

Year End Audit Report



Branston Parish Council

Period Audited: April 2024-March 2025

YEAR 24/25

Objective (Automated)	QUESTIONS	Answer	Recommendations
Proper Bookkeeping	What systems are used -	Scribe	
Proper Bookkeeping	ieScribe/Rialtas/Edge/Excel/Quickbooks etc		
Proper Bookkeeping	Is cashbook maintained and up to date?	Yes	
Proper Bookkeeping	Is cashbook arithmetically correct?	Yes	
Proper Bookkeeping	Is the cashbook regularly balanced?	Yes - monthly	
Proper Bookkeeping	What basis are the accounts made up on -	Accruals basis is set in the accounting package.	
	cash or accruals?		
A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND	Has the council formally adopted standing orders and financial regulations?	Yes, reviewed and readopted at March 2025 meeting.	
B) Payment Controls			
A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND	Has a Responsible financial officer been appointed with specific duties?	Yes	
B) Payment Controls			
A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND	Have items or services above the de minimus amount been competitively purchased?	Evidence of quotes being sought and considered by Council within the minutes.	
B) Payment Controls			

<p>A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND B) Payment Controls</p> <p>A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND B) Payment Controls</p> <p>A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND B) Payment Controls</p> <p>A) Standing Orders and Financial Regulations adopted and applied; AND B) Payment Controls</p> <p>Risk Management Arrangements</p> <p>Risk Management Arrangements</p> <p>Risk Management Arrangements</p> <p>Risk Management Arrangements</p> <p>Burial Authority</p> <p>Budgetary Controls</p>	<p>Are payments in the cashbook supported by invoices, authorised and minuted?</p>	<p>Yes, sample documents reviewed and evidenced authorisations in the minutes of the meetings.</p>	
	<p>Has VAT on payments been identified, recorded and reclaimed?</p>	<p>Yes VAT 126 process. Evidence of VAT income received on 24 March 2025.</p>	<p>Given the purchase of a building the Council could consider getting VAT advice on 'Opt to Tax' to ensure that it is able to claim back the costs of refurbishment or any construction work undertaken in future.</p>
	<p>Does the Council have General Power of Competence?</p>	<p>No</p>	
	<p>Is s137 expenditure separately recorded and within statutory limits?</p>	<p>No items flagged within the accounts package, assume no S137 spend.</p>	<p>Ensure that expenditure is within powers and identify this within the accounting package, powers should ideally be minuted.</p>
	<p>Does a review of the minutes identify any unusual financial activity?</p>	<p>No.</p>	
	<p>Do minutes record the council carrying out an annual risk assessment?</p>	<p>No this was delayed to April 2025 due to the Clerk discovering an error which needed to be corrected.</p>	<p>Ensure that the Risk Register is reviewed at least once within the financial year. This is a reason for answering 'No' to Objective C.</p>
	<p>Is insurance cover appropriate and adequate?</p>	<p>The building purchased in 2020 is due for a re-instatement valuation to be carried out to ensure that adequate cover has been provided as building materials have increased significantly since that date. This is something insurance providers require every 5 years or so. The Council has an internal checks system carried out by Councillors quarterly. Signed copies of the checklist are retained in the office. There does not appear to be a separate statement of internal control adopted documenting these activities. Whilst this is not required in law, it does provide a focus to remind the Council to review its procedures and confirm that they are sufficient. There is no evidence in the minutes that the Council performed such a review this financial year.</p>	<p>Seek a re-instatement valuation to ensure that enough insurance has been purchased.</p>
	<p>Are internal financial controls documented and regularly reviewed?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The Council should consider adopting a statement of internal control.</p>
	<p>(Burial Authorities only) Is the Council aware of the Ministry of Justice guidance on "Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials"</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
	<p>Has a sample of burials and interments been tested and the relevant paperwork and payments found to be in place?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
	<p>Has the council prepared an annual budget in support of its precept?</p>	<p>The budget for 2025-26 was prepared and signed off at the January 2025 meeting. However there is no inclusion of the actuals from 2023-24 as is standard practice and the budget is minuted as having been set after the precept was agreed - which is incorrect - the precept has to be set following agreement of an adequate budget.</p>	<p>Ensure that there is a prior year, current year and new year on the budget setting sheet going forward and be careful how this is minuted - the legislation is very clear that the precept must be set after the consideration of a budget. This is the reason for answering 'No' to Objective D.</p>

		Is actual expenditure against the budget regularly reported to the council?	Whilst the bank reconciliations go to Council on a quarterly basis there is no evidence of budget monitoring reports being seen by the Council documented in the minutes. There are no papers attached to the published agendas so it is difficult to know what has actually been circulated.	Consider publishing reports on the website with the agenda to improve transparency. Ensure that a budget monitoring report from the Scribe system is produced and issued to Council for review.
Budgetary Controls				
		Are there any significant unexplained variances from budget?	No - the variances have been explained but these highlight an error in accounting practices. The Council is operating income and expenditure accounting and the 'errors' mentioned should have been accounted for as adjustments if they were known at the time or as amendments to be noted as 'restated' on the AGAR this year.	I would recommend that the Clerk be supported to attend training on the different accounting methods and year-end practices for both.
Budgetary Controls			This has been highlighted to the Clerk who has arranged for the corrections to be carried out.	
Income Controls		Is income properly recorded and promptly banked?	Yes, most receipts deposited directly online.	
			The figures were correct but there was an error in the wording on the notice. This also varies from the published figures by the Government which has been submitted by the District Council (£207,950 vs £194,385 banked).	
		Does the precept recorded agree to the Council Tax authority's notification?	Upon checking it appears that the District Council has incorrectly included a grant within the figures submitted to Government.	
Income Controls				
Income Controls		Are security controls over cash and near-cash adequate and effective?	Yes	
Petty Cash Procedures		Is all petty cash spent recorded and supported by VAT invoices/receipts?	N/A	
Petty Cash Procedures		Is petty cash expenditure reported to each council meeting?	N/A	
Petty Cash Procedures		Is petty cash reimbursement carried out regularly?	N/A	
		Do all employees have contracts of employment with clear terms and conditions?	Yes	
Payroll Controls				
Payroll Controls		Do salaries paid agree with those approved by the council?	Yes	
Payroll Controls		Are other payments to employees reasonable and approved by the council?	Yes	
Payroll Controls		Have PAYE/NIC been properly operated by the council as an employer?	Yes	
Asset Control		Does the council maintain a register of all material assets owned or in its care?	Yes.	
Asset Control		Are the assets and Investments registers up to date?	Yes.	
		Do asset insurance valuations agree with those in the asset register?	Reviewed amounts and all seems to tally. I am not sure if a revaluation has been carried out on any of the buildings for re-instatement purposes, this is something that the Council should review periodically to ensure that it has enough insurance or that it is not over insured.	
Bank Reconciliation		Is there a bank reconciliation for each account?	Individual reconciliations not provided but the 'all banks reconciliation' reports provided summarises all of the banks onto one page and checks the balances match.	
			No, there seems to be a several month delay to carry out the all bank reconciliation. Unsure if this is the same for individual accounts as a report isn't stored in the system (system design issue, not the Clerk's error) but would expect this to be done monthly to ensure any issues are spotted quickly and can be resolved whilst the matter is still 'fresh'.	Ensure monthly reconciliations are carried out promptly.
Bank Reconciliation		Is a bank reconciliation carried out regularly and in a timely fashion?		
Bank Reconciliation		Are there any unexplained balancing entries in any reconciliation?	April 2024 - does not balance and no explanation minuted in Council minutes. It's a small sum which disappears off the reports later on so appears to have been dealt with.	Ensure that issues are reported to Council and that this is minuted to provide an audit trail.
Bank Reconciliation		Is the value of investments held summarised on the reconciliation?	Yes	

		Are year end accounts prepared on the correct accounting basis (Receipts and Payments or Income and Expenditure)?	Yes, a discussion with the clerk highlighted some errors in handling the year-end conversion within the software but these have now been addressed and the accounts represent the accurate position of the Council.	
	Year End Procedures	Do accounts agree with the cashbook?	Yes, Scribe is a self-balancing system.	
	Year End Procedures	Is there an audit trail from underlying financial records to the accounts?	Yes.	
	Year End Procedures	Where appropriate, have debtors and creditors been properly recorded?	Yes.	
	Year End Procedures	Is the Council are Market Authority and if so please provide a list of regular market traders so we can check their contracts & a rate card for contracted and casual traders	N/A	
	Market Authority			Restricted access can be provided to the Scribe system which would allow the Assistant Clerk to input invoices and for purchase orders to be logged centrally. This would also help with the year-end processes. I recommend that the system's functionality be fully utilised for the new financial year.
		Do you manage any facilities, what systems do you use to record bookings and payments?	A separate calendar in outlook is used to log bookings. Invoices are raised outside of the accounting system by the Assistant Clerk who does not have access to Scribe. The team is currently looking at an alternative booking system.	
	Facilities			
		Is the Council registered with the Information Commissioner? If so what is the Reference Number and what is the date of expiry	Yes - ZZ01566X - 20 Dec 2025	
	Other Issues			
		What arrangements does the Council have for the back up of computer files?	This is outsourced to an IT company.	
	Other Issues			
		Does the Council have responsibility for any Trust Funds or Charities? If so, are they independently examined?	N/A	
	Other Issues			
		Record of Minutes	Minutes are available online and are complete. Some discrepancies noted where the Council appears to go into confidential session for an item but its not clear if the meeting is re-opened for the public to attend for the remaining items which should be in public session - eg finance and planning applications (sample refs May and July 2024 meetings). Practice of writing 'Resolved - Council agreed' - should really set out the specifics of the decision so that it is entirely clear what has been decided eg 'Resolved: That the Council approve and adopt the XYZ policy.	Council to ensure that it is not considering public items in confidential session without due cause. Agendas are normally organised to leave confidential matters to the end so that as much of the meetings can be conducted in open session as possible.
			The Annual Meeting in May did not follow the format laid out in Standing Orders, consequently a number of documents do not appear to have been reviewed within the financial year - Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Complaints policy, Risk Management policy and register etc.	The Annual Meeting of the Council has a set running order in Standing Orders which ensures that the Council is reviewing documents and subscriptions etc at least annually - the Clerk should seek to follow his for future annual meetings. This is a reason for answering 'No' to Objective C.
	Other Issues			
		Do the Council have a .gov.uk domain and dedicated email addresses for Council business?	No the website is co.uk domain. The Clerk does have gov.uk domain email address. Confusingly there is no mention of the 'Mere' part of the Council's name which enables confusion with Branston Parish Council in Staffordshire. The Clerk has advised that the Council will be moving to a gov.uk address in the new financial year.	Consider altering the domain name to distinguish the Council from others with the same name.
	Other Issues			
		Internal Audit report published by 1st July on the website?	Only the tick sheet within the AGAR form was published. Whilst this meets the criteria for the AGAR requirements, where a Council has an accompanying narrative report, this should also be published for full transparency.	The narrative report of the internal auditor should be published to increase transparency - this is recommended in the national guidance.
		Payments made in accordance with financial regulations, cheques, online banking, BACS, DD, credit or debit cards, other payments	Yes.	
	Other Issues			

S137 Grants- Do Grant Recipients fill in a report after given?

(during the 2024-25 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2023-24 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).

Are all the councils policies available to view on the PC Website?

Any other issues that are worthy of reporting.

No grants given.

The notice was published on the website however the document uploaded was not completed with an announcement date or contact information on how to gain access to the accounts. These documents were all published in a news item but they are not easily accessible from the finance page. Dates were confirmed in the minutes, however which enables this to be ticked yes.

There is a good array of policies but they were difficult to find - I would expect a menu item on the main menu, not a heading of 'Legals' in the footer of the website. This is usually for the terms and conditions of use of the website, not the provision of the Council's general policy documents. Similarly, the Finance page should have a main menu link - not be hidden on the bottom of a very long page of information. These are all issues that can be easily addressed with the website provider and do not impact on the audit opinion - just something to work on to improve access.

A quick scan of the website reveals a few accessibility issues which the Council should seek to address - mostly contrast issues due to colour choices so these are simple to fix.

Consider how the documents are published going forward to ensure that they are easily accessible and provide the relevant audit trail information.

Consider adjusting the website to ensure that documents are easy to locate. Any datasets provided should be in a re-usable format too eg csv files for expenditure/contract information. An 'Access to Information' page would be beneficial to improve transparency.

Suggest a review of the website would be beneficial both using the transparency guide and accessibility regulations to ensure that it is meeting expected standards.