

WESTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL

INTERNAL CONTROL STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2026

1. SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Westhorpe Parish Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council is responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

3. THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

The Council: The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approves budgets for the following year at its January meeting. The January meeting of the Council approves the level of precept for the following financial year. A Councillor is appointed to have responsibility for bank reconciliation checks. The full Council meets four times each year and monitors progress against its aims and objectives at each meeting by receiving relevant reports from the Clerk/RFO. The Council reviews its internal controls, systems and procedures annually.

Clerk to the Council/Responsible Finance Officer: The Council has appointed a Clerk to the Council who acts as the Council's advisor and administrator. The Clerk also acts as the Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the Council's finances. The Clerk advises the Council on day-to-day compliance with laws and regulations that the Council is subject to and oversees risk management. The Clerk also provides advice to help the Council ensure that its procedures, control systems, and policies are adhered to.

Payments: All payments are reported to the Council for approval. Two members of the Council must authorise the payment. The signatories should consider each payment against the relevant invoice. No officer of the Council can authorise payments. Where delegation permits, as per s.101(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Financial Regulations a report detailing those payments will be presented at the next full Council meeting.

Income: All income is received and banked in the Council's name in a timely manner and reported to the Council.

Risk Assessments/Risk Management: The Council reviews its risk assessment annually and regularly reviews its systems and controls.

Internal Audit: The Council appoints an independent and competent internal auditor who reports to the Council on an annual basis on the adequacy of its:

- Records
- Procedures
- Systems
- Internal control
- Regulations
- Risk management

External Audit: The Council's external auditors submit an annual certificate of audit which is presented to the Council. This process does not apply to smaller authorities that have declared themselves exempt.

4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Council has responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal controls which should include a review of the effectiveness of internal audit. The results of that review must be considered by the Council, which should also approve the Statement of Internal Control.

WESTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL

INTERNAL CONTROL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2026

The Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015 aims to strengthen governance and accountability through requirements related to internal control and internal audit.

Whilst the Parish Council has reviewed the effectiveness of the internal audit (independence, competence, proportionate and scope), it has a requirement levied on it to ensure that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control:

‘The regulations require active participation by members in providing positive assurance to the electors of their stewardship of public money. The framework of accountability is risk-based i.e. level of control and management must be appropriate to the risk involved. The Council must determine the most appropriate method of internal control ... care should be taken to ensure that internal control tests are proportionate and relevant and that they are neither seen as, nor intended as, undue interference in the RFO’s day to day management of financial affairs.’

The Council reviews its internal control system annually. A written report of any findings must be submitted to the Council and formally recorded in the minutes.

CONTROL TEST	TEST DONE	COMMENTS
Adoption of Financial Regulations and Standing Orders Ensuring Financial Regulations and Standing Orders are reviewed and kept up to date whenever changes are made to the model documents	Yes	Reviewed and updated March 2026 and uploaded onto website
Adoption of Codes of Conduct for Members	Yes	Adopted by full Council March 2026
Declaration of Acceptance of Office	Yes	Full Council 2023
Procedures in place to record and monitor Members’ Interests and, where applicable, Gifts and Hospitality	Yes	At each Council meeting
Council has reviewed the internal audit report and, where applicable, the external audit report, and has addressed any recommendations, comments, or required actions	Yes	Reviewed

Annual review of Council policies and, where applicable, the terms of reference for committees, sub-committees, and working groups	Yes	Conducted annually
Regular reporting on performance of Contractors (crucial for maintaining accountability, ensuring contract compliance, mitigating risks, and optimising performance)	N/A	Not applicable in 2025/26
Annual review of risk and the adequacy of Insurance cover	Yes	Reported to full Council in September 2025
Annual review of risk assessment, including financial risks	Yes	Conducted in February 2026
Regular review of financial records and proper procedures for approving expenditure	Yes	Approved at each meeting
Regular bank reconciliation, independently reviewed	Yes	Reviews carried out by RFO and verified by a signatory
Payments supported by invoices, authorised and minuted	Yes	Signatories verify prior to release of payments
Recording in the minutes the powers under which expenditure is approved and ensuring S137 payments are listed separately	Yes	Annual reporting of expenditure incurred over £100.
Regular inspection of income records to ensure income is correctly received, recorded and banked	Yes	Income received is reported at each meeting.
Check to ensure the precept is recorded in the cash book matches the District Council's notification	Yes	RFO checks and reports to full Council
Regular financial reporting to the Parish Council, including Receipts & Payments (or Income & Expenditure) and updates on reserves	Yes	Bank reconciliations and details of expenditure and income received provided at each Council meeting
Regular budget monitoring statements presented to the Parish Council	No	To be undertaken going forwards

VAT correctly accounted for: VAT payments identified, recorded and reclaimed in the cashbook and minuted	Yes	VAT claim submitted to 30.06.2025. All VAT invoices are addressed to the Parish Council. The RFO maintains a VAT record in the cashbook to show the VAT that is reclaimable
Maintaining an up-to-date Asset Register	Yes	Reviewed March 2026
Regular maintenance arrangement for physical assets		Reviews carried out by members. All assets under insurance. Repairs to Hengrave bus shelter roof and restoration of war memorial undertaken in 2025
Staffing and Employment compliance: review of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts of employment for staff • Annual performance appraisal • Updating records to record changes in relevant legislation • PAYE/NIC properly operated by the Council as an employer • Pension Regulator re-declaration to be completed every three years 	Yes	PAYE/NIC verified once payslips submitted for payment
Compliance with Local Transparency Code in line with your Council's turnover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual turnover not exceeding £25,000 • Annual Turnover between £25,000 and £200,000 • Annual Turnover over £200,000 (NALC advises that all Councils adhere to the Smaller Authorities Transparency Code as a minimum)	Yes	Council is compliant with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities
Compliance with the DCLG 2014 Guide on Open & Accountable Local Government, Part 4: Ensuring officer decisions are properly documented and made transparent	Yes	Decisions are minuted and minutes are uploaded to the website

<p>Verifying that the Council is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements and the following are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered with the ICO • Audit / Impact Assessment • Privacy Notices • Procedures for dealing with Subject Access Requests • Procedure for dealing with Data breaches • Data Retention & Disposal Policies 	Yes	Council is registered with the ICO. Other matters will be addressed in March 2026
Minutes are properly numbered and paginated, with a master copy securely filed	Yes	All minutes signed by Chair at each meeting in accordance with the LGA 1972. Pages are paginated.
The Council's website complies with WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility standards	Yes	Confirmed by Suffolk Cloud November 2025
Email management: The Council has a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain	Yes	Each Councillor and the clerk has a .gov.uk email address. The council has a .gov.uk website
IT policy adopted	Yes	Will be adopted in March 2026

Date of review of system of Internal Controls: 27 February 2026