

## **Report to Creeting St Mary Parish Council**

### **The Internal Audit of the Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2026**

#### **1. Introduction and Summary.**

1.1 The Internal Audit work undertaken confirmed that during the 2025/26 year the Council maintained effective governance arrangements including a robust framework of internal control and risk management. The Internal Audit review, undertaken on the documentation provided to the Internal Auditor and on the information published on the Council's website, has confirmed that the Council continues to maintain efficient arrangements for financial administration and internal financial control.

1.2 By examination of the 2025/26 accounts and supporting documentation it was confirmed that the Clerk, in the role of the Council's Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), satisfactorily undertook the administration of the Council's financial affairs and produced financial management information to enable the Council to make well-informed decisions.

1.3 The Council's documentation and information were very well presented by the Clerk/RFO for the internal audit.

1.4 The Accounts for the year confirm the following:

*Total Receipts for the year: £65,974.93*  
*Total Payments in the year: £52,673.90*  
*Total Reserves at year-end: £51,818.22*

1.5 The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) was examined and the following figures agreed with the Clerk for inclusion in Section 2 Accounting Statements 2025/26 (rounded for purposes of the Return):

<i>Balances at beginning of year (1 April 2025):</i>	<i>Box 1: £38,518</i>
<i>Annual Precept 2025/26:</i>	<i>Box 2: £11,686</i>
<i>Total Other Receipts:</i>	<i>Box 3: £54,289</i>
<i>Staff Costs:</i>	<i>Box 4: £5,599</i>
<i>Loan interest/capital repayments:</i>	<i>Box 5: nil</i>
<i>All Other payments:</i>	<i>Box 6: £47,075</i>
<i>Balances carried forward (31 March 2026):</i>	<i>Box 7: £51,819</i>
<i>Total cash/short-term investments:</i>	<i>Box 8: £51,819</i>
<i>Total fixed assets:</i>	<i>Box 9: £87,794</i>
<i>Total borrowings:</i>	<i>Box 10: nil</i>

1.6 Sections One and Two of the AGAR are due to be approved and signed at a forthcoming meeting of the Council. The Internal Auditor has completed the Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26 within the AGAR.

1.7 The following Internal Audit work was carried out on the adequacy of systems of internal control.

**2. Governance, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and other Regulatory matters (examination of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Code of Conduct, Formal Policies and Procedures, Tenders where relevant. Acting within the legal framework, including Data Protection legislation).**

2.1 The Annual Parish Council meeting was held on 22 May 2025. The first item of business was the Election of Chair, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972. The Council appointed representatives to outside bodies.

2.2 Standing Orders are in place and are based on the model document issued by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). The Council reviewed, approved and adopted the Standing Orders at its meeting on 22 May 2025.

2.3 Financial Regulations are in place and are also based upon the model document published by NALC. They were reviewed and adopted by the Council at its meeting on 22 May 2025. A copy has been published on the Council's website.

2.4 The Council is applying the General Power of Competence (GPoC). At its meeting on 11 May 2023 the Council declared that it was an eligible Council to use the GPoC, having at least two-thirds elected Councillors and a suitably qualified Clerk, and adoption of the Power was agreed (Minute CSM14/23/24 refers). The GPoC remains in place until the Annual Meeting following the next Ordinary Election in May 2027.

2.5 A Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) is in position, Mrs Jennie Blackburn having been appointed from 16 January 2017. At the meeting on 18 January 2024 the Council formally provided appropriate Delegation to the Clerk to receive comments from Councillors by email which would then be collated and submitted to the planning authority concerned.

2.6 The Council's Minutes are presented to a high standard and provide clear evidence of the decisions taken by the Council. Each page of the Minutes is signed/initialled by the Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes are approved.

2.7 The Council is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as a Fee Payer/Data Controller for the provision of council services (Registration ZA057299, expiring 30 July 2026). To assist in meeting the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) the Council maintains a Data Protection and Information Security Policy and a Records Management Policy.

2.8 The Council also has in place a Publication Scheme which details the information available from the Council under the model publication scheme.

2.9 The Council has a number of other Policies, Procedures and Protocols in place to assist good overall governance. At the meeting on 26 March 2026 the Council adopted an Unauthorised Encampments Policy, a Health and Safety Policy, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and a Complaints Procedure. The documents can be viewed on the Council's webpage:

<https://creetingstmary-pc.gov.uk/parish-council/parish-council-documents/>

2.10 The Council has adopted the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Councillor Code of Conduct which details the requirements and responsibilities placed upon each individual Councillor. A copy of the Code has been published on the Council's website.

2.11 A new Assertion 10 in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) of the AGAR 2025/26 requires local councils to formally declare their compliance with digital and data governance standards. The SAPP Practitioners' Guide provides the following instruction regarding Assertion 10 - Digital and Data Compliance, at item 1.47 et seq.:

*'To warrant a positive response to this assertion, the authority needs to have taken the following actions:*

- a) *Email management - Every authority must have a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain, for example clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk.*
- b) *All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must meet legal requirements for all existing websites regardless of what domain is being used.*
- c) *All websites must meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (where applicable).*
- d) *All websites must include published documentation as specified in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Transparency code for smaller authorities (where applicable).*
- e) *All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must follow both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018.*
- f) *All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must process personal data with care and in line with the principles of data protection.*
- g) *The DPA 2018 supplements the GDPR and classifies an authority as both a Data Controller and a Data Processor.*
- h) *All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must also have an IT policy. This explains how everyone - clerks, members and other staff - should conduct authority business in a secure and legal way when using IT equipment and software. This relates to the use of authority-owned and personal equipment.'*

2.12. The Council has a domain name of creetingstmary-pc.gov.uk and the Clerk/RFO is using the email address of clerk@creetingstmary-pc.gov.uk

2.13 The Council also adopted an IT Policy at its meeting on 15 January 2026 to assist in evidencing compliance. The Council has published a Website Accessibility

Statement (in addition to one posted by the website host under the name of Suffolk Cloud) to assist compliance with the Website Accessibility Regulations. In summary, the Council has demonstrated proper governance of its digital presence, including using an authority-owned domain for emails and complying with the latest website accessibility standards as far as practicably possible.

**3. Accounting Procedures and Proper Book-keeping (*examination of entries in the Cashbook, regular reconciliations, supporting vouchers, invoices and receipts and VAT accounting*).**

3.1 The Cashbook Spreadsheet was found to be in good order and well presented. The Spreadsheet is well referenced and provides an audit trail to the Bank Statements and the financial information prepared by the Clerk/RFO. A sample of transactions was closely examined and was found to be in order with supporting invoices/vouchers in place.

3.2 VAT payments are tracked and separately identified within the Cashbook to assist future re-claims to HMRC. Re-claims totalling £3,936.69 were re-imbursed by HMRC in the year as follows:

- a) The reclaim for the £965.76 VAT paid during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 was submitted to HMRC on 25 April 2025, received on 14 May 2025 and reported to Council on 22 May 2025.
- b) The reclaim for the £1,526.40 VAT paid for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 July 2025 was submitted to HMRC on 22 August 2025 and received at bank on 4 September 2025.
- c) The reclaim for £1,444.53 VAT paid during the period 1 August 2025 to 31 August 2025 was submitted by the Clerk/RFO to HMRC on 1 September 2025 and received at bank on 11 September 2025.

3.3 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Report has been constructed by the Clerk/RFO for the year 2025/26 and displays an opening balance of £30,816.55 as at 31 March 2025 with £46,840.25 CIL receipts in the year and payments of £32,920.08. The CIL Fund balance as at 31 March 2026 accordingly stood at £45,736.72. The CIL Report is due to be approved at a forthcoming meeting of the Council and has to be published on the Council's website and a copy submitted to the District Council no later than 31 December 2026.

3.4 A Statement of Explanation of Variances (explaining significant differences in receipts and payments between the years 2024/25 and 2025/26) has been prepared by the Clerk/RFO for submission to the External Auditors and for publication on the Council's website.

**4. Bank Reconciliation (*Regularly completed and cash books reconcile with bank statements*).**

4.1 Bank Reconciliations are presented to meetings of the Council and the Council's approval is Minuted.

4.2 The TSB bank statements as at 31 March 2025 (as below) totalled £51,818.22 and reconciled with the End-of-Year accounts and agreed with the overall Bank Reconciliation:

Business Current Account (£3,212.66)  
Blacksmiths Field Savings Account (£1,135.38)  
Reserves Savings Account (£574.03)  
CIL Fund Account (£46,896.15)

**5. Year End procedures (Regarding accounting procedures used and can be followed through from working papers to final documents. Verifying sample payments and income. Checking creditors and debtors where appropriate).**

5.1 End-of-Year accounts are prepared on a Receipts and Payments basis and were in good order. Sample audit trails were undertaken and were found to be in order.

**6. Internal Control and the Management of Risk (Review by Council of the effectiveness of internal controls, including risk assessment, and Minuted accordingly).**

6.1 The Council's Internal Control Measures and Risk Management arrangements were reviewed and approved by the Council at its meeting on 26 March 2026 (Minute CSM227/25/26a refers). The documents provide detailed analysis of the financial risks faced by the Council and the control measures in place to mitigate the risks identified.

6.2 The Council accordingly complied with Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 which requires a review by the Full Council at least once a year of the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control, including the arrangements for management of risk, with the review suitably Minuted.

6.3 The Council receives regular reports of play equipment inspections taking place at the Blacksmiths Field including the current condition of equipment and any action proposed/taken. Play Area inspections are undertaken for the Parish Council by Mid Suffolk District Council.

6.4 Insurance was in place for the year of account. At the Council's meeting on 4 September 2025 the Council agreed the insurance renewal and on 16 October 2025 approved the payment of £929.07 to CAS Business Services Ltd. The policy is provided by Ansvar Insurance and runs from 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026. Employer's Liability cover and Public Liability cover each stand at £10m.

**6.5 The Fidelity Guarantee (Councillor/Employee Dishonesty) insurance cover stands at £50,000 which does not meet the current recommended guidelines which provide that the cover should be at least the sum of the year-end balances plus 50% of the precept/grants. The Council's year-end bank balance as at 31 March 2026 was £51,818 and, with 50% of the 2026/27 Precept (£6,793), amounts to £58,611 which is in excess of the insurance cover in place.**

**6.6 Accordingly, the Council is advised to monitor the level of bank balances maintained during 2026/27 and increase the Fidelity Guarantee insurance cover if necessary in order to ensure that public funds are adequately protected.**

6.7 The Clerk/RFO confirmed to the Internal Auditor that the insurance policy has been checked against the Asset Register and adequately covers all relevant Assets.

**7. Budgetary controls (*Verification of the budgetary process with reference to Council Minutes and supporting documents*).**

Precept 2025/26: £11,686.00

Precept 2025/26: £13,587.00

7.1 The Draft Budget for 2025/26 was approved by the Council at its meeting on 28 November 2024. The Final Budget and Precept for 2025/26 were approved by the Council at its meeting on 30 January 2025. The Precept decision and the amount have been clearly Minuted (Minute CSM127/24/25e refers).

7.2 Similarly, the Draft Budget for 2026/27 was considered and agreed by the Council on 27 November 2025. The Final Budget was approved by the Council at the meeting held on 15 January 2026, when the Precept of £13,587 was approved. The precept decision and amount have been clearly Minuted (CSM166/25/26f refers).

7.3 The Clerk/RFO ensures the Council is aware of its responsibilities and commitments and the need for forward planning and adequate reserves. The Council has sound budgetary procedures in place. Examination of the accounts and supporting documentation for the year under review confirmed that the Council prepared detailed estimates of the annual budget and of receipts and payments for the years 2025/26 and 2026/27.

7.4 Budget Monitoring Reports are presented by the Clerk/RFO to meetings of the Council in order to meet the Council's budgetary control responsibilities.

7.5 The Overall Reserves at the year-end totalled £51,818.22, of which £46,872.10 are Earmarked/Restricted Reserves as follows:

CIL Receipts: £45,736.72 (Restricted Reserve as per Annual CIL Report).

Blacksmith Field: £1,135.38 (Earmarked Reserve as per balance at Bank as at 31 March 2026).

7.6 The General Reserves (Overall Reserves less Earmarked/Restricted Reserves) were accordingly £4,946.12 as at 31 March 2026 (the equivalent of approximately 36% or 4 months of the 2026/27 Precept) and in line with the generally accepted position that non-earmarked revenue reserves should usually be between three and twelve months of Net Revenue Expenditure/Precept (the SAPP Practitioners' Guide Item 5.34 refers).

**8. Income Controls (regarding sums received from Precept, Grants, Loans and other income including credit control mechanisms).**

8.1 Receipts are reported to Council as a matter of routine. Receipts of £65,974.93 recorded in the Cashbook Spreadsheet consisted of Precept (£11,686), CIL receipts (£46,840.25), VAT reclaim (£3,936.69), Bank Interest (£781.99), Social Club – gate money from Fireworks Night (£2,705) and Other Income (£25.00).

8.2 Receipts recorded in the Cashbook were cross referenced with the Council's Bank Statements on a sample basis and were found to be in order.

**9. Petty Cash (Associated books and established system in place).**

9.1 A Petty Cash system is not in use. An expenses system is in place, with on-line payments being made for expenses incurred.

**10. Payroll Controls (PAYE and NIC in place; compliant with HMRC procedures; records relating to contracts of employment).**

10.1 Payroll Services are being operated by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) in accordance with HMRC requirements. PAYE is in operation and detailed pay slips are produced. The P60 End of Year Certificate for the Clerk/RFO was presented to the Internal Auditor.

10.2 A Contract of Employment dated 16 January 2017 is in place between the Council and the Clerk/RFO and confirms that the employment commenced on 16 January 2017. As at 31 March 2025 the Clerk/RFO was paid at NJC SCP 22 for 26 working hours per month.

10.3 At the meeting on 3 July 2025 the Council agreed that the Clerk/RFO's salary be increased by two increments to scale point 24 and back dated to 1 April 2025.

10.4 At the meeting on 4 September 2025 the Council noted the national pay award 2025/26 for local government officers and agreed that this would apply to the salary of the Clerk/RFO and would be backdated to 1 April 2025.

10.5 An Office Allowance and a Storage Allowance are also payable to the Clerk/RFO.

10.6 With regard to the workplace pensions legislation, the Council wrote to the Clerk/RFO on 2 July 2017 outlining the scheme and the criteria and confirmed that Mrs Blackburn did not become a member of the scheme automatically but had the option to join the scheme. Mrs Blackburn decided not to join the scheme.

10.7 The Council submitted a re-declaration to the Pensions Regulator on 6 February 2026 in accordance with the requirements of the Pensions Act 2008. (The re-declaration of compliance confirms to the Pensions Regulator that the Council complies with its duties as an employer and has to be completed every three years).

**11. Assets Controls (*Inspection of asset register and checks on existence of assets; recording of fixed asset valuations; cross checking on insurance cover*).**

11.1 An Asset Register is in place and was considered and approved by the Council at its meeting on 22 May 2025.

11.2 The Register displays a total value of £87,794 as at 31 March 2026, a net increase of £8,406 over the value of £79,388 as at the end of the previous year (31 March 2025) and includes the acquisition of Flashing Signage (£4,598) and the Village Sign (£2,240) during the 2025/26 year.

11.3 The Register complies with the current requirements which provide that each asset should be displayed at a consistent value, year-on-year. The assets are recorded at purchase cost (where known) or a community value of £1 in appropriate cases. The value as at 31 March 2026 has been correctly entered into Box 9 of Section 2 of the AGAR.

**12. Internal Financial Controls, Payments Controls and Audit Procedures (*Confirmation that the Council has satisfactory internal financial controls in place for making payments with adequate documentation to support/evidence payments made. Any previous audit recommendations implemented*).**

12.1 The Council has satisfactory internal financial controls in place. The Clerk/RFO provides financial reports to Council meetings and Councillors are provided with information to enable them to make informed decisions. The Council receives details of the financial position of the Council, including accounts balance, payments and receipts.

12.2 Receipts and payments are listed in the Council's Minutes as part of the overall financial control framework. Payments were made through on-line banking during 2025/26. The Clerk/RFO is the Service Administrator, who initiates payments which are then authorised by nominated Parish Councillors before payment is released. The Clerk/RFO confirmed that the procedure is documented in the Council's Financial Regulations.

12.3 The Internal Audit Report for the previous year, 2024/25 was reported to the Council at its meeting on 22 May 2025. No issues of concern had been raised in the Report.

12.4 The Internal Auditor for the 2025/26 year was appointed by the Council at the meeting held on 26 March 2026.

**13. External Audit (*Recommendations put forward/comments made following the annual review*).**

13.1 The External Audit Report and Certificate for the year 2024/25 was completed by PKF Littlejohn LLP on 29 July 2025. The Report was received and approved by the Council at its meeting on 4 September 2025. The External Auditors raised no matters of concern.

13.2 At its meeting on 26 March 2026 the Council noted that an External Audit review is required for the year 2025/26 because income/expenditure is over £25,000 in the year of account.

#### **14. Publication Requirements.**

14.1 Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 authorities must publish each year the following information on a publicly accessible website (by 1 July):

*Notice of the period for the exercise of Public Rights  
AGAR - Sections 1 and 2.*

14.2 Following the completion of the External Audit (by 30 September):

*Notice of Conclusion of Audit  
AGAR - Section 3  
AGAR - Sections 1 and 2 (including any amendments as a result of the Limited Assurance Review).*

14.3 The Internal Auditor was able to confirm that the documents relating to the year 2024/25 were readily accessible on the Council's website:

*<https://creetingstmary-pc.gov.uk/parish-council/parish-council-documents/>*

#### **15. Additional Comments.**

15.1 I would like to record my appreciation to the Clerk/RFO for her assistance during the course of the audit work and would particularly commend her for the careful presentation of the Council's documents for the audit.

*Trevor Brown*

**Trevor Brown, CPFA**

**Internal Auditor**

**10 May 2026**