

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

Parish Clerk	Karen Gregory
RFO	As above
Chair	Sue Innes
Precept	£ 46,357.00
Income	£ 145,052.33
Expenditure	£ 85,661.57
General reserves	£ 7,027.38
Earmarked reserves	£ 178,243.30
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		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Is the ledger maintained and up to date?</i>	YES	The council uses an excel spreadsheet and ensures that the financial transactions of the Parish Council are as accurate as reasonably practicable. All transactions are well referenced and provide an effective tool for the basis of the council's internal controls.
<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	The 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 the authority's financial position. The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) uses the financial information to present reports 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		Internal auditor commentary
Have Standing Orders been adopted, up to date and reviewed annually?	YES	The Standing Orders, as seen on the Parish Council's website, show an adopted date of January 2024 Standing Orders are that by the National Association of Local Councils (2018) and contain the provisions of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct. 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 show a review date of 11 th March 2024. Financial Regulations are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations. COMMENT: At the next annual review, Council might wish to review the Procurement Thresholds amendments (SI 2022/139) of the Public Contracts (Amendment) Regulations 2022 which came into force on 21 st December 2022 and make the changes to the contract value limits from £25,000 to £30,000 for non-central government authorities. The contract value limits are to be calculated inclusive of VAT (effective from 1 st January 2022).
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

¹ Section 151 Local Government Act 1972 (d)

		be responsible for the administration of the financial affairs of the relevant authority. This was confirmed by full Council at its meeting 12 th June 2023.
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

Section 3 – Payment controls

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

Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
Is there supporting paperwork for payments with appropriate authorisation?	YES	A selection of random payments were cross checked against the cash book, bank statement and invoices and all were found to be recorded and authorised in accordance with Proper Practices.
Where applicable, are internet banking transactions properly recorded and approved?	YES	Payments made require dual authorisation with the clerk raising the payments and a councillor authorising. All transactions are listed in the monthly register of payments and signed off at each Parish Council meeting.
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	YES	VAT is identified in the cash book with one reclaim being made during the period under review for £2,914.44, this was documented in the cashbook dated 14 th March 2023 and evidenced on the Bank Statement on that same date.
Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	N/A	The council does not hold the General Power of Competence.

² Localism Act

Are payments under s.137 ³ separately recorded, minuted and is there evidence of direct benefit to electorate?	YES	Payments for the year under review total £3,820.86 and are in accordance with statutory limits. These are clearly identified within the council accounts.
Where applicable, are payments of interest and principal sums in respect of loans paid in accordance with agreements?	YES	Council has a PWLB with reference PW494126 and the statement of 31 st March detailing an outstanding balance of £81,686.29. Two payments were recorded in June and December 2023 of £5,644.59 each.
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 11 th March 2024.
<i>Is there evidence that risks are being identified and managed?</i>	YES	Council is aware that the Financial Risk Assessment needs to focus on the safety of the Parish Council's assets and in particular its money. There is evidence the Parish Council has taken action to identify and assess those risks and has considered what actions or decisions it needs to take during

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.

		the year to manage in order to avoid financial or reputational consequences.
<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>	YES	Council has insurance in place under a specialist policy for local councils with Hiscox which shows core cover for the following: Public/Products Liability: £10m; Employers Liability £10m and Fidelity Guarantee of £500k. This policy was reviewed and approved by council at a meeting held 11 th September 2023 with the policy commencing 1 st October 2023. In addition, council has in place a vintage tractor insurance with NFU Mutual which was agreed at a meeting held 12 th June 2023 and commenced 23 rd July 2023, and an agricultural tractor insurance which was approved by council at a meeting held 10 th July 2023 and commenced 19 th June 2023.
<i>Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed⁴</i>	YES	At the meeting of Council held 11 th March 2024, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, council confirmed that the financial and management systems were sound and adequate and internal control arrangements were efficient and effective to address the risks associated with the management of public finances.
<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>	YES	In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Parish Council formally reviewed the scope and effectiveness of its internal audit arrangements, evidence of which is contained within its Internal Control Policy as adopted on 11 th March 2024.
Additional comments:		

⁴ Accounts and Audit Regulations

⁵ Practitioners Guide

Section 5 – Budgetary controls		
The internal auditor will seek verification that budgets are properly prepared, agreed and monitored. In particular they will look for evidence of good practice in that the key stages of the budgetary process have been followed		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<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 9 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 £46,357 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 monthly reviews covering the budget for the current year with a review of income and expenditure against budget along with forecasts for the remainder of the year.
<i>Reserves held – general and earmarked⁶</i>	YES	The Council, as at year-end, had Earmarked Reserves totalling £178,243.30 with the balance being General Reserves of £7,027.38.
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. The RFO has ensured that the accounting records contain all day-to-day entries of all sums of money received.
<i>Is income reported to full council?</i>	YES	In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, income received is reported to full Council within the financial reports submitted 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 £46,357 from Mid Suffolk District Council for the period under review as reported to full Council within its Financial Reports. Evidence was provided showing a full audit trail from Precept being discussed and approved to being served on the Charging Authority to remittance advice showing the Precept to be paid and receipt of same in the Council's Bank Account in two instalments of £23,178.50 in April and September 2023. COMMENT: Council should keep in mind the need to spend, or allocate the Parish CIL funds within 5 years of receipt.
<i>If appropriate, are CIL reporting schedules in accordance with the Regulations?⁷</i>	YES	During the year under review, Council received CIL receipts totalling £83,305.84 in two payments of £52,083.08 on 17 th April 2023 and £31,222.76 on 16 th October 2023.
<i>Is CIL income reported to the council?</i>	YES	
<i>Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?</i>	YES	

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010

<i>Has an annual report been produced?</i>	<i>NO</i>	CIL receipts received are reported to full Council within the financial reports submitted to full Council. At the time of audit, the annual report was not evidenced, but council is aware of the need to publish this by 30 th June each year.
<i>Has it been published on the authority's website?</i>	<i>NO</i>	
<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 all staff have a Contract of Employment in place. All salary payments are presented to the Council for approval and payments made in accordance with Council's own Financial Regulations. Backpay in accordance to the NALC contract was approved by council and overtime authorised. No employee is paid the national minimum wage.
<i>Has the Council approved salary paid?</i>	YES	
<i>Minimum wage paid?</i>	NO	
<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	As noted in the previous audit, council stated within its minutes of a meeting held 14 th February 2022 that the clerk chose to opt-out of this provision. COMMENT: Council should remember that even if choosing to opt out, council must complete a re-declaration to the Pension Regulator every three years.
<i>Have pension re-declaration duties been carried out</i>	YES	As above
<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 where expenses claimed are approved in accordance with Council's Financial Regulations.
Additional comments:		

Section 9 – Asset control The Internal Audit will be seeking to establish if there is a list of assets in accordance with proper practices including the date of acquisition, location, and value. This extends to checking policies (with evidence of review) and that the Council has applied the documented approach in practice. The Internal Auditor will check not only valuation processes but the existence of reserve budgets for depreciation and adequacy of insurance. A clear audit trail should be available when items are purchased including minutes to evidence approval.		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<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 11 th March 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 31 st
<i>Is the value of the assets included? (Note value for insurance purposes may differ)</i>	YES	

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

⁹ Practitioners Guide

<i>Are records of deeds, articles, land registry title number available?</i>	<i>N/A</i>	March 2024 is £82,363 which reflects overall movement in the asset register covering acquisitions and disposals.
<i>Are copies of licences or leases available for assets sited at third party property?</i>	<i>N/A</i>	The council does not have any licences or leases in place.
<i>Is the asset register up to date and reviewed annually?</i>	<i>YES</i>	The asset register was signed off by the Council at its meeting on 11 th March 2024 confirming it covers assets within the ownership or responsibility of the Council.
<i>Cross checking of insurance cover</i>	<i>YES</i>	The clerk confirmed that at renewal the insurance provider is informed of any changes to the assets held.
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

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 monthly basis and reconcile with the cash sheets. These are presented to full council at each meeting.
<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 £185,270.71 as recorded in the Draft 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. The minutes of Full Council meetings, demonstrate that a review of the bank reconciliation versus the bank statements has been undertaken. This is not only good practice but is also a safeguard for the RFO and fulfils one of the authority's internal control objectives.

Section 11 – year end procedures		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Are appropriate accounting procedures used?</i>	YES	Accounts are produced on a receipts and expenditure basis and all found to be in order.
<i>Financial trail from records to presented accounts</i>	YES	The end of year accounts and supporting documentation were well presented for the internal auditor review.
<i>Has the appropriate end of year AGAR¹⁰ documents been completed?</i>	YES	As Council is a smaller authority with gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 it will be required to complete Part 3 of the AGAR.
<i>Did the Council meet the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt?</i>	N/A	As the Parish Council had gross income and expenditure exceeding £25,000 it was not able to declare itself exempt from a limited assurance review.
<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 Wednesday 7 th June to Wednesday 19 th July 2023 with the date of the notice being Tuesday 6 th June 2023.
<i>Have the publication requirements been met in accordance with the Regulations?¹¹</i>	YES	In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, as a smaller authority with either income or expenditure exceeding £25,000 but not exceeding £6.5 million, it is confirmed that the Council complied with the

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

¹¹ Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

		requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for the year ending 31 st March 2023 as it published the following on its website: Annual Internal Audit Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement Section 2 - Accounting Statements Section 3 - The External Auditor Report and Certificate Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and other information required by Regulation 15(2) Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
<i>Additional comments:</i>		

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		<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 the meeting of full Council 22 nd May 2023.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?</i>	YES	Council reviewed the report and took action where it deemed necessary.
<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 8 th January 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		Internal auditor commentary
Has the Council considered the previous external audit report? ¹²	YES	At the meeting of full Council 11 th September 2023 Council considered the report from the External Auditor for the year ending 31 st March 2023. The Notice of Conclusion was seen on the Council's website.
Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?	N/A	The External Audit did not raise any issues.
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	Council held its Annual Meeting of the Parish Council at which the Chair and other Officers were elected on 22 nd May 2023 in accordance with legislation.
Is there evidence that Minutes are administered in accordance with legislation? ¹⁴	YES	Council is aware that that under LGA 1972 schedule 12, paragraphs 41(1) and 44 the draft minutes of a meeting should be formally approved (with any necessary amendments) at the next meeting. At each meeting, the Chair is given formal approval to sign the minutes.
Is there a list of members' interests held?	YES	Evidence was seen on the District Authority's website the Register of Interests for all current Parish Councillors. COMMENT: Council could look to provide a direct link from the Council's own website to the Mid-Suffolk website.
Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?	N/A	Council does not have any Trustee Responsibilities.
Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?	N/A	Whilst the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 applies to local authorities, including Parish councils with annual income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) over £200,000, Councils with income over £25,000 but under £200,000 are expected (but are not legally required to do so) to follow its recommendations. COMMENT: Council might wish to review its provisions and consider whether it might be able to work towards ensuring compliancy with the requirements of publishing the following data on its website in accordance with the required timescales:

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

		Publish quarterly: Individual items of expenditure that exceed £500 (currently published on an annual basis); Government Procurement Card transactions; Invitations to tender for contracts over £5,000; Details of contracts that exceed £5,000. Publish annually: Details of all land and building assets; Grants to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations; Organisational Chart.
<i>Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)?¹⁵</i>	YES	The Council is correctly registered with the IO as a data controller in accordance with legislation. Reference number: ZA185889 Expiry date: 14 July 2024
<i>Is the Council compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements?</i>	YES	Council has taken active steps to ensure compliancy with the GDPR requirements and has adopted a number of GDPR Policies that provide clear responsibilities and obligations of the Council in respect of the collecting, using and protecting of personal information in accordance with the provisions of the GDPR. These were noted as being reviewed at a meeting of council held 8th January 2024.
<i>Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations?¹⁶</i>	YES	Council has a website accessibility statement detailing the technical information of the website along with the methods used for testing the website; the steps being taken to improve accessibility and how the site is being improved to ensure that content meets the WCAG 2.1 Standard under Regulation 8 of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. COMMENT: Council should ensure there are procedures in place for periodic reviews by Suffolk Cloud to ensure constant compliancy.

¹⁵ Data Protection Act 2018

¹⁶ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

<i>Does the council have official email addresses for correspondence?¹⁷</i>	YES	Council has in place gov.uk email addresses.
<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 twice a week and stored on a USB drive.
<i>Do terms of reference exist for all committees and is there evidence these are regularly reviewed?</i>	YES	Council hold Terms of Reference for its committees, with the last recorded update as March 2022, the clerk advised these were soon due for review.
Additional comments:		

Signed: J. Lawes

Date of Internal Audit Visit: N/A

Date of Internal Audit Report: 2nd May 2024

On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils

¹⁷ Practitioners Guide