

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Council		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	11th June 2026 7.00 pm	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Serena Van Schepdael – Responsible Financial Officer		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	8 Internal Audit Report – Final Audit for 2025-26		
Background	All town and parish councils are required by statute to make arrangements for an independent, internal audit examination of their accounting records and systems of internal control.		
Updates	Congleton Town Council's internal audit services are provided by Auditing Solutions Ltd. The final year-end audit for 2025-2026 has taken place; all audits were completed remotely. The Internal Audit report supports the Annual Internal Audit Report section of the Annual Governance and Accountability Report (AGAR) we submit to external auditors annually. For the full Internal Audit report, please see Appendix 1; for the AGAR section report, see Appendix 2.		
Decision Requested	To receive the Final Internal Audit report for the year ending 31 st March 2026.		

Congleton Town Council

Internal Audit Report 2025-26: Final

Adrian Shepherd-Roberts

***For and on behalf of
Auditing Solutions Ltd***

Background

All town and parish councils are required by statute to make arrangements for an independent internal audit examination of their accounting records and system of internal control and for the conclusions to be reported each year in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

This report sets out the work undertaken in relation to the 2025-26 financial year which was completed by the 20th November 2025 and 17th February 2026 and 10th May 2026. We have undertaken our reviews for the year and we wish to thank the Responsible Finance Officer and staff in assisting the process, providing all necessary documentation to facilitate completion of our review for the year to date.

Internal Audit Approach

In undertaking our reviews for this financial year, we have had regard to the materiality of transactions and their susceptibility to potential mis-recording or misrepresentation in the year-end Statement of Accounts/AGAR. We have employed a combination of selective sampling techniques (where appropriate) and 100% detailed checks in a number of key areas in order to gain sufficient assurance that the Council's financial and regulatory systems and controls are appropriate and fit for the purposes intended.

Our programme of cover has been designed to afford appropriate assurance that the Council's financial systems are robust and operate in a manner to ensure effective probity of transactions and to afford a reasonable probability of identifying any material errors or possible abuse of the Council's own and the national statutory regulatory framework. The programme is also designed to facilitate our completion of the 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return, which requires independent assurance over a number of internal control objectives.

Overall Conclusion

We have concluded that, on the basis of the programme of work we have undertaken, the Council has maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements during the year to date.

We ask that members consider the content of this report and acknowledge that the report has been reviewed by Council.

We have completed and signed the 'Annual Internal Audit Report' in the year's Annual Governance and Accountability Return, having concluded that, in all significant respects, the control objectives set out in that report were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the Council.

Detailed Report

Review of Accounting Arrangements & Bank Reconciliations

Our objective here is to ensure that the accounting records are being maintained accurately and currently and that no anomalous entries appear in cashbooks or financial ledgers. To that end, we have: -

- Ensured that the ledger remains in balance at the present date;
- Verified the opening trial balance for 2025-26 to the Statement of Accounts and AGAR for 2024-25 to ensure that the closing balances have been brought forward accurately and completely;
- Checked and agreed transactions in the Council's main bank account cashbooks to the relevant RBS Bank statements for April & September 2025 and January 2026;
- Checked and agreed for the same months, inter account "sweep" transfers between the current and high interest bank account; and
- Examined and verified the accuracy of transactions in the Council's mayoral charity bank account cashbooks and bank accounts as at March 2026 to ensure that no long-standing payments or other anomalous entries exist.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting further comment.

Review of Corporate Governance

Our objective is to ensure that the Council has robust corporate governance documentation in place; that Council and Committee meetings are conducted in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders and that, as far as we are able to ascertain, no actions of a potentially unlawful nature have been or are being considered for implementation. We noted previously that an updated Corporate Business Plan had been prepared and have examined the content accordingly.

We note that the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were reviewed and adopted on 12th June 2025 and subsequently a further revision of the Financial Regulations in February 2026.

We have completed our review of the minutes of the Full Council and Standing Committees, excluding Planning, to ensure that no actions of an ultra vires nature are being either considered or have been actioned, whilst also ensuring that the Council's finances remain at a healthy level to provide appropriate funds for future planned development and current revenue spending plans. We also note that, as previously, various grants have been approved for payment during the current year.

We are satisfied that The Council have met the requirements for Assertion 10 for this financial year.

**Congleton TC: 2025-26 Interim update 20-Nov-25 & 21-Feb-26 Auditing Solutions Ltd
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Conclusions

There are no matters requiring formal recommendation in this area of our review process.

Review of Expenditure

Our aim here is to ensure that: -

- Council resources are released in accordance with the Council's approved procedures and budgets;
- Payments are supported by appropriate documentation, either in the form of an original trade invoice or other appropriate form of document confirming the payment as due and/or an acknowledgement of receipt, where no other form of invoice is available;
- An official order has been raised in each and every case where one would be expected;
- All discounts due on goods and services supplied are identified and appropriate action taken to secure the discount;
- The correct expense codes have been applied to invoices when processed; and
- VAT has been appropriately identified and coded to the control account for periodic recovery.

We have completed work in this area examining a sample of payments from April 2025 to March 26.

Finally, in this area, we have examined the content of the quarterly VAT reclaims to March 2026.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no significant issues have been identified in this area.

Assessment and Management of Risk

Our aim here is to ensure that the Council has put in place appropriate arrangements to identify all potential areas of risk of both a financial and health and safety nature, whilst also ensuring that appropriate arrangements exist to monitor and manage any such risks identified in order to minimise the opportunity for their coming to fruition.

Risk assessment registers are in place and they are subject to routine annual review and update. We note that the Business Risk Assessment for 25-26 was formally approved in February 2025.

We noted as at a previous review that an external agent for Health and Safety and HR Services Ansa Environmental Services Ltd has been appointed.

Zurich Municipal continues to provide the Council's insurance cover: we have examined the current year's schedule (to June 2025) and consider it meets the current needs of the Council appropriately with Employer's liability set at £10 million and Public Liability cover set at £15 million and Fidelity Guarantee cover at £1.0 million.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area warranting further comment.

Precept Determination and Budgetary Control

We aim in this area of our work to ensure that the Council has appropriate procedures in place to determine its future financial requirements leading to the adoption of an approved budget and formal determination of the amount of the precept placed on the Unitary Authority, that effective arrangements are in place to monitor budgetary performance throughout the financial year and that the Council has identified and retains appropriate reserve funds to meet future spending plans.

We are pleased to note that members continue to receive regular budget monitoring reports with over/under-spends and the level of earmarked reserves the subject of regular review.

We also note from the draft minutes that the Council approved a precept of £1,585,910 for 2026-27 at the meeting of 22nd January 2026.

Conclusions

There are no matters requiring formal comment or recommendation in this area of our review process.

Review of Income

In considering the Council's income streams, we aim to ensure that robust systems are in place to ensure that all income due to the Council is identified and invoiced in a timely manner and that effective procedures are in place to pursue recovery of any outstanding monies. We have: -

- At the interim audit we reviewed the income generated in respect of the Tourist Information Centre from the accounts data. We have also checked that there is a stock control review completed which will be completed again by the end of this financial year. We are pleased to report that the process is well managed and that records are maintained in a very satisfactory manner.
- At this update review we have undertaken a check of the Town Hall bookings and the relevant records;
- Examined the "Aged debtors schedule" generated by the accounting software and have confirmed with the RFO regarding the records that there are no significant issues arising with regard to long-standing debts of which officers and members are unaware.

We have also reviewed the nominal ledger detailed transaction reports for income items for the year to January 2026 to ensure that no obvious coding errors or other anomalous entries are apparent and are pleased to record that none are in evidence.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that there are no significant issues in this area.

Petty Cash Account

Our aim in this area is to ensure that appropriate controls are in place; that all expenditure incurred is adequately supported by trade invoices or till receipts; that the expenditure is appropriate for the Council's requirements; that VAT has been separately identified for periodic recovery and that cheque encashments from the main cashbooks are properly recorded.

We have not checked the cash but have reviewed the holding from the information that we have been provided. As we are working remotely, we suggested that where possible an independent check is undertaken to confirm that the cash has been checked and the account balances. We note that this continues to be reviewed.

We have reviewed the vehicle fuel nominal ledger and sample statements and we are satisfied that this is monitored and controlled effectively.

Conclusions

There are no matters requiring formal comment or recommendation in this area of our review process.

Review of Staff Salaries

In examining the Council's payroll function, we aim to confirm that extant legislation is being appropriately observed as regards adherence to the Employee Rights Act 1998 and the requirements of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) legislation as regards the deduction and payment over of income tax and NI contributions, together with meeting the requirements of the local government pension scheme, as further revised from 1st April 2023 in relation to employee percentage bandings. To meet that objective, we have: -

- Ensured that the Council has approved staff pay rates for the financial year, based upon the approved NJC rates:
- Checked and agreed the computation of staff gross and net pay and salary deductions for September 2025, noting the continued use of a local, third party bureau service provider;
- Checked to ensure that appropriate tax codes and national insurance tables are being applied in the year and that the correct deductions / contributions have been deducted and paid over to HMRC in a timely manner; and

- Ensured that the appropriate revised superannuation contribution rates have been applied, also ensuring that the deductions have been paid over to the County Council in a timely manner.

Conclusions

We are pleased to record that no issues have been identified in this area.

Fixed Asset Registers

The Governance and Accountability Manual requires all councils to maintain a record of all assets owned. We will check and agree the principles used in the detail, as recorded in the Council's Asset Register using purchase cost values or where that value is unknown at the previous year's Return level or uplifted or decreased to reflect the acquisition or disposal of assets. This register is completed by the RFO but also cross referenced to the register produced by DCK Accounting Solutions Limited, their accountants.

Conclusion

No issues require formal comment or recommendation.

Investments & Loans

Our objectives here are to ensure that the Council is "investing" surplus funds, be they held temporarily or on a longer term basis, in appropriate banking and investment institutions, that an appropriate investment policy is in place, that the Council is obtaining the best rate of return on any such investments made, that interest earned is brought to account correctly and appropriately in the accounting records and that any loan repayments due to or payable by the Council are transacted in accordance with the appropriate loan agreements.

The Council holds no specific investments but holds a Special Interest account with RBS and deposits with the Cambridge and Counties Bank and CCLA.

We have verified the half-yearly loan repayments to PWLB by reference to the direct debit advice as part of the aforementioned expenditure testing.

Conclusions

We are pleased to report that no issues have been identified in this area that warrants any further attention by officers or formal recommendation.

Annual Governance and Accountability Return

The Accounts and Audit Regulations required that all Councils prepare a detailed Statement of Accounts, together with supporting statements identifying other aspects of the Council's financial affairs.

As part of our year-end review, we have checked the March 2026 trial balances and nominal ledgers balances together with cash books, reconciliations and bank statements.

**Congleton TC: 2025-26 Interim update 20-Nov-25 & 21- Feb- Auditing Solutions Ltd
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We have also examined the Council's procedures and data in relation to the preparation of the year-end detailed accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return data and are satisfied that there are no issues arising.

Conclusions

No issues have arisen in this review area and, on the basis of work undertaken during the year, we have duly signed off the Internal Audit Report of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, assigning positive assurances in each relevant area.

Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26

CONGETON TOWN COUNCIL

www.congeton-tc.gov.uk PUBLICLY AVAILABLE WEBSITE/WEBPAGE ADDRESS

During the financial year ended 31 March 2026, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2025/26 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

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 financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
C. This authority assessed 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. Cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all 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 2024/25, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2024/25 AGAR tick "not covered")			✓
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. In the year covered by this 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).	✓		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2024/25 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	✓		
O. The authority has complied with laws, regulations & proper practices relating to digital and data compliance.	✓		
P. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	Yes	No	Not applicable
			✓

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

20/11/2025

17/02/2026

16/05/2026

A C Shepherd-Roberts INTERNAL AUDITOR

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit

Date

16/05/2026

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

**Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned, or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).