



Mrs O Ghent
Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council
Town Hall
Sheep Street
Stratford-upon-Avon
Warwickshire
CV37 6EF

5 June 2025

Dear Odette

Re: Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council
Internal Audit for Financial Year Ended 31 March 2025 – Final Audit report

Executive summary

Following completion of our final internal audit on 5 June 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.**

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 Stratford-upon-Avon 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 2024/25 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 properly kept throughout the financial year.

Audit findings

This is the first internal audit conducted by Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd having been appointed by the council this year.

The audit was conducted on site with the council's Responsible Financial Officer (RFO). The RFO had prepared the information advised in advance of the visit, and other information was reviewed through discussion with the RFO and a review of the council website www.stratford-tc.gov.uk

The council uses the Sage accounting package for recording the council's finances, although also translates this information into a complex set of management reports. The council has also historically completed a full set of accounts at the year-end.

The only requirement for Town and Parish Councils is completion of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and any additional accounting statements produced, while potentially useful to the council, are not required. It also appears an overly complex process completing the separate management accounts where this information could be extracted directly from the accounting software if a chart of accounts was set up within the package.

I reviewed the nominal ledger report for the period 1 April to 31 March to ensure items were posted to the correct heading and that there were no instances of netting off and the expenditure was correctly posted to the headings to which the line item related. This has confirmed that the accounting package is being properly used.

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 2023/24 was qualified, with the External Auditor stating 'Box 11b on Section 2 of the AGAR was submitted with a 'Yes' response. Given the Council are not a sole trustee, the response to this box should have been 'N/A'.

The inspection period for the exercise of electors' rights was set for 52 working days which is more than the mandatory 30 working days as set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Paragraph 14(1). Given more than the standard amount of time was provided form in future the Council should ensure that it provides the precise public inspection period. We would anticipate the Council taking this into account when it completes Assertion 4 on its 2024/25 Annual Governance and Accountability Return.

The Council were required to amend Section 2 of the AGAR in relation to an invoice of £15,465 which was raised in Mar-24 and included in Box 3 but should have been raised in Apr-24 therefore should not be included in the 2023-24 figures. This was removed correctly and resubmitted to us. However, rather than initialling and dating the change, the Council approved the amendment at a Council meeting. Whilst this is not necessarily an issue, the Council then put new approval dates and minute references on Section 2. This is not the correct action, as now the approval dates and minutes do not agree to the original approval and Notice of Public Rights

publications. The council must amend its original form, by crossing through and inserting the corrected figures and initialling and dating the changes. This will be the final version of the form and must be published to the website with the other documents required to be published on conclusion.'

Under other matters, the External Auditor commented '*Upon review, general reserves appear to be held at a low level. The Council should keep this under review and ensure that they have sufficient general reserves to cover expenditure. Per Paragraph 5.33 of JPAG Practitioner's Guide, best practice suggests this should generally be at least three months expenditure as a minimum. These cannot include ring-fenced funds and should avoid including funds which are designated for another purpose.'*

The External Auditor's Report and Certificate has been published on the council website along with the Notice of Conclusion of Audit.

Confirm by sample testing that councillors sign statutory office forms

I confirmed by sample testing that councillors sign "Acceptance of Office" forms.

The council website includes a link to the District Council website where the individual Register of Members' Interests forms are published.

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 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 Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioner's Guide (March 2024) contains updated guidance on the matter as below:

The importance of using .gov.uk domains for websites and emails

- 5.210. *All Parish, Town and Community Councils are eligible to use, and are advised to use, a .gov.uk domain for their websites and email communications. Your community, suppliers and partners will now reasonably expect a local council to have a .gov.uk domain name. Note that Parish meetings are exempt from the requirement to have a website.*
- 5.211. *To assist with compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), it is advised that clerks provide official .gov.uk email accounts to their councillors, which must only be used for official council business.*
- 5.212. *When choosing a domain name all councils must follow the rules set out by the Cabinet Office to choose a .gov.uk domain name, for example, 'ourparishcouncil.gov.uk' with email addresses linked to that domain.*

- 5.213. *Using a .gov.uk domain for your council website and email accounts gives Parish Councils the following advantages:*
- 5.214. *Increased professionalism and trust from members of your community, partners and suppliers because your email address and website domains are a trusted government brand.*
- 5.215. *Separation of your personal life from your professional life, ensuring members of your community, partners and suppliers understand what capacity you are emailing them in - whether a Councillor or Clerk.*
- 5.216. *Increased control for the Responsible Officer over email accounts and documentation when managing new joiners, leavers, sudden absences or Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests.*

The council has a Privacy Notice and Accessibility Statement on the home page of its website, and it is clear the council has made every effort to comply with the website requirements.

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 for each committee published on the council website.

Details of upcoming meeting dates are also published on the council website, along with historic agendas and minutes for council and committee meetings.

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

I was able to confirm that at least 3 clear days' notice is given on agendas. Whilst we have not tested every single committee and council meeting there was no evidence of non-compliance in giving three clear days' notice of the meeting.

I note that committee meeting agendas include the date of publication, but this appears to be missing from the Full Council agendas and recommend this is added to make it clear that the statutory publication requirement has been met.

I note that non-confidential supporting papers are published with the agendas, either as hyperlinks within the agenda itself or as appendices. This meets the requirements of the Information Commissioner's Office.

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

Draft minutes are uploaded to the council website and clearly annotated as draft.

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

The Standing Orders are based on an older version of the NALC model and were most recently reviewed and adopted by council in September 2024 (minute ref 58).

The Standing Orders in place exclude elements relating to statutory responsibilities to provide information and under data protection legislation.

I recommend that the council updates its Standing Orders using the current NALC template available on the NALC website to ensure it is meeting all its statutory responsibilities, and then ensures the Standing Orders are reviewed annually, with this activity noted in the minutes of the relevant meeting.

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

Financial Regulations are based on an older NALC model. The regulations contain provisions for the approval of spending, setting of budgets, reconciliation of the bank and reporting to council.

I note that the council have subsequently adopted the revised NALC model (personalised to suit the council) at the Finance and Audit Committee Meeting held on 3 June 2025 (minute ref 10).

Check that the council's Financial Regulations (those in place for 2024/25 financial year) are being routinely followed

A review of council minutes and invoices shows that council authorises payments in accordance with the adopted Financial Regulations.

Confirm all section 137 expenditure meets the guidelines and does not exceed the annual per elector limit of £10.81 per elector

The council has section 137 expenditure within the allowable threshold.

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 has a risk assessment process in place, which was reviewed and approved by the Finance & Audit Committee at their meeting in September 2024. I reviewed the risk assessment record, which includes a risk matrix to assess the overall risk based on likelihood and consequences of an event occurring and then assesses the risks within each sector of the council's business operations.

Each potential risk is identified, relevant legal and statutory considerations are noted, the likelihood and severity of each occurrence are assessed using the risk matrix to find an overall risk rating and then the controls and monitoring actions are recorded.

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 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.

We discussed assertion 8 on the Annual Governance Statement and whether this had any impact on the council.

"We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements."

The Clerk confirmed that they were not aware of any event having a financial impact that was not included in the accounting statements.

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 £661,678 for 2024/25. With a tax base of 14,232.7, this equates to a band D equivalent of £46.49 (compared to the average in England of £85.89). I was able to confirm receipt of the precept amount, and this is correctly recorded in Box 2 of the AGAR.

I was able to confirm that the 2025/26 budget and precept were approved by the council at the meeting held on 7 January 2025 (minute ref 99).

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.

The 2024 Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioner's guide (which covers the 2024-25 financial year under review at this audit) 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. The document contains reference to the 2014 Governance and Accountability for Local Councils Practitioners Guide and includes the stated aim 'Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council maintains a level of General Reserves equivalent to a minimum of 25% of annual budgeted expenditure.'

The Reserves Policy is annotated as having last been reviewed by the Finance & Audit Committee in January 2022, and I recommend the policy is reviewed and updated during 2025-26 using the guidance in the Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Practitioner's Guide published in March 2025.

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.

Financial Regulation 12.2 states *'Particulars of all charges to be made for work done, services rendered, or goods supplied shall be agreed annually by the Council...'*

I note that the council approved an increase in the Cemetery fees, to take effect for the 2025/26 financial year, at the Community Services and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 February 2025 (minute ref 36(a)).

The Town Hall hire fees were approved at the Civic Heritage and Events Committee Meeting held on 21 January 2025 (minute ref 47.5).

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.

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 petty cash float which is used for incidental expenditure. The petty cash is locked in a tin under the control of the FFO and petty cash vouchers are completed for each transaction. The petty cash is checked and balanced by the FFO on a monthly basis.

A review of the vouchers shows that all petty cash items are genuine and other arrangements for payment would not have been appropriate.

I am satisfied that the council has in place appropriate measures for the safe management of petty cash.

G. PAYROLL

Internal audit requirement

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

Audit findings

The council has circa 20 employees on the payroll. 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 a sample of the staff timesheets and compared this to the summary and individual payslips and found no anomalies.

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

I reviewed the total figure being included within box 4 (staff costs) on the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and was able to confirm from the accounting software that this includes only salary payments, HMRC payments and pension contributions.

H. ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS

Internal audit requirement

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

Audit findings

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

Financial regulation 19.1 states *'The RFO shall ensure that the fixed asset register is maintained and kept up to date and submitted to the Finance & Audit Committee, at least annually.'*

I confirmed the asset register total matches that included in box 9 (total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets) on the AGAR and was able to trace the changes to the previous year's total against the asset register.

The council has no borrowing.

I. BANK AND CASH

Internal audit requirement

Periodic and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out.

Audit findings

There is no reference in the 2024-25 Financial Regulations requiring councillors to conduct any verification of bank reconciliations. Within the version adopted by the council on 3 June, there is the requirement that *'At least once in each quarter and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair or a bank signatory shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statements as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the Council.'* (FR 2.6)

Checks will be conducted against this requirement at future internal audits, and the council is reminded that both the bank reconciliation and accompanying bank statement must be signed by the councillor completing this process.

I reviewed the March 2025 bank reconciliation for all accounts and was able to confirm the balances to the bank statements and found no errors. The total matches the figure included in box 8 of the AGAR.

As the council's annual budget exceeds the €500,000 threshold, it is not protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

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), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.

Audit findings

The council, at its meeting to sign off the year-end accounts, must discuss Section 1 of the AGAR (Annual Governance Statement) and record this activity in the minutes of the meeting.

COUNCIL IS REMINDED THAT THIS MUST BE A SEPARATE AGENDA ITEM PRIOR TO THE SIGNING OF SECTION 2 OF THE AGAR (ACCOUNTING STATEMENT).

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement

Based on the internal audit findings, I recommend using the table below as the basis for that discussion.

	Annual Governance Statement	'Yes', means that this authority	Suggested response based on evidence
1	We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	<i>prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.</i>	YES – accounts follow latest Accounts and Audit Regulations and practitioners guide recommendations.

2	We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	<i>made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.</i>	YES – there is regular reporting of financial transactions and accounting summaries, offering the opportunity for scrutiny.
3	We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	<i>has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.</i>	YES – the Clerk advises the council in respect of its legal powers.
4	We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	<i>during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.</i>	NO – the requirements and timescales for 2023/24 year-end were not followed.
5	We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	<i>considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.</i>	YES – the council has a risk management scheme and appropriate external insurance.
6	We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	<i>arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.</i>	YES – the council has appointed an independent and competent internal auditor.
7	We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	<i>responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.</i>	YES – matters raised in internal and external audit reports have been addressed.
8	We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and. Where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	<i>disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.</i>	YES – no matters were raised during the internal audit visits.

9	Trust funds including charitable – In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/asset(s), including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	<i>has met all its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.</i>	N/A – the council has no trusts
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Section 2 – Accounting Statements

AGAR box number		2023/24	2024/25	Internal Auditor notes
1	Balances brought forward	139,001	192,987	Agrees to 2023/24 carry forward (box 7)
2	Precept or rates and levies	582,238	661,678	Figure confirmed to central precept record
3	Total other receipts	413,310	466,433	Agrees to underlying accounting records
4	Staff costs	415,093	425,055	Agrees to underlying accounting records. Includes only expenditure allowed as staff costs (see section G)
5	Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Council has no borrowing
6	All other payments	526,469	531,167	Agrees to underlying accounting records
7	Balances carried forward	192,987	364,876	Casts correctly and agrees to balance sheet
8	Total value of cash and short- term investments	221,049	351,348	Agrees to bank reconciliation for all accounts
9	Total fixed assets plus long- term investments and assets	11,163,783	11,416,758	Matches asset register total and changes from previous year have been traced
10	Total borrowings	0	0	Council has no borrowing
11a	Disclosure note re Trust Funds (including charitable)	No	No	No – the council is not a sole trustee
11b	Disclosure note re Trust Funds (including charitable)	N/A	N/A	N/A – the council is not a sole trustee

Audit findings

The year-end accounts have been correctly prepared on an income and expenditure basis with the box 7 and 8 reconciliation completed.

This shows total year-end debtors of £203,708 and total year-end creditors of £182,243, with a full breakdown of the individual debtors and creditors provided.

The AGAR correctly casts and cross casts. The RFO has uncovered an omission from last year's accounts and has restated last year's comparatives figures.

K. LIMITED ASSURANCE REVIEW

Internal audit requirement

IF the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2023/24, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2023/24 AGAR tick “not covered”)

Audit findings

The council did not certify itself exempt in 2023/24 due to exceeding the income and expenditure limits and this test does not apply.

L: PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION

Internal audit requirement

The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation

Audit findings

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.

I was able to confirm that pages 4 (Annual Governance Statement), 5 (Accounting Statements) and 6 (External Auditor’s Report and Certificate) of the AGARs are available for review on the council website for the required period.

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

The authority has demonstrated that during summer 2024 it correctly provided for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

Audit findings

Inspection – key dates	2023/24 Actual
Date AGAR signed by council	11 June 2024
Date inspection notice issued	19 June 2024
Inspection period begins	20 June 2024
Inspection period ends	31 August 2024
Correct length (30 working days)	No
Common period included (first 10 working days of July)	Yes

The requirements of this control objective were not met for 2023/24.

The External Auditor reported ‘*The inspection period for the exercise of electors’ rights was set for 52 working days which is more than the mandatory 30 working days as set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Paragraph 14(1). Given more than the standard amount of time was provided form in future the Council should ensure that it provides the precise public inspection period. We would anticipate the Council taking this into account when it completes Assertion 4 on its 2024/25 Annual Governance and Accountability Return.*’

Assertion 4 on the Annual Governance Statement must therefore be signed ‘no’ by the council.

N: PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS**Internal audit requirement**

The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2023/24. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website / webpage.

Before 1 July 2024 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 2023/24, approved and signed, page 4
- Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2023/24, approved and signed, page 5

Not later than 30 September 2024 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 2024.

I was able to confirm that the Notice of Conclusion of Audit and External Auditor Report and Certificate were published on the council's website before 30 September 2024.

The council has therefore met the publication requirements for 2023/24 have been met.

O. TRUSTEESHIP

Internal audit requirement

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

Audit findings

The council has no trusts, and testing for this internal control objective is not applicable.

Achievement of control assertions at final internal audit date

Based on the tests conducted during the interim and final audits, 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 this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	✓		
H	Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	✓		
I	Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	✓		
J	Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	✓		
K	If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in the previous year, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. <i>(If the authority had a limited assurance review in the previous year tick "not covered")</i>			✓
L	The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation	✓		
M	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 (evidenced by the notice published on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).		✓	
N	The authority has complied with the publication requirements for previous year's 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy', written in a cursive style.

Andy Beams

Director, Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd