



Mrs V Rutt  
Hadlow Down Parish Council  
33 Swaines Way  
Heathfield  
East Sussex  
TN21 0AN

21 May 2025

Dear Vicki

**Re: Hadlow Down Parish Council**  
**Internal Audit for Financial Year Ended 31 March 2025 – Final Audit report**

**Executive summary**

Following completion of our final internal audit on 21 May 2025 we enclose our report for your kind attention and presentation to the council. The audit was conducted in accordance with current practices and guidelines and testing was risk based. Whilst we have not tested all transactions, our samples have where appropriate covered the entire year to date.

Our report is presented in the same order as the assertions on the internal auditor report within the published Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The start of each section details the nature of the assertion to be verified. Testing requirements follow those detailed in the audit plan previously sent to the council, a copy of which is available on request. The report concludes with an opinion as to whether each assertion has been met or not at this point in the year. **Recommendations for action are shown in bold text and are summarised in the table at the end of the report.**

Some assertions, as noted in this report, were tested at the interim internal audit completed during the financial year and the council should review all internal audit reports for the year before completing the Annual Governance Statement.

Our sample testing did not uncover any errors or misstatements that require reporting to the external auditor at this time, nor did we identify any significant weaknesses in the internal controls such that public money would be put at risk.

It is clear the council takes governance, policies and procedures seriously and I am pleased to report that overall, the systems and procedures you have in place are fit for purpose and whilst my report may contain recommendations to change these are not indicative of any significant failings, but rather are pointers to improving upon an already well-ordered system.

It is therefore our opinion that the systems and internal procedures at Hadlow Down Parish Council are well established and followed.

**Regulation**

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require smaller authorities, each financial year, to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts. In addition to this, a smaller authority 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, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.”

Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance activity designed to improve an organisation’s operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. The purpose of internal audit is to review and report to the authority on whether its systems of financial and other internal controls over its activities and operating procedures are effective.

Internal audit’s function is to test and report to the authority on whether its specific system of internal control is adequate and working satisfactorily. The internal audit reports should therefore be made available to all Members to support and inform them when they considering the authority’s approval of the annual governance statement.

**Independence and competence**

Your audit was conducted by Michelle Webber of Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd, who has over 27 years’ experience in the financial sector with the last 13 years specialising in local government.

Your auditor is independent from the management of the financial controls and procedures of the council and has no conflicts of interest with the audit client, nor do they provide any management or financial assistance to the client.

**Engagement Letter and inherent risk assessment**

An engagement letter was previously issued to the council covering the 2024/25 internal audit assignment, which includes the scope and plan of works and fee structure. Copies of this document are available on request from [anna@mulberrylas.co.uk](mailto:anna@mulberrylas.co.uk)

In summary, our work will address each of the internal control objectives as stated on the Annual Internal Audit Report of the AGAR.

It is our opinion that the inherent risk of error or misstatement is low, and the controls of the council can be relied upon and as such substantive testing of individual transactions is not required. Testing to be carried out will be “walk through testing” on sample data to encompass the period of the council year under review.

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## Interim internal audit recommendations

Audit Point	Interim Audit Findings	Council comments
None		

**A. BOOKS OF ACCOUNT****Internal audit requirement**

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

**Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

**B. FINANCE REGULATIONS, GOVERNANCE AND PAYMENTS****Internal audit requirement**

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

**Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

**C. RISK MANAGEMENT AND INSURANCE****Internal audit requirement**

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

**Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

We discussed assertion 8 on the Annual Governance Statement and whether this had any impact on the council.

*“We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.”*

The Clerk confirmed that they were not aware of any event having a financial impact that was not included in the accounting statements.

## **D. BUDGET, PRECEPT AND RESERVES**

### **Internal audit requirement**

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

### **Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

The year-end budget report shows receipts reported as 128.7% of budget and payments at 109.5%, suggesting that the budget has been accurately set and carefully monitored throughout the year. There is evidence within the minutes of meetings that councillors regularly receive budget reports for review, providing them with sufficient financial information to make informed decisions.

At the end of the financial year, the council held circa £40,041 in earmarked reserves, spread across a range of clearly identifiable projects, including amounts received from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which are identified separately. I checked the purpose of these earmarked reserves with the Clerk and am satisfied they are all for legitimate future planned projects of the council.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioner’s guide provides updated guidance on the appropriate level of general reserves that councils should retain as below:

*5.33. The general reserve of an authority comprises its cash flow and contingency funds to cover unexpected inflation, unforeseen events and unusual circumstances.*

*5.34. The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a smaller authority’s general reserve is that this should be maintained at between three and twelve months of net revenue expenditure.*

*5.35. The reason for the wide range is to cater for the large variation in activity level between individual authorities. The smaller the authority, the closer the figure may be to 12 months expenditure, the larger the authority, the nearer to 3 months. In practice, any authority with income and expenditure in excess of £200,000 should plan towards 3 months equivalent general reserve.*

*5.36. In all of this it is important that each authority adopt, as a general reserve policy, the level appropriate to their size, situation, risks and plan their budget so as to ensure that the adopted level is maintained. Consideration of the minimum level of reserves requires not only consideration of level of income and expenditure but also the risks to that income.*

5.37. *Authorities with significant self-generated income (other than the precept or levy) should take into account situations that may lead to a loss in revenue as well as increased costs and adapt their general reserve accordingly.*

The general reserve balance at the end of the financial year is £31,249, which is within the recommended range.

## E. INCOME

### **Internal audit requirement**

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

### **Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

## F. PETTY CASH

### **Internal audit requirement**

*Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved, and VAT appropriately accounted for.*

### **Audit findings**

The council has no petty cash and the testing for this internal control objective does not apply.

## G. PAYROLL

### **Internal audit requirement**

*Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.*

### **Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

I reviewed the total figure being included within box 4 (staff costs) on the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and was able to confirm from the accounting software that this includes only salary payments, HMRC payments and pension contributions.

## H. ASSETS AND INVESTMENTS

### **Internal audit requirement**

*Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.*

### **Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

I confirmed the asset register total matches that included in box 9 (total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets) on the AGAR and was able to trace the changes to the previous year's total against the asset register.

The council has borrowing through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and I was able to confirm the figures for in year payments (box 5) and year-end balance (box 10) against the PWLB statement and remittance advices.

The council has no long-term investments.

## I. BANK AND CASH

### **Internal audit requirement**

*Periodic and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out.*

### **Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

I reviewed the March 2025 bank reconciliation for all accounts and was able to confirm the balances to the bank statements and found no errors.

## J. YEAR END ACCOUNTS

### **Internal audit requirement**

*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.*

### **Audit findings**

The council, at its meeting to sign off the year-end accounts, must discuss Section 1 of the AGAR (Annual Governance Statement) and record this activity in the minutes of the meeting.

**COUNCIL IS REMINDED THAT THIS MUST BE A SEPARATE AGENDA ITEM PRIOR TO THE SIGNING OF SECTION 2 OF THE AGAR (ACCOUNTING STATEMENT).**

### **Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement**

Based on the internal audit findings, I recommend using the table below as the basis for that discussion.

	<b>Annual Governance Statement</b>	<i>‘Yes’, means that this authority</i>	<b>Suggested response based on evidence</b>
1	We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	<i>prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.</i>	<b>YES</b> – accounts follow latest Accounts and Audit Regulations and practitioners guide recommendations.
2	We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	<i>made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.</i>	<b>YES</b> – there is regular reporting of financial transactions and accounting summaries, offering the opportunity for scrutiny.
3	We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-	<i>has only done what it has the legal power to do and has</i>	<b>YES</b> – the Clerk advises the council in

	compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	<i>complied with Proper Practices in doing so.</i>	respect of its legal powers.
4	We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	<i>during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.</i>	<b>YES</b> – the requirements and timescales for 2023/24 year-end were followed.
5	We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	<i>considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.</i>	<b>YES</b> – the council has a risk management scheme and appropriate external insurance.
6	We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	<i>arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.</i>	<b>YES</b> – the council has appointed an independent and competent internal auditor.
7	We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	<i>responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.</i>	<b>YES</b> – matters raised in internal and external audit reports have been addressed.
8	We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and. Where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	<i>disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.</i>	<b>YES</b> – no matters were raised during the internal audit visits.
9	Trust funds including charitable – In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/asset(s), including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	<i>has met all its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.</i>	<b>N/A</b> – the council has no trusts

**Section 2 – Accounting Statements**

AGAR box number		2023/24	2024/25	Internal Auditor notes
1	Balances brought forward	66,995	62,896	Agrees to 2023/24 carry forward (box 7)
2	Precept or rates and levies	39,679	42,660	Figure confirmed to central precept record
3	Total other receipts	4,153	12,241	Agrees to underlying accounting records
4	Staff costs	27,584	23,364	Agrees to underlying accounting records. Includes only expenditure allowed as staff costs (see section G)
5	Loan interest/capital repayments	1,134	1,134	Agrees to PWLB remittance advices
6	All other payments	19,213	22,009	Agrees to underlying accounting records
7	Balances carried forward	62,896	71,290	Cast correctly and agrees to balance sheet
8	Total value of cash and short- term investments	62,896	71,290	Agrees to bank reconciliation for all accounts
9	Total fixed assets plus long- term investments and assets	50,574	55,839	Matches asset register total and changes from previous year have been traced
10	Total borrowings	1,660	560.23	Agrees to PWLB statement
11a	Disclosure note re Trust Funds (including charitable)	NO	NO	No – the council is not a sole trustee
11b	Disclosure note re Trust Funds (including charitable)	N/A	N/A	N/A – the council is not a sole trustee

**Audit findings**

The year-end accounts have been correctly prepared on an receipts and payments basis with no requirement to complete the box 7 and 8 reconciliation.

The AGAR correctly casts and cross casts and last year's comparatives match the figures submitted for 2023/24 and published on the council website.

The variance analysis has been completed and, in my opinion, provides sufficient financial and narrative information to explain the variances to the External Auditor.

**K. LIMITED ASSURANCE REVIEW****Internal audit requirement**

*IF the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2023/24, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2023/24 AGAR tick "not covered")*

**Audit findings**



The council did not certify itself exempt in 2023/24 due to exceeding the income and expenditure limits and this test does not apply.

## L: PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION

### Internal audit requirement

*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*

### Audit findings

For councils with a turnover over £25,000, it is recommended best practice to follow the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, but not a statutory requirement and therefore not subject to verification during the internal audit.

All councils are required to follow The Accounts and Audit Regulations which include the following requirements:

**13(1)** An authority must publish (which must include publication on that authority's website)

- (a) the Statement of Accounts together with any certificate or opinion entered by the local auditor in accordance with section 20(2) of the Act; and
- (b) the Annual Governance Statement approved in accordance with regulation 6(3)

**13(2)** Where documents are published under paragraph (1), the authority must

- (a) keep copies of those documents for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum; and
- (b) ensure that those documents remain available for public access for a period of not less than five years beginning with the date on which those documents were first published in accordance with that paragraph.

I was able to confirm that pages 4 (Annual Governance Statement), 5 (Accounting Statements) and 6 (External Auditor's Report and Certificate) of the AGAR are available for review on the council website for financial years 2019/20 to 2023/24 inclusive.

## M: EXERCISE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS - INSPECTION OF ACCOUNTS

### Internal audit requirement

*The authority has demonstrated that during summer 2024 it correctly provided for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.*

### Audit findings

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

Inspection – key dates	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Proposed
Date AGAR signed by council	7 May 2024	10 June 2025
Date inspection notice issued	31 May 2024	13 June 2025
Inspection period begins	3 June 2024	16 June 2025
Inspection period ends	12 July 2024	25 July 2025
Correct length (30 working days)	Yes	Yes

<b>Common period included (first 10 working days of July)</b>	Yes	Yes
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I am satisfied the requirements of this control objective were met for 2023/24, and assertion 4 on the Annual Governance Statement can therefore be signed yes by the council. I was able to confirm that the proposed dates for 2023/24 meet the statutory requirements.

## **N: PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **Internal audit requirement**

*The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2023/24. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website / webpage.*

*Before 1 July 2024 authorities must publish:*

- *Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and a declaration that the accounting statements are as yet unaudited*
- *Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2023/24, approved and signed, page 4*
- *Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2023/24, approved and signed, page 5*

*Not later than 30 September 2024 authorities must publish:*

- *Notice of conclusion of audit*
- *Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate*
- *Sections 1 and 2 of AGAR including any amendments as a result of the limited assurance review.*

*It is recommended as best practice, to avoid any potential confusion by local electors and interested parties, that you also publish the Annual Internal Audit Report, page 3.*

### **Audit findings**

I was able to confirm that the Notice of the Period of Public Rights and Section 1 (Annual Governance Statement) and Section 2 (Accounting Statement) were published on the council's website before 1 July 2024.

I was able to confirm that the Notice of Conclusion of Audit and External Auditor Report and Certificate were published on the council's website before 30 September 2024.

The council has therefore met the publication requirements for 2023/24 have been met.

## **O. TRUSTEESHIP**

### **Internal audit requirement**

*Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.*

### **Audit findings**

Testing conducted at the interim internal audit.

**Achievement of control assertions at final internal audit date**

Based on the tests conducted during the interim and final audits, our conclusions on the achievement of the internal control objectives to date are summarised in the table below.

	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 Finance Regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved, and VAT was appropriately accounted for	✓		
C	This authority assesses 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	Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty 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 the previous year, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. <i>(If the authority had a limited assurance review in the previous year tick "not covered")</i>			✓
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	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 <i>(evidenced by the notice published on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set)</i> .	✓		
N	The authority has complied with the publication requirements for previous year's AGAR.	✓		
O	Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.			✓

Should you have any queries please contact me directly on [michelle@mulberrylas.co.uk](mailto:michelle@mulberrylas.co.uk)

Yours sincerely

*m. webber*

**Michelle Webber**  
Internal Auditor, Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd

**Final Internal Audit - Points Carried Forward**

Audit Point	Interim Audit Findings	Council comments
None		