

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES**

<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Finance and Policy Committee</b>		
<b>MEETING DATE AND TIME</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> March 2026 7.00 pm</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>Congleton Town Hall</b>
<b>REPORT FROM</b>	<b>David McGifford C.O &amp; Serena Van Schepdael: R.F.O</b>		
<b>AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>17 Approval of Internal Auditor for 2026-2027</b>		
<b>Background</b>	<p>The Town Council 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.</p> <p><a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/234/regulation/5/made">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/234/regulation/5/made</a></p> <p>The Council have complied with these requirements by appointing and internal auditor, currently Auditing Solutions Ltd provide this function to the Council. As we are now in excess of £2 million income/expenditure we now must provide the External Auditors with:</p> <p>Evidence that when appointed, the authority satisfied itself with regard to the competence of the internal auditor and agreed a letter of engagement (see Practitioners’ Guide 2024 Paragraphs 1.35, 4.12 and 4.13), e.g. minutes of the meeting where competence and the appointment was considered and the signed letter of engagement or the minutes of meeting where the engagement letter was agreed. Please note this information is only required if there has been a change in the appointed internal auditor since the information previously submitted in prior years.</p> <p><b>Main Requirements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Independence &amp; Competence:</b> The internal auditor cannot be involved in the financial decision-making or management of the council. They must have a strong understanding of local government finance.</li><li>• <b>Appointment:</b> The council formally appoint the internal auditor.</li><li>• <b>Scope of Work:</b> The internal auditor reviews the council’s internal controls, risk management, and governance processes, reporting directly to the council.</li></ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reporting:</b> The auditor must complete the Annual Internal Audit Report (AIAR) section of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).</li> <li>• <b>Access:</b> Auditors must have access to all records necessary for their work.</li> <li>• <b>Engagement Terms:</b> A letter of engagement should outline roles, responsibilities, reporting requirements, and remuneration.</li> <li>• <b>Rotation:</b> While not mandatory, rotating auditors can enhance independence.</li> </ul>
<b>Updates</b>	<p>See attached appendix for a summary of audit requirements for 2026-2027. The areas we are required to be audited on align with the Annual Governance and Accountability Report we have to submit annually. (Pages 27 to 32 of the Good Practice Guide)</p> <p>Accounting Solutions Ltd are a well-established company with experience with Town and Parish Councils. They complete the audits remotely but have visited the office to complete a review on the Information Centre after we took over. They work with many other councils in providing this service and are familiar with our processes and procedures.</p> <p>Officer recommendation is that we retain the services of Auditing Solutions for 2026-2027, a letter of engagement will be signed on Council approval.</p> <p>Going forward a full review will be completed during each financial year for the following year or for a 3 year arrangement.</p>
<b>Financial</b>	All external support services are budgeted for via budget setting.
<b>Environmental</b>	Considerations of impact on travel have been considered.
<b>Equality and Diversity</b>	Our Equality and Diversity Policy will be considered when sourcing new suppliers/services.
<b>Decision Request</b>	To approve the services of Auditing Solutions for the financial year 2026-2027 and recommend this to Council for approval.

Appendix 1 (Internal Auditor Appointment) Scope of work of Internal Auditor based on the Annual Return. Taken from 2025-2026 Practitioners Guide

AGAR certificate reference	Internal Audit action for expected controls
<p>A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the year. AND I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure the correct roll forward of the prior year cashbook balances to the new financial year.</li> <li>● Check a sample of financial transactions in cashbooks to bank statements, etc: the sample size dependent on the size of the authority and nature of accounting records maintained.</li> <li>● Ensure that bank reconciliations are prepared routinely, are subject to independent scrutiny and sign-off by members.</li> <li>● Verify the accuracy of the year-end bank reconciliation detail and ensure accurate disclosure of the combined cash and bank balances in the AGAR, section 2, line 8.</li> <li>● Where the authority has bank balances in excess of £100,000 it has an appropriate investment strategy.</li> </ul>
<p>B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review the procedures in place for acquisition of formal tenders and quotes, ensuring they are in line with the SOs and FRs which should be based on the latest version.</li> <li>● Ensure that consistent values are in place for the acquisition of formal tenders between SOs and FRs (frequently different limits are recorded in the two documents).</li> <li>● Review the procedures for receipt of invoices, agreement of invoice detail and confirmation of goods/ services delivery and approval for payment; ideally, a suitably designed certification stamp should be in place providing for evidencing of these checks and payment authorisation.</li> <li>● Check that there is effective segregation between the writing of cheques or the setting up of online payments, 28 of 74 and physical release of payments.</li> <li>● Check that VAT reclaims are prepared and submitted in a timely manner in line with the underlying records and in accordance with current HMRC requirements.</li> <li>● Where debit / credit cards are in use, establish the total monthly and individual transaction limits and ensure appropriate controls over</li> </ul>
<p>C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that authorities have prepared and formally adopted, at least once annually, an appropriate and comprehensive register of assessed risks, both regular and ad hoc.</li> <li>● Ensure that appropriate levels of insurance cover are in place for land, buildings, public, employers' and hirers' (where applicable) liability, fidelity/ employees (including members) liability, business interruption and cyber security.</li> <li>● Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for monitoring play areas, open spaces and sports pitches; such reviews should be undertaken by appropriately qualified external inspectors or, if by officers or members, that they have received the appropriate training and accreditation.</li> <li>● Review the effectiveness</li> </ul>
<p>D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the full Authority, not a committee, has considered, approved and adopted the annual precept for the coming year in accordance with the required parent Authority timetable</li> <li>● Ensure that current year budget reports are prepared and submitted to the Authority/ Committees periodically during the year with appropriate commentary on any significant variances.</li> </ul>

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<p>was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review the budget performance either during the year or at the financial year-end seeking explanations for any significant or unanticipated variances.</li> <li>● Ensure that the Authority has considered the establishment of specific earmarked reserves and, ideally, reviews them annually as part of the budget assessment process.</li> <li>● Ensure that the precept received in the accounts matches the prior year submission form to the relevant authority and the public record of precepted amounts.</li> </ul>
<p>E. Expected income was fully received based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT appropriately accounted for.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review “Aged debtor” listings to ensure appropriate follow up action is in place.</li> <li>● Allotments: ensure that appropriate signed tenancy agreements exist, that an appropriate register of tenants is maintained, identifying that debtors are monitored.</li> <li>● Burials: ensure that a formal burial register is maintained, that it is up-to-date and that a sample of interments and memorials are appropriately evidenced, that fees have been charged at the correct approved rate and been recovered within a reasonable time: (Authorities should also acquire and retain copies of Burial / Cremation certificates)</li> <li>● Hall hire: ensure that an effective diary system for bookings is in place identifying the hirer, hire times and ideally cross-referenced to invoices raised.</li> <li>● Leases: ensure that leases are reviewed in a timely manner in accordance with the terms of the lease and rents similarly reviewed appropriately at the due time.</li> <li>● Other variable income streams: ensure that appropriate control procedures and documentation are in existence to provide a clear audit trail through to invoicing and recovery of all such income.</li> <li>● Where amounts are receivable on set dates during the year, ensure that an appropriate control record is maintained duly identifying the date(s) on which income is due and actually received / banked.</li> </ul>
<p>F. Petty Cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A number of authorities are now running down and closing their petty cash accounts and using debit / credit cards for ad hoc purchases. Consequently, a “Not covered” response is frequently required in this area.</li> <li>● Review the systems in place for controlling any petty cash and also cash floats (used for bar, catering, etc).</li> <li>● Check a sample of transactions during the financial year to ensure appropriate supporting documentation is held.</li> <li>● Review the existence of evidenced periodic independent verification of the petty cash and any other cash floats held.</li> <li>● Ensure that VAT is identified wherever incurred and appropriate.</li> <li>● Physically check the petty cash and other cash floats held.</li> <li>● Where bar or catering facilities are in place, ensure that appropriate cashing-up procedures are in place reconciling the physical cash takings to the till “Z” total 30 of 74 readings.</li> </ul>
<p>G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with the authority’s approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that, for all staff, a formal employment contract is in place together with a confirmatory letter setting out any changes to the contract.</li> <li>● Ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for the payment of members allowances and deduction of any tax liability.</li> <li>● Ensure that, for a sample of staff salaries, gross pay due is calculated in accordance with the approved spinal point on the NJC scale or hourly rate, if off-scale, and also with the contracted hours.</li> </ul>

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<p>were properly applied.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that appropriate tax codes are being applied to each employee.</li> <li>● Where free or paid for software is used, ensure that it is up to date.</li> <li>● For the test sample of employees, ensure that tax is calculated appropriately.</li> <li>● Check the correct treatment of Pension contributions.</li> <li>● For NI, ensure that the correct deduction and employer’s contributions are applied: NB. the employers allowance is not available to councils but may be used by other authorities</li> <li>● Ensure that the correct employers’ pension percentage contribution is being applied.</li> <li>● Ensure that for the test sample, the correct net pay is paid to the employee with tax, NI and pension contributions correctly paid to the respective agencies.</li> </ul>
<p>H. Asset and investment registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained. This section/assurance should be extended to include loans to or by the authority</p>	<p>Tangible Fixed Assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the Authority is maintaining a formal asset register and updating it routinely to record new assets at historic cost price, net of VAT and removing any disposed of/ no longer serviceable assets.</li> <li>● Physically verifying the existence and condition of high value, high risk assets may be appropriate.</li> <li>● Ideally, the register should identify for each asset the purchase cost and, if practicable, the replacement/ insured cost, the latter being updated annually and used to assist in forward planning for asset replacement.</li> <li>● Additions and disposals records should allow tracking from the prior year to the current.</li> <li>● Ensure that the asset value to be reported in the AGAR at section 2, line 9 equates to the prior year reported value, adjusted for the nominal value of any new 31 of 74 acquisitions and / or disposals.</li> <li>● Compare the asset register with the insurance schedule to ensure that all assets as recorded are appropriately insured or “self-insured” by the Authority.</li> </ul> <p>Fixed asset investments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that all long-term investments (i.e., those for more than 12 month terms) are covered by the “Investment Strategy” and reported as Assets in the AGAR at section 2, line 9.</li> </ul> <p>Borrowing and Lending:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the authority has sought and obtained appropriate UK Debt Management Office approval for all loans acquired.</li> <li>● Ensured that the authority has accounted for the loan appropriately (i.e., recorded the full value of the loan, any arrangement fee should be regarded as an admin expense) in the year of receipt.</li> <li>● Ensure that the combined principal loan repayment and interest for the year is correctly recorded in the AGAR at section 2 line 5.</li> <li>● Ensure that the outstanding loan liability as at 31<sup>st</sup> March each year is correctly recorded in the AGAR at section 2, line 10 (value should be verified from the lender and verification provided to the IA by the clerk/RFO).</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where the Authority has issued loans to local bodies, they should ideally seek signed indemnities from the recipient body, or their members, agreeing to underwrite the loan debt.</li> </ul>
<p>J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cashbook, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and, where appropriate, debtors and creditors were properly recorded.</p>	<p>Whilst IAs are not required to verify the accuracy of detail to be disclosed in the AGAR, this assertion, together with the expectation of most Authorities, effectively requires IAs to ensure that the financial detail reported at section 2 of the AGAR reflects the detail in the accounting records maintained for the financial year. Consequently, IAs should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that, where annual turnover exceeds £200,000, appropriate records are maintained throughout the year on an Income and Expenditure basis to facilitate budget reporting in that vein.</li> <li>● Ensure that appropriate accounting arrangements are in place to account for debtors and creditors during the year and at the financial year-end.</li> </ul>
<p>K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in the prior year, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt.</p>	<p>IAs should ensure that, all relevant criteria are met (receipts and payments each totalled less than £25,000)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the correct exemption certificate was prepared and minuted in accordance with the statutory submission deadline;</li> <li>● that it has been published, together with all required information on the Authority’s website and noticeboard.</li> </ul>
<p>L. The authority publishes information on a free to access website / web page, up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation</p>	<p>IAs should review the Authority’s website ensuring that all required documentation is published in accordance with the relevant legislation.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>IAs should acquire / examine a copy of the required “Public Notice” ensuring that it clearly identifies the statutory 30 working day period when the Authority’s records are available for public inspection. IAs may also check whether authorities have minuted the relevant dates at the same time as approving the AGAR.</p>
<p>N. The authority complied with the publication requirements for</p>	<p>IAs should ensure that the statutory disclosure / publication requirements in relation to the prior year’s AGAR have been met as detailed on the front page of the current year’s AGAR.</p>

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the prior year AGAR.	
O. Trust funds (including charitable) - the Council met its responsibilities as a trustee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Confirm that all charities of which the council is a Trustee are up to date with CC filing requirements.</li><li>● that the council is the sole trustee on the Charity Commission register.</li><li>● that the council is acting in accordance with the Trust deed.</li><li>● that the Charity meetings and accounts are recorded separately from those of the council.</li><li>● review the level and activity of the charity and where a risk based approach suggests such, review the Independent Examiners report.</li></ul>