a regular basis with it being documented in the minutes. This was recorded as taking place in June, September and October 2022. Council should ensure its reconciliations are carried out in accordance with its Financial Regulations 2. Accounting and Audit (Internal and External) 2.2. On a regular basis, at least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chairman shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of verification. This activity shall on conclusion be reported, including any exceptions, to and noted by the council.
Do bank balances agree with bank statements?	YES	Bank balances agree with period end statements and, as at year end 31st March 2022 the balance across the council's accounts stood at £93,419.76 as recorded in the Draft Statement of Accounts. Business Saver £82,806.88 Current Account £10,612.88
Is there regular reporting of bank balances at Council meetings?	YES	Account balances are recorded within the bank reconciliations at full council meetings.



Section 11 – year end procedures		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Are appropriate accounting procedures used?	YES	The accounts are produced on receipts and payments basis.
Financial trail from records to presented accounts	YES	There is a clear financial trail from budgeting, invoice, authorisation, payment and banking.
Has the appropriate end of year AGAR ¹⁰ documents been completed?	YES	As the Council is a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000 it has completed Section 2 of Part 2 of the AGAR.
Did the Council meet the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt?	YES	As the Council was a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000 during the year 2021/22, it was able to certify itself as exempt. At the meeting of 12 th April 2022, council agreed that it would be exempt from an external audit due to its gross income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000.
During the period in question did the small authority demonstrate that it correctly provided for the exercise of public right as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015?	YES	The dates for the exercise of public rights were set at Monday 13 th June to Friday 22 nd July 2022 which included the mandatory first 10 working days of July. This was evidenced on the council's website with the notice publicised.
Have the publication requirements been met in accordance with the Regulations? ¹¹	Partly Met	 The council has complied with the requirements of the Regulations for smaller authorities with income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000 as the following were published on the public website operated by the Council: Certificate of Exemption, page 3 Annual Internal Audit Report 2021/22, page 4 Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2021/22, page 5 Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2021/22, page 6 Analysis of variances Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and other information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

¹¹ Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015



	RECOMMENDATION: The Annual Governance and Accountability Return, Publication Requirements states the council bank reconciliation should also be published with the council documentation.
Additional comments:	



Section 12 – internal audit

The internal auditor will revisit weaknesses and recommendations previously identified to see if these have been addressed. They will also check if any changes introduced require further verification to ensure effectiveness of the corrective action taken.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Has the Council considered the previous internal audit	YES	The Internal Audit Report was considered by full council at a meeting held
report?		21 st June 2022.
Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?	YES	It is evidenced within the minutes and relevant documents uploaded onto the website that the items raised within the Audit Report have mostly been actioned.
Has the Council confirmed the appointment of an internal auditor?	NO	There is no record of the council confirming the appointment of the Internal Auditor for the period under review.
Additional comments:		



Section 13 – external audit for the period under review The internal auditor will revisit the external audit so that previous weaknesses and recommendations can be considered.			
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary	
Has the Council considered the previous external audit report? ¹²	N/A	As the council was a smaller authority it was exempt from a limited assurance review and therefore no external report was issued.	
Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?	N/A	As above	
Additional comments:			

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



Section 14 – additional information

The internal auditor will look for additional evidence of good record keeping, compliance with data protection regulations, freedom of information and website accessibility regulations.

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Was the annual meeting held in accordance with legislation? ¹³	YES	The Annual Parish Council Meeting was held 24 th May 2022 with its first action item on the agenda the election of the Chairman.
Is there evidence that Minutes are administered in accordance with legislation? ¹⁴	YES	Council has a page numbering system with the minutes approved as a true record of the meeting held.
Is there a list of members' interests held?	YES	Evidence was seen on the District Authority website of the Register of Interests for Parish Councillors. Council is reminded that whilst the monitoring officer of the District Council must arrange for the parish council's register of members' interests to be available, where the parish council has its own website, its register of members' interests must also be published on that website. (Openness and transparency on personal interests - A guide for councillors – August 2012)
Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?	N/A	The council has no Trustee responsibilities.
Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?	YES	 To ensure compliance with the requirements of the Transparency Code for smaller authorities (turnover not exceeding £25,000), Council is aware that the following should be published on a public website for the year 2021/2022 not later than 1 July: Internal Audit Report List of Councillors and Responsibilities Items of Expenditure Above £100 including recoverable and non-recoverable VAT End of Year Accounts Annual Governance Statement

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

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



Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)? ¹⁵	YES	 Asset Register and that Agendas of Meetings; Associated Papers and Minutes should be published in accordance with the prescribed timescales as set out in the Transparency code for smaller authorities – December 2014. The Council is registered with the ICO as a data controller. Registration Certificate ZA504901 expiry date 21st March 2024.
Is the Council compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements?		The council has taken steps to ensure compliancy. Documents detailed on the council's website include: Privacy Notice, Code of Conduct, Information Protection Policy, Subject Access Policy, Data Protection and Data Information Policy
Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations? ¹⁶	YES	The council has published a Website Accessibility Statement detailing the last review taking place 5 th April 2023 by Community Action Suffolk.
Does the council have official email addresses for correspondence? ¹⁷	YES	The Clerk and Chairman of the council have official email addresses directly linked to the council as: <u>clerk@elmsett.gov.uk</u> <u>chairman@elmsett.gov.uk</u> In accordance with the Practitioners Guide the importance of smaller authorities using secure e-mail systems and gov.uk addresses, it is recommended every authority has its own e-mail addresses which is owned by the authority rather than relying on the use of personal e-mail addresses that can change regularly. This reduces the risk of correspondence going astray or being delayed.
Is there evidence that electronic files are backed up?	YES	The clerk confirmed electronic files are backed up using an external hard drive.
Do terms of reference exist for all committees and is there evidence these are regularly reviewed?	N/A	The council does not have committees
Additional comments:		

¹⁷ Practitioners Guide

¹⁵ Data Protection Act 2018

¹⁶ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

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Signed: *J.Lawes*

Date of Internal Audit Visit: N/A

On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils



Date of Internal Audit Report: 05/06/2023