

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

Clerk	Dina Bedwell (until 30/04/2024)
RFO (if different)	As above
Chairperson	Cllr F. Winrow-Giffin
Precept	£ 81,338
Income	£ 180,662
Expenditure	£ 149,506
General reserves	£ 10,985
Earmarked reserves	£ 188,766
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 Rialtas to manage its accounts and ensures that the financial transactions 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	Council accounts are conducted on a payments and receipts basis.
<i>Is the cash book up to date and regularly verified?</i>	YES	The Responsible Financial Officer uses the accounting and reporting tools associated with the package to produce clear financial management information to the Council on both a monthly and annual basis. This provides good evidence to support the council’s underlying statements.
<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 documented as reviewed at a meeting of council held 18 th March 2024 and are based on the latest model published by the National Association of Local Councils (2018) containing 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 reviewed and adopted by council at its meeting held 18 th March 2024 and are based on the NALC Model Financial Regulations 2019. COMMENT: At the next annual review council might wish to consider the revised Financial Regulations released 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 to be responsible for the administration of the financial affairs of the relevant authority. This was confirmed by full Council at its meeting 18 th March 2024.
Additional comments:		

¹ Section 151 Local Government Act 1972 (d)

Section 3 – Payment controls		
The internal auditor will specifically check bank reconciliation including credit/debit cards and management approval processes and evidence that internal Financial Regulations (FO) are being followed. The internal auditor will examine how regular payments are managed and specifically seek evidence that these have been brought back to the Council for verification purposes especially where the actual payment made differs from the amount previously agreed. VAT should be clearly identified including evidence that claims have been correctly managed. The internal auditor will check if the Council has a clear understanding on eligibility in relation to the General Power of Competence and that s.137 has been correctly applied and managed.		
Evidence		<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. During the period under review a mix of cheque and online payments were recorded.
Is VAT correctly identified, recorded, and claimed within time limits?	YES	VAT is identified in the cash book with the reclaim for the period covering the year 2023-2024 in the sum of £11,921.10 submitted to HMRC 8 th April 2024.
Has the Council adopted the General Power of Competence (GPOC) and is there evidence this is being applied correctly? ²	YES	The council confirmed eligibility criteria to enable it to exercise the GPOC and has adopted the same at its meeting on 15 th May 2023.
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.

² Localism Act

³ Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) enables local councils to spend a limited amount of money for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure. The basic power is for a local council to spend money (subject to the statutory limit – of £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.

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:		

<p>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.</p>		
Evidence		Internal auditor commentary
<i>Is there evidence of risk assessment documentation?</i>	YES	The Financial Risk Assessment and general 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 Registers for the year under review were considered and adopted by full Council at its meeting of 18 th March 2024.
<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 Parish 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.

<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 BHIB which shows core cover for the following: Public/Products Liability £10m; Employers Liability £10m and Fidelity Guarantee of £250k. Council reviewed and approved its insurance cover at a meeting of full council held 15 th May 2023.
<i>Evidence that internal controls are documented and regularly reviewed⁴</i>	YES	At the meeting of 18 th 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.
<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 18 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 discussed in brief at a meeting of 21 st November 2022 and then approved at the Council meeting held 16 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 £81,338 for 2023/2024, as confirmed at the above meeting, with the paperwork demonstrating that this was a 0% change over that set the previous year due to a change in the tax base.
<i>Regular reporting of expenditure and variances from budget</i>	YES	The minutes evidence that Council carried out quarterly reviews covering the budget for 2023/2024 against income and expenditure.
<i>Reserves held – general and earmarked⁶</i>	YES	The Council, as at year-end, had Earmarked Reserves totalling £188,766.44 with the balance being General Reserves of £10,985.09.
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 Standing Orders, income received is reported to full Council within the financial reports.
<i>Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax Authority’s notification?</i>	YES	Council received precept in the sum of £81,338 from Mid-Suffolk District Council for the period under review. 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	£22,154.63 Starting Balance £69,493.81 Income £26,082.00 Expenditure £65,566.44 End Balance
<i>Is CIL income reported to the council?</i>	YES	Council received two payments during the period under review. The CIL report is published on the council website.
<i>Does unspent CIL income form part of earmarked reserves?</i>	YES	CIL funds form part of the earmarked funds.

⁷ Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010

<i>Has an annual report been produced?</i>	YES	
<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	As above
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 Council confirmed a Contract of Employment was 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. COMMENT: It is noted that the clerk in position for 2023/2024 has now left and council is in the process of advertising the vacancy.
<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 Lovewell Blake. 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 and payments were made in accordance with timescales agreed with the Council's Pension Provider. T
<i>Have pension re-declaration duties been carried out</i>	YES	Council recorded a re-declaration to the Pension Regulator on the 8 th September 2019. This is carried out by the payroll operator Lovewell Blake. COMMENT: The re-declaration to the Pension Regulator should be completed every 3 years, or on a change of staff. With the Clerk/RFO no longer in employment, the Pension Regulator should be notified.
<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.
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 is for 202/2024 with the 2022/2023 register evidenced as approved at the meeting of 17 th April 2023.

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

⁹ Practitioners Guide

		The Asset Register 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 £264,545.90 which reflects overall movement in the asset register covering acquisitions and disposals of £38,241.67.
<i>Is the value of the assets included? (Note value for insurance purposes may differ)</i>	YES	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>Are records of deeds, articles, land registry title number available?</i>	N/A	Records of deeds, articles, land registry title number were not reviewed during the internal audit which was carried out via remote means.
<i>Are copies of licences or leases available for assets sited at third party property?</i>	N/A	Information not provided.
<i>Is the asset register up to date and reviewed annually?</i>	YES	Whilst the asset register is still to be signed off by the council, it is noted that the values submitted on the Draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return for Internal Audit show an asset value of £264,545.90.
<i>Cross checking of insurance cover</i>	YES	Council ensures appropriate cover for its assets.
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 regular basis, reported within the minutes 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 £199,751.53 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		<i>Internal auditor commentary</i>
<i>Are appropriate accounting procedures used?</i>	YES	Accounts are produced on a receipts and payments basis and all found to be in order.
<i>Financial trail from records to presented accounts</i>	YES	There is a full audit trail from records to presented accounts.
<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 2023-2024, the Council set the dates of Monday 3 rd July 2023 to Friday 11 th August 2023, with the publication date of 30 th June 2023 as published on the council website.
<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 did comply with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for the year ending 31 st March 20** as it published the following on its website: Annual Internal Audit

¹⁰ Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)

¹¹ Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

		<p>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.</p>
<p><i>Additional comments:</i></p>		

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 by and approved by council at the meeting held 18 th September 2023.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the recommendations raised?</i>	YES	Council took appropriate action where 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 18 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>	YES	At the meeting of full Council held 16 th October 2023, Council considered the report from the External Auditor for the year ending 31 st March 2023.
<i>Has appropriate action been taken regarding the comments raised?</i>	N/A	There were no matters which come to the attention of the external auditor which have cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met.
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		<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 15 th May 2023 in accordance with legislation, at which the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020 was adopted.
<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 Parish Council website.
<i>Does the Council have any Trustee responsibilities and if so, are these clearly identified in a Trust Document?</i>	YES	The Parish Council is the sole trustee for the Debenham Memorial Garden Charity 117595 (URC Cemetery). The council is currently trying to gain access following a change in council members but advised there are no financial transactions.
<i>Has the Transparency Code been correctly applied, and information published in accordance with current legislation?</i>	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 continue to review its provisions and consider whether it might be able to work towards ensuring compliancy with the

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

		<p>requirements of publishing the following data on its website in accordance with the required timescales: Publish quarterly: Individual items of expenditure that exceed £500 (this is being done); 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.</p>
<i>Has the Council registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)?¹⁵</i>	YES	<p>The Council is correctly registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Controller in accordance with the Data Protection Legislation. Ref: Z9006055 Expiry: 30th March 2025.</p>
<i>Is the Council compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements?</i>	YES	<p>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.</p>
<i>Has the Council published a website accessibility statement on their website in line with Regulations?¹⁶</i>	YES	<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>

¹⁵ Data Protection Act 2018

¹⁶ Website Accessibility Regulations 2018

<i>Does the council have official email addresses for correspondence?¹⁷</i>	YES	Council operates with a .org.uk email address for the Clerk and Councillors, thereby complying with GDPR and demonstrating that the council has an official status thereby building trust, credibility and authenticity.
<i>Is there evidence that electronic files are backed up?</i>	YES	Council uses a system whereby files are held on a server, and accessible on a laptop.
<i>Do terms of reference exist for all committees and is there evidence these are regularly reviewed?</i>	YES	Council holds Terms of Reference for its committees.
Additional comments:		

Signed: **J. Lawes**

Date of Internal Audit Visit: N/A

Date of Internal Audit Report: 10th June 2024

On behalf of Suffolk Association of Local Councils

¹⁷ Practitioners Guide