# Annual Internal Auditor's report 2025/26
# Westbere Parish Council

Internal Auditor: Deborah O'Brien CiLCA PIALC

Smaller authorities are required by 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.

In accordance with guidelines contained in the 2025 Practitioners' Guide (JPAG) paragraphs 4.6-4.12, I am independent of the Parish Council and its members as well as being a CiLCA qualified Clerk with over 10 years' experience.

I have carried out a selective assessment of the Council's compliance with relevant procedures and controls, which I expected to be in operation during the year ended 31st March 2026, as outlined in the letter of engagement signed by the Council at its 21st July 2025 meeting. The function of this internal audit is to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's procedures, not to detect errors or fraud, as the management of the Council's internal controls is a function of the Council as a whole. (Practitioners' Guide, paragraphs 4.4-4.5).

This internal audit has been conducted electronically utilising requested documents provided by the Clerk, as well as those present on the website at Westbere Parish Council. In addition, a Zoom meeting was held on 21st April 2026 to view hard copies of certain records.

This written report is laid out using the same format and headings as the AGAR Internal Audit report (page 3). Where I have answered NO to any of the AGAR assertions, the comments in bold in this report demonstrate the reasoning. I would recommend that the Practitioners' Guide is also referenced – the version for 2025/26 is available at Practitioners' Guide 2025. A newer version for 2026/27 can also be downloaded at Practitioners Guide 2026.

Overall, the standard of management and governance processes is excellent, with some items mentioned below for the attention of the Parish Council. I would like to thank the Parish Clerk/RFO, Amanda Sparkes for her cooperation and assistance in facilitating this internal audit.

## Internal Audit report assertions

### A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.

- Prior year's cashbook balance has been correctly brought forward.

- Appropriate accounting records (Excel spreadsheets) have been kept throughout the year with monthly updates and bank reconciliations brought to council meetings, where they are signed off by a councillor. (Please note that the lower tab in one workbook (Exp v budget) references 2018-19 and should be updated.)
- Council minutes for the year are complete and have been initialled and signed. I would recommend that older minutes are stored at the County Archives for safety as they are a legal record (and therefore evidence in law) of Council business.

**B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for.**

- The council’s Financial Regulations have been/are being followed.
- Financial Regulations are regularly reviewed and are based on the latest 2025 template.
- Standing Orders were last reviewed in May 2025 as a part of the year-end process.
- A random sample of financial transactions was examined in detail and found to be administered correctly. Expenditure was considered and approved at full council meetings. I would recommend that the payments and receipts excel schedule clearly states who the ‘payees’ are. (e.g. ‘office supplies’, ‘rock salt’ or ‘APM refreshments’).
- The Council has effective controls on the making of payments. It still has a cheque book, but the majority of payments are made by bank transfer. The Clerk/RFO sets up payments and two councillors authorise the release of funds. Invoices are initialled by 2 councillors when reviewing for payment.

**C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.**

- The Council reviewed its Strategic Risk Assessment Policy and Internal Control documents at its May 2025 meeting.
- Appropriate levels of insurance cover are in place, and these are reviewed annually.
- An annual inspection of land & assets was introduced in July 2023; findings and actions have been minuted. In addition, bi-annual tree inspections have been undertaken and remedial works conducted. I would recommend that the company used for inspections is independent of the company conducting remedial works. Both invoices indicate that one supplier was used.

**D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.**

- The 2025-26 budget was considered, and precept amount of £17,312 agreed at a full council meeting dated 18/11/2024.
- The 2026-27 budget was considered, and precept amount of £19,078 agreed at a full council meeting dated 17/11/2025.
- Progress against the budget is monitored and quarterly reports submitted to full council at a meeting. These are minuted and signed by a councillor.
- Reserves have been reviewed as part of the budgeting process. An ear-marked reserves schedule is maintained and totals £13,342. This leaves an operating reserve of £5,670 or approximately 4 months' worth of expenditure. Practitioners' Guide paragraph 5.35 recommends that smaller Councils should hold closer to 12 months' operating reserve. I would recommend further reviewing the earmarked reserves at budgeting time.

**E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.**

- The precept received of £17,312 matches the public record of precepted amounts, and the amount requested by Council.
- In addition to the precept, the council receives a concurrent funding award from CCC of £4,503.
- Interest was received in the amount of £225.49.
- VAT reclaims are made in accordance with VAT form 126 claims for organisations not registered for VAT and received regularly. (£362.35 for 1 Jul-31/5/25 received July 2025. £1,247.65 for 1 Jun 25 – Dec 2025 received Jan 2026)
- A £200 donation towards graves upkeep plus £399.61 insurance reimbursement from the village hall was also received.

**F. Cash payments were properly supported by receipts; all cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.**

- No cash is handled, but Financial Regulations cover this when required.

**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.**

- The sole employee is the Clerk/RFO. Payroll is handled by an outside company. The Clerk's hours were reviewed in July 2025 and agreed as sufficient.
- Sample payslips were reviewed showing pension and NI deductions.
- The 2025/26 National pay scale agreement has been applied and back pay to 1st April 2025 issued in August. (minuted in September)

- Payments are made monthly to HMRC and the pension provider. I was able to view HMRC's year end summary and there are no outstanding payments due to HMRC.
- The Council is registered with the Pensions Regulator and the latest compliance declaration was made in January 2026. (3-year requirement)
- No Councillor's allowances are paid.

### H. Asset and investment registers were complete and accurately and properly maintained.

- The asset register is regularly updated and reviewed annually.
- The asset register matches the figure stated in box 9 of section 2 of the AGAR. Insurance valuations are also recorded. Transferred ownership benches should be listed at £1.
- The Council has no loans and there are no fixed asset investments.

### I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.

- Monthly bank reconciliations are made to the statements, reviewed at meetings and signed by a councillor.
- Year-end reconciliations for 31/3/25 and 31/3/26 were checked and agreed to line 8 of section 2 of the AGAR.

### 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.

- The council operates on receipts and payments accounting in accordance with regulation 11 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- The financial detail reported in Section 2 of the AGAR reflects the detail shown in the accounting records for 2025/26. (Assets to be updated to reflect benches)

### K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2024/25, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt.

- The authority met the criteria and declared itself exempt in 2024/25 in accordance with the Section 9 of the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015.
- The Council recorded its approval of the Certificate of Exemption at a full Council meeting on 19 May 2025.
- The Council published the Certificate of Exemption together with all other required information on its website by 31 May 2025.

**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.**

- The authority maintains a website which is regularly updated.
- All required information is published in accordance with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities 2015.
- The council is in compliance with The Accounts & Audit regulations 2015 regulation 13 (At least five years of AGARs and associated documents must be published).
- The ICO Model Publication Scheme document is available on the website.

**M. In the year covered by the AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (*during the 2025-26 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2024-25 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set?*)**

- The Council agreed the dates for exercise of public rights at its 19 May 2025 meeting. The notice was published on 2 June 2025, and the agreed dates were 3 June 2025 – 14 July 2025.

**N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2024/25 AGAR *(see AGAR page 1 Guidance Notes)***

- The council complied with this requirement.

**O. The authority has complied with laws, regulations & proper practices relating to digital and data compliance.**

- E-mail management – the parish council has a dedicated generic email account hosted on the PC's domain. Some councillors are also using PC specific e-mail addresses – I would recommend that all adopt and use them as personal and/or work e-mail addresses are still subject to Freedom of Information requests.
- The website states that it partially complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (where applicable).
- Accessibility statement requirements are that it is reviewed when there are major changes to legislation and at least annually Make your website or app accessible and publish an accessibility statement - GOV.UK The statement was last reviewed in January 2026.
- The Parish Council follows both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. A Data audit has been conducted (November 2024).
- The Council is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Data Processor as required. The Model Publication Scheme (Information Available) document is also available on the website.

- The Parish Council adopted an IT policy on 19 May 2025.

**P. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.**

- Not applicable – the Council is not a trustee.

## Other matters not covered above:

- I would recommend that the Council reviews the 2026 edition of Practitioners' Guide, as it contains new requirements and guidance which will affect the 2026/27 audit. A summary of the changes and the guide itself can be viewed at Practitioners' Guide 2026.
- I note again, that the Clerk receives an allowance for use of her personal equipment (including laptop and software), for Council business. I would again, strongly recommend that a dedicated laptop is provided for Westbere Parish Council's business and usage.
- As mentioned last year, the draft AGAR Governance statement has had the responses pre-populated. The responses to these questions should be completed at the Parish Council meeting where the Internal Audit report is reviewed and the responses made accordingly.
- This is now the 4th year that I have conducted the Internal Audit for Westbere PC. I would recommend that you review your Internal Audit provision and obtain quotes from 3 providers in the same way that you would every 3 years for any other contract.

This report should be submitted along with the AGAR Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 to the full council for review and consideration, prior to completing the Annual Governance Statement.

Deborah O'Brien CiLCA PIALC
21st April 2026