

Internal Audit Report for Darsham Parish Council for the period ending 31 March 2024

Clerk	Marie Backhouse
RFO (if different)	As above
Chairperson	Jasmine Backhouse
Precept	£ 6,750
Income	£ 30,524
Expenditure	£ 41,290
General reserves	£ 4,302
Earmarked reserves	£ 32,686
Audit type	Annual
Auditor name	Julie Lawes

Introduction

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

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

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

- the integrity and reliability of information, accounts, and data

Methodology

When conducting the audit, the internal auditor may:

- conduct a selective assessment of compliance with relevant procedures and controls expected to be in operation during the financial year in order to be able to complete the Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)
- review the reliability and integrity of financial information and the means used to identify, measure, classify and report such information
- review the means of safeguarding assets and, as appropriate, verify the existence of such assets
- appraise the economy and efficiency with which resources are employed, identify opportunities to improve performance and recommend solutions to problems
- review the established systems to ensure compliance with those policies, procedures, laws, and regulations which could have a significant impact on operations, and determine whether the council complies
- review the operations and activities to ascertain whether results are consistent with objectives and whether they are being conducted as planned

Section 1 – proper bookkeeping		
The internal auditor will look at the methods and processes used to manage the council’s accounts and in particular that it provides clear data for reporting and monitoring purposes. This includes checking information is accurate, kept up to date, referenced and verified.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Is the ledger maintained and up to date?</i>	YES	The council uses an excel spreadsheet to form the basis of its accounts and ensures that the financial transactions of the Parish Council are as accurate as reasonably practicable.
<i>Is the ledger on the correct basis in relation to the gross income/expenditure?</i> (under Proper Practices, Councils are required to work on an Income & Expenditure basis when their gross income, or gross expenditure, exceeds £200,000 for 3 consecutive years)	YES	Council operates its accounts on a payments and receipts basis.
<i>Is the cash book up to date and regularly verified?</i>	YES	Council follows Proper Practices in ensuring that its accounting procedure gives an accurate presentation of an authority's financial position. The Responsible Financial Officer produces clear financial information to the council on both a monthly and annual basis.
<i>Is the arithmetic correct?</i>	YES	A number of spot checks were carried out and the functionality of the cashbook was found to be in order.
Additional comments:		

Section 2 – Financial Regulation and Standing Orders		
The internal auditor will check the date the Council conducted its annual review of both Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and in particular check if these are based on NALC'S latest model which include legislative changes.		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
Have Standing Orders been adopted, up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	The Standing Orders, as seen on the Parish Council's website, were approved by council at a meeting held 12 th March 2024 and are based on the latest model published by the National Association of Local Councils (2018) and contain the provisions of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct as adopted by the Council. The Standing Orders are compliant with legislation and have been adapted (where they are not statutory requirements) to ensure that they are relevant to the Parish Council.
Are Financial Regulations up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	Financial Regulations, as seen on the Council's website, were approved by council at a meeting held 12 th March 2024 and are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2019 with provisions included as outlined under LTN 87 - Procurement – March 2022. COMMENT: At the next review council should give consideration to the recently released revised Financial Regulations issued by NALC.
Has the Council properly tailored the Financial Regulations?	YES	The Council's Financial Regulations have been tailored to the Parish Council.
Has the Council appointed a Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)? ¹	YES	In accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972(d) (financial administration), the Council has appointed a person (the Clerk) to be responsible for the administration of the financial affairs of the relevant authority.
Additional comments:		

¹ Section 151 Local Government Act 1972 (d)

Section 3 – Payment controls		
<p>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.</p>		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
Is there supporting paperwork for payments with appropriate authorisation?	YES	A selection of random payments were cross checked against the cash book, bank statement and invoices and all were found to be recorded and authorised in accordance with Proper Practices.
Where applicable, are internet banking transactions properly recorded and approved?	YES	Internet banking is operated in accordance with the Council's own Financial Regulations and is used for the settlement of the Council's expenditure. The council has adopted an Internet Banking Policy detailing the procedure taken as reviewed by council at a meeting held 12 th September 2023 and published on the council website.
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	YES	Council recorded VAT to the total of £5,463.96 for the period of 2023-2024 with two submissions made to HMRC giving a combined income of £5,074.33 received.
Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	YES	The council has confirmed eligibility criteria to enable it to exercise the GPOC as adopted at the meeting held 16 th May 2023.

² Localism Act

Are payments under s.137 ³ separately recorded, minuted and is there evidence of direct benefit to electorate?	N/A	Council uses the discretionary power to do anything that an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law.
Where applicable, are payments of interest and principal sums in respect of loans paid in accordance with agreements?	N/A	Council has no loans
Additional comments:		

Section 4 – Risk management		
The internal auditor will expect to find evidence of the management of risks from identification of what those are for each individual Council through to how these will be managed and the controls in place to mitigate these and that these have been approved by the Council.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is there evidence of risk assessment documentation?</i>	YES	The Financial Risk Assessment documentation as reviewed provides details of the risks associated with the functioning of a smaller authority and the measures that the Council will undertake to mitigate such risks. The Risk Register for the year under review was considered and adopted by full Council at its meeting of 12 th March 2024. Council also holds a GDPR Risk Assessment which was reviewed by council at its meeting held 12 th September 2023.
<i>Is there evidence that risks are being identified and managed?</i>	YES	Council is aware that Risk Assessment needs to focus on the safety of the Parish Council's assets and in particular its money. There is evidence that the council has taken action to identify and assess those risks and has considered what actions or decisions it needs to take during the year to manage in order to avoid financial or reputational consequences.

³ Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the 1972 Act") enables local councils to spend a limited amount of money for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure. The basic power is for a local council to spend money (subject to the statutory limit – of £9.93 per elector) on purposes for the direct benefit of its area, or part of its area, or all or some of its inhabitants.

<p><i>Does the Council have appropriate and adequate insurance cover in place for employment, public liability and fidelity guarantee and has been reviewed on an annual basis?</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Council has insurance in place under a specialist policy for local councils with Clear Councils which shows core cover for the following: Public/Products Liability £10m; Employers Liability £10m and Fidelity Guarantee of £50k. Council reviewed and approved its insurance cover at a meeting held 14th November 2023.</p>
<p><i>Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed⁴</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>At the meeting of 12th March 2024, Council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, confirmed that the financial and management systems of the council were sound and adequate and internal control arrangements were efficient and effective to address the risks associated with the management of public finances.</p>
<p><i>Evidence that a review of the effectiveness of internal audit was conducted during the year, including consideration of the independence and competence of the internal auditor prior to their appointment⁵</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Parish Council formally reviewed the scope and effectiveness of its internal audit arrangements, evidence of which is contained within its Internal Control Policy as adopted on 12th March 2024.</p>
<p>Additional comments:</p>		

⁴ Accounts and Audit Regulations

⁵ Practitioners Guide

Section 5 – Budgetary controls		
The internal auditor will seek verification that budgets are properly prepared, agreed and monitored. In particular they will look for evidence of good practice in that the key stages of the budgetary process have been followed		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Verify that budget has been properly prepared and agreed</i>	YES	The budget for the year 2023/2024 was approved at the Council meeting of 10 th January 2023.
<i>Verify that the precept amount has been agreed in full Council and clearly minuted</i>	YES	The precept was set at £6,750 for 2023/2024, as confirmed at the above meeting.
<i>Regular reporting of expenditure and variances from budget</i>	YES	The minutes evidence that Council carried out quarterly reviews covering the budget for the current year with a review of income and expenditure.
<i>Reserves held – general and earmarked⁶</i>	YES	The Council, as at year-end, had Earmarked Reserves totalling £32,686 with the balance being General Reserves of £4,302.
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
<i>Is income properly recorded and promptly banked?</i>	YES	Income is recorded in accordance with Council’s Financial Regulations. A number of items of income were cross checked against cash book and bank statement and found to be in order and recorded in accordance with Proper Practices.
<i>Is income reported to full council?</i>	YES	In accordance with the Council’s Standing Orders, income received is reported to full Council.
<i>Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax Authority’s notification?</i>	YES	Council received precept in the sum of £6,750 from East Suffolk Council for the period under review as reported to full Council. Evidence was provided showing a full audit trail from Precept being discussed and approved to being served on the Charging Authority to remittance advice showing the Precept to be paid and receipt of same in the Council’s Bank Account.
<i>If appropriate, are CIL reporting schedules in accordance with the Regulations?⁷</i>	YES	£39,459.45 Starting Balance -£0.06 Adjustment £15,532.69 Income received £29,056.13 Expenditure £25,935.95 Balance 31/03/2024
<i>Is CIL income reported to the council?</i>	YES	
<i>Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?</i>	YES	CIL income is reported to full council and forms part of the earmarked reserves.

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010

<i>Has an annual report been produced?</i>	YES	The Annual Report for 2023/2024 has been produced and published on the council website.
<i>Has it been published on the authority's website?</i>	YES	
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

Section 7 – petty cash		
The Internal Auditor will seek evidence that the Council has followed its own policies, procedures, and verification processes and that these are up to date.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is petty cash in operation?</i>	N/A	Council does not operate a petty cash system.
<i>If appropriate, is there an adequate control system in place?</i>	N/A	
Additional comments:		

Section 8 – Payroll controls		
The Internal Auditor will check salaries were approved in accordance with PAYE, NI, Pension and that there is a clear understanding that the clerk is not self-employed. The Internal Auditor will also review how payroll is managed including evidence of approval of payslips.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Do all employees have contracts of employment?</i>	YES	Council had 1 employee on its payroll at the period end of 31 st March 2024. Employment contracts were not reviewed during the internal audit but the Clerk to the Council has confirmed that a Contract of Employment is in place.
<i>Has the Council approved salary paid?</i>	YES	All salary payments are presented to the Council for approval and payments made in accordance with Council's own Financial Regulations. No employee is paid the national minimum wage.
<i>Minimum wage paid?</i>	N/A	
<i>Are arrangements in place for authorising of the payroll and payments to the council? Does this include a verification process for agreeing rates of pay to be applied?</i>	YES	There are suitable payroll arrangements in place which ensures the accuracy and legitimacy of payments of salaries and wages, and associated liabilities and as such the council has complied with its duties under legislation.
<i>Do salary payments include deductions for PAYE/NIC? Is PAYE/NIC paid promptly to HMRC?</i>	YES	The payroll function for the year under review is operated in accordance with HM Revenue and Customs guidelines and outsourced to Suffolk Association of Local Councils. Cross-checks were completed on three payments covering salary and PAYE were found to be in order. Deductions paid to HM Revenue and Customs during the year under review were made in accordance with timescales as set out in the regulations.

<i>Is there evidence that the Council is aware of its pension responsibilities? Are pension payments in operation?⁸</i>	YES	Council is aware of its pension responsibilities. No pension payments are made.
<i>Have pension re-declaration duties been carried out</i>	YES	The clerk to the council advised the pension re-declaration was completed in March 2023.
<i>Are there any other payments (e.g.: expenses) and are these reasonable and approved by the Council?</i>	YES	There is a satisfactory expense system in place and all staff expenses claimed are approved in accordance with Council's Financial Regulations.
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

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

Section 9 – Asset control		
The Internal Audit will be seeking to establish if there is a list of assets in accordance with proper practices including the date of acquisition, location, and value. This extends to checking policies (with evidence of review) and that the Council has applied the documented approach in practice. The Internal Auditor will check not only valuation processes but the existence of reserve budgets for depreciation and adequacy of insurance. A clear audit trail should be available when items are purchased including minutes to evidence approval.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Does the Council maintain a register of material assets it owns and manage this in accordance with proper practices?⁹</i>	YES	The Asset Register, as viewed on the Council's website, and as approved at the meeting of 13 th February 2024 reflects those items listed under insurance and within the Parish Council's remit for maintenance and ownership. It is noted that the declared value for all assets at year-end is £62,070. Council is mindful of the guidance within the Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England March 2022 on the valuation of its assets and has ensured that where the acquisition value of the asset at the time of first recording is used, that method of valuation has been consistently applied.
<i>Is the value of the assets included? (Note value for insurance purposes may differ)</i>	YES	Records of deeds, articles, land registry title number were not reviewed during the internal audit which was carried out via remote means.
<i>Are records of deeds, articles, land registry title number available?</i>	YES	It is noted in the Asset Register that the deeds for the Allotments Site are held by the clerk with evidence of ownership in the Parish records.
<i>Are copies of licences or leases available for assets sited at third party property?</i>	N/A	Council does not hold assets at third party property holding a licence or lease.
<i>Is the asset register up to date and reviewed annually?</i>	YES	The Asset Register is up to date and reviewed at least annually by council.
<i>Cross checking of insurance cover</i>	YES	Council has ensured its insurance cover is adequate for its assets held.

⁹ Practitioners Guide

Additional comments:

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
<i>Is bank reconciliation regularly completed and reconciled with the cash book and cover every account?</i>	YES	Bank reconciliations are completed on a quarterly basis and reconcile with the cash sheets.
<i>Do bank balances agree with bank statements?</i>	YES	Bank balances agree with period end statements and, as at year end 31 st March 2024 the balance across the council’s accounts stood at £36,988.74 as recorded in the Statement of Accounts and on the Year-end Bank Reconciliation.
<i>Is there regular reporting of bank balances at Council meetings?</i>	YES	Balances across the Council’s accounts are reported at each meeting of full Council.

Section 11 – year end procedures		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Are appropriate accounting procedures used?	YES	Accounts are produced on a receipts payments basis and all found to be in order.
Financial trail from records to presented accounts	YES	The end of year accounts and supporting documentation were well presented for the internal auditor review.
Has the appropriate end of year AGAR ¹⁰ documents been completed?	YES	As Council is a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 it has completed Form 3 of the AGAR. RECOMMENDATION: Section 2 Accounting Statements, Box 4 Staff Costs is detailed as £4,074. This figure should not include Office Expenses or Clerks Expenses which should instead be accounted for in Box 6 All Other Payments. RECOMMENDATION: Guidance Notes on the Annual Return states ‘The authority should receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report before approving the Annual Governance Statement and the accounts.’
Did the Council meet the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt?	YES	As the Council was a smaller authority with a gross income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000 for the period of 2022/2023, it was able to certify itself as an exempt authority. RECOMMENDATION: The council should look to document in more detail within its minutes when declaring itself as an exempt authority.

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

		<i>'7.2 AGAR form – Cllr Leggate read out the questions from Section 1, these were agreed by all the Councillors, also the figures on Section 2 were agreed by all the Councillors.'</i>
<i>During the period in question did the small authority demonstrate that it correctly provided for the exercise of public right as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015?</i>	YES	During the review of the publication requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, it is noted that, for the year 2022-2023, the Council correctly provided for the exercise of elector's rights. The RFO had set the dates for the inspection of the Council's accounts and associated documents as Monday 5 th June to Friday 14 th July 2023 with the date of the notice being 31 st May 2023.
<i>Have the publication requirements been met in accordance with the Regulations?¹¹</i>	NO	The Council has not complied with the requirements of the Regulations for smaller authorities with income and expenditure not exceeding £25,000 and published the following on a public website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of Exemption, page 3 • Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23, page 4 • Analysis of variances • Bank reconciliation • Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and other information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. RECOMMENDATION: Under the publication requirements, council is required to have on its website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23, page 5 • Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2022/23, page 6
Additional comments:		

Section 12 – internal audit

¹¹ Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

<p>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.</p>		
Evidence		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Has the Council considered the previous internal audit report?</i>	YES	The Internal Audit Report for the period ending 31 st March 2023 was formally considered at the meeting of full Council held 20 th June 2023.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?</i>	N/A	The previous auditor did not record any action items.
<i>Has the Council confirmed the appointment of an internal auditor?</i>	YES	SALC were appointed as the Council's internal auditors for the year ending 31 st March 2024 at the meeting of 12 th March 2024.
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		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Has the Council considered the previous external audit report?¹²</i>	<i>N/A</i>	Council was exempt from a limited assurance review.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?</i>	<i>N/A</i>	
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

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		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Was the annual meeting held in accordance with legislation?</i> ¹³	YES	Council held its Annual Meeting of the Parish Council at which the Chair and other Officers were elected on 16 th May 2023 in accordance with legislation in place at that time. The LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020 was adopted at a meeting held 12 th March 2024.
<i>Is there evidence that Minutes are administered in accordance with legislation?</i> ¹⁴	YES	Council is aware that that under LGA 1972 schedule 12, paragraphs 41(1) and 44 the draft minutes of a meeting should be formally approved (with any necessary amendments) at the next meeting. At each meeting, the Chair is given formal approval to sign the minutes.
<i>Is there a list of members' interests held?</i>	YES	Evidence was seen on the East Suffolk Council website the Register of Interests for current Parish Councillors.
<i>Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?</i>	N/A	Council does not have any Trustee Responsibilities.
<i>Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?</i> <i>(note to auditor- check if the Council is a smaller authority as defined in legislation¹⁵, if it has complied with the requirements to publish certain data sets. Where a larger</i>	YES	To ensure compliance with the requirements of the Transparency Code for smaller authorities (turnover not exceeding £25,000), Council was aware that the following should be published on a public website for the year 2019/20 not later than 1 July: Internal Audit Report List of Councillors and Responsibilities Items of Expenditure Above £100 including recoverable and non-recoverable VAT

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

¹⁵ Smaller Authorities Transparency Code 2014

<p><i>authority status applies (expenditure over £200,000) has it published data in accordance with legislation ¹⁶⁾</i></p>		<p>End of Year Accounts Annual Governance Statement 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.</p> <p>Councils with income over £25,000 but under £200,00 will be expected (but are not legally required to do so) to follow the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 (turnover exceeding £200,000).</p>
<p><i>Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)?¹⁷</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>The Council is correctly registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller in accordance with the Data Protection Legislation. Reference: ZA413334 Expiry: 19th June 2024</p>
<p><i>Is the Council compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements?</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Council has taken active steps to ensure compliancy with the GDPR requirements.</p>
<p><i>Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations?¹⁸</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Council has accessibility tools on its website thereby allowing for the increased functionality of the council's website, along with a website accessibility statement on the Council operated website detailing the technical information of the website along with the methods used for testing the website; the steps being taken to improve accessibility and how the site is being improved to ensure that content meets the WCAG 2.1 Standard under Regulation 8 of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.</p>
<p><i>Does the council have official email addresses for correspondence?¹⁹</i></p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>The Clerk to the council has an official email address for all correspondence.</p>

¹⁶ Local Government Transparency Code 2015

¹⁷ Data Protection Act 2018

¹⁸ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

¹⁹ Practitioners Guide

<i>Is there evidence that electronic files are backed up?</i>	YES	Council uses a system whereby a back-up of the council's data is taken and stored on one drive.
<i>Do terms of reference exist for all committees and is there evidence these are regularly reviewed?</i>	N/A	Council does not operate with a committee system.
Additional comments:		

Signed: ***J. Lawes***

Date of Internal Audit Visit: N/A

Date of Internal Audit Report: Thursday 13th June 2024

On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils