



Starston Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Libby Alexander, 6 Selwyn Gardens, Pulham Market, IP21 4TR
Tel: 07943 279946; Email: starstonparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

Policy: Annual Governance Statement of Internal Control and Review the Effectiveness of Internal Audit for the Year Ending 2025

Overview

Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 requires Councils to review annually the effectiveness of their **systems of internal control** and publish a statement on such systems (**annual governance statement**).

Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit (Amendment)(England) Regulations 2006 requires Councils to review the effectiveness of their **systems of internal audit** once a year, and for the findings to be considered by full Council or a committee (Regulation 4).

Governance and Accountability for Local Councils – A Practitioners Guide 2008 (England) is statutory guidance (available from SLCC and NALC).

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Starston 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.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is also 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.

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.



Starston Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Libby Alexander, 6 Selwyn Gardens, Pulham Market, IP21 4TR
Tel: 07943 279946; Email: starstonparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

The Council:

The Council has appointed a Chair who is responsible for the smooth running of meetings and for ensuring that all Council decisions are lawful.

The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approves budgets for the following year at its December or January meeting. The December / January meeting of the Council approves the level of precept for the following financial year.

The Council meets 6 times a year and has bi-monthly reports from the Responsible Financial Officer (Clerk) to enable it to monitor progress against objectives, financial systems and procedures, budgetary control and carry out regular reviews of financial matters.

The Council carries out annual reviews of its internal controls, systems and procedures.

Clerk to the Council / Responsible Financial Officer:

The Council has appointed a Clerk to the Council who acts as the Council's advisor and administrator. The Clerk is the Council's Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the Council's finances. The Clerk is responsible for the day to day compliance with laws and regulations that the Council is subject to and for managing risks. The Clerk also ensures that the Council's 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 every online banking transaction (or cheque if required). The Clerk is not allowed to sign cheques or approve any online banking transaction.

Risk Assessments / Risk Management:

The Council carries out regular risk assessments in respect of actions and regularly reviews its systems and controls. The Council has a Financial Risk Assessment Policy.



Starston Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Libby Alexander, 6 Selwyn Gardens, Pulham Market, IP21 4TR
Tel: 07943 279946; Email: starstonparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

Internal Audit:

Evidence to Support Reviews - Internal Audit:

- letter of appointment and completion of Annual Internal Audit Checklist.
- minute recording annual appointment/re-appointment
- Internal Audit is wholly independent of the Council and written internal audit reports are produced to the Clerk and Chair in his/her name
- Internal Audit has direct access to the Clerk/RFO and Chair
- prior to internal audit visit(s) the auditor liaises with the Clerk
- internal audit meets business needs of the Council and is proportionate to its size and activities

Evidence to Support Reviews - Internal Controls:

- measures in place to prevent and detect fraud and corruption e.g. cheque signatories and or authorised online banking transactions, bank mandates, cash handling, controlled stationary, budget monitoring (actuals against budget)
- level of reserves both earmarked and general are not excessive and reviewed annually prior to budget and precept setting
- all borrowing is authorised and level of loan debt appropriate
- investment arrangements (policy) are appropriate and returns adequate
- members have opportunity to question the internal auditor
- Council has acted upon any internal or external auditor's recommendations
- professional advice has been sought where necessary

The Council has appointed an Independent Internal Auditor who reported to the Council on the adequacy of its:

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

The effectiveness of the internal audit is reviewed annually.



Starston Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Libby Alexander, 6 Selwyn Gardens, Pulham Market, IP21 4TR
Tel: 07943 279946; Email: starstonparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

External Audit:

Starston Parish Council is only required by law to complete Part 2 of the AGAR (Annual Governance and Accountability Return) as they are classed as a 'Smaller Authority' this is where the higher of the gross income or gross expenditure was £25,000 or less full council can agree to certify themselves exempt from a limited assurance review with the External Auditors, PKF LittleJohn who was appointed by The Audit Commission.



Starston Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Libby Alexander, 6 Selwyn Gardens, Pulham Market, IP21 4TR
Tel: 07943 279946; Email: starstonparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT

The Council's review should be linked to the internal auditor's written report and include confirmation that:

- minutes record approval of year end accounts (Sections 1 of the Annual Return)
- financial and other risk assessments have been undertaken and periodically reviewed
- Council has adequate insurance cover which is annually reviewed
- Council has acted lawfully in its financial decision making and not exceeded its powers.
- Internal auditor should evidence (by sample testing payments) correct use of legal (powers)
- electors have been given opportunity to inspect accounts and ask questions (public notice given of rights of inspection and completion of audit)
- standing orders and financial regulations are in place and up to date
- supply of goods and services, tendering and management of contracts been dealt with in accordance with SO's and financial regulations
- Council has responded positively to any issues raised in previous IA reports Reviewing Effectiveness of Internal Audit
- Council, as sole managing trustee of any charity, has managed the accounts properly and no charity transactions, funds or reserves appear in the Annual Return (Sect. 1) or the Council's accounts
- cash book (manual or electronic) is reconciled with invoices
- VAT is correctly calculated/applied, linked to invoices and has been reclaimed
- VAT and Section 137 payments are separately recorded
- bank reconciliations provided regularly to 31 March and all are signed and dated by Clerk/RFO
- a budget has been approved and precept (if required) issued and paid
- Council has approved accounts by 30 June **and prior** to receipt of IA report
- all payments including standing orders and direct debits shown in minutes
- significant variations in the Annual Return (Sect. 1) figures explained
- asset register is up to date and concurring with AR Sect. 1 (Box 9)
- pay awards, salary changes and expense payments all minuted
- PAYE records established and tax and NI requirements properly applied



Starston Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Libby Alexander, 6 Selwyn Gardens, Pulham Market, IP21 4TR
Tel: 07943 279946; Email: starstonparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

The Council has responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of:

- The full Council;
- The Clerk to the Council / Responsible Financial Officer who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment and managing risks;
- The independent Internal Auditor who reviews the Council's system of internal control;
- The number of significant issues that are raised during the year.

SIGNIFICANT INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

No significant internal control issues were identified during the **2024/2025** financial year.

Whilst no significant internal control issues were identified during the year the Council strives for the continuous improvement of the system it has adopted for the internal control and has addressed all minor issues and weaknesses raised and reported during the review process.

This Annual Governance Statement of Internal Review was approved at a meeting of Starston Parish Council

On 19th May 2025

Signed

Position on the Council - Chair

Date of next review – May 2026