

Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26 Form 3

To be completed by Local Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and other Smaller Authorities*:

- where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure exceeded £25,000 but did not exceed £15 million; or
- where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure was £25,000 or less but that:
 - are unable to certify themselves as exempt (fee payable); or
 - have requested a limited assurance review (fee payable)

Guidance notes on completing Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26

1. Every smaller authority in England that either received gross income or incurred gross expenditure exceeding £25,000 **must** complete Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return at the end of each financial year in accordance with *Proper Practices*.
2. **The Annual Governance and Accountability Return is made up of three parts, pages 3 to 6:**
 - The **Annual Internal Audit Report** must be completed by the authority's internal auditor.
 - **Sections 1 and 2** must be completed and approved by the authority.
 - **Section 3** is completed by the external auditor and will be returned to the authority.
3. The authority **must** approve Section 1, Annual Governance Statement, before approving Section 2, Accounting Statements, and both **must** be approved and published on the authority website/webpage **before 1 July 2026**.
4. An authority with either gross income or gross expenditure exceeding £25,000 or an authority with neither income nor expenditure exceeding £25,000, but which is unable to certify itself as exempt, or is requesting a limited assurance review, **must** return to the external auditor by email or post (not both) **no later than 30 June 2026** Reminder letters will incur a charge of £40 +VAT:
 - the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Sections 1 and 2, together with
 - a bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2026
 - an explanation of any significant year on year variances in the accounting statements
 - notification of the commencement date of the period for the exercise of public rights
 - Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26

Unless requested, do not send any additional documents to your external auditor. Your external auditor will ask for any additional documents needed.

Once the external auditor has completed the limited assurance review and is able to give an opinion, the Annual Governance and Accountability Return **Section 1, Section 2 and Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate** will be returned to the authority by email or post.

Publication Requirements

Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities **must** publish the following information on the authority website/webpage:

Before 1 July 2026 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 2025/26** approved and signed, page 4
- **Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2025/26** approved and signed, page 5

Not later than 30 September 2026 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.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return constitutes the annual return referred to in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Throughout, the words 'external auditor' have the same meaning as the words 'local auditor' in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

**for a complete list of bodies that may be smaller authorities refer to schedule 2 to the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.*

Guidance notes on completing Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2025/26

- The authority **must** comply with *Proper Practices* in completing Sections 1 and 2 of this AGAR. *Proper Practices* are found in the *Practitioners' Guide** which is updated from time to time and contains everything needed to prepare successfully for the financial year-end and the subsequent work by the external auditor.
- Make sure that the AGAR is complete (no highlighted boxes left empty) and is properly signed and dated. Any amendments **must** be approved by the authority and properly initialled.
- The authority **should** receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report before approving the Annual Governance Statement and the accounts.
- Use the checklist provided below to review the AGAR for completeness before returning it to the external auditor by email or post (not both) no later than 30 June 2026
- The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) **must** be approved before the Accounting Statements (Section 2) and evidenced by the agenda or minute references, even where approved on the same day.
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) **must** certify the accounts (Section 2) before they are presented to the authority for approval. The authority **must** in this order; consider, approve and sign the accounts.
- The RFO is required to commence the public rights period which **must** be a single period of 30 working days for inspection (this excludes weekends and public holidays) which **must** include the first 10 working days of July.
- You must inform your external auditor about any change of Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer or Chair, and provide relevant authority owned generic email addresses and telephone numbers.**
- Make sure that the copy of the bank reconciliation to be sent to your external auditor with the AGAR covers all the bank accounts. If the authority holds any short-term investments, note their value on the bank reconciliation. The external auditor **must** be able to agree the bank reconciliation to Box 8 on the accounting statements (**Section 2, page 5**). An explanation **must** be provided of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8. More help on bank reconciliation is available in the *Practitioners' Guide**.
- Explain fully significant variances in the accounting statements on **page 5**. Do not just send a copy of the detailed accounting records instead of this explanation. The external auditor wants to know that you understand the reasons for all variances. Include complete numerical and narrative analysis to support the full variance.
- Additional costs may be incurred if additional audit work is required.
- Make sure that the accounting statements add up and that the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2025) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2026).
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), on behalf of the authority, **must** set the commencement date for the exercise of public rights which **must** be a single period of 30 working days for inspection (this excludes weekends and public holidays) which **must** include the first 10 working days of July.
- The authority **must** publish on the authority website/webpage the information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, including the period for the exercise of public rights and the name and address of the external auditor **before 1 July 2026**

Completion checklist – 'No' answers mean you may not have met requirements		Yes	No
All sections	Have all highlighted boxes have been completed?		
	Has all additional information requested, including the dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights , been provided for the external auditor?		
Internal Audit Report	Have all highlighted boxes been completed by the internal auditor and explanations provided?		
Section 1	For any statement to which the response is 'no', has an explanation been published?		
Section 2	Has the Responsible Financial Officer signed the accounting statements before presentation to the authority for approval?		
	Has the authority's approval of the accounting statements been confirmed by the signature of the Chair of the approval meeting?		
	Has an explanation of significant variations been published where required?		
	Has the bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2026 been reconciled to Box 8?		
	Has an explanation of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8 been provided?		
Sections 1 and 2	Trust funds – have all disclosures been made if the authority as a body corporate is a sole managing trustee? NB: do not send trust accounting statements unless requested.		

***Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices**, can be downloaded from www.nalc.gov.uk or from www.ada.org.uk

Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26

BETHERSDEN PARISH COUNCIL

www.bethersden-pc.gov.uk PUBLICLY AVAILABLE WEBSITE/WEBPAGE ADDRESS

During the financial year ended 31 March 2026, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2025/26 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

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 financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
C. This authority assessed 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. Cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all 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 2024/25, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2024/25 AGAR tick "not covered")			✓
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. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (during the 2025/26 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2024-25 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).	✓		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2024/25 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	✓		
O. The authority has complied with laws, regulations & proper practices relating to digital and data compliance.		✓	
P. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	Yes	No	Not applicable
			✓

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

20/05/2026 MM/YYYY DD/MM/YYYY

HELEN BROUGHTON

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit



Date

20/05/2026

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

**Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).

AGAR 2025/26

Annual Governance Statements

Name of Authority: Bethersden Parish Council

Web address: <https://www.bethersden-pc.gov.uk>

We acknowledge, as the members of the above authority, our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2026, that:

We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements. Yes

We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness. Yes

We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-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. No

We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations. Yes

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. No

We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems. Yes

We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit. Yes

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. Yes

Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit. N/A

We have put in place arrangements for the effective IT and data management in accordance with proper practices during the year under review. No

For any statement to which the response is 'no', an explanation follows on the next page.

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

On this date

As recorded in minute reference

10/06/2026 102/2026

Signed by the Chair and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Signed by Chair

Aileen S. Baya JP

Signed by Clerk

Raymond

*Published web address

www.bethersden-pc.gov.uk

2025/26

Accounting Statements

Name of Authority: Bethersden Parish Council

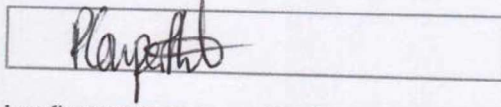
Key	Year ending 31	Year ending 31
	March 2025	March 2026
Balances brought forward	£66,475	£74,508
Precept	£45,000	£65,000
Total other receipts	£20,262	£44,933
Staff Costs	£19,657	£18,477
Loan interest/capital repayments	£0	£0
All other payments	£37,572	£143,263
Balances carried forward	£74,508	£22,701
Total value of cash and short term investments	£74,508	£22,701
Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	£360,165	£360,165
Total borrowings	£0	£0

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2026 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities - a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval:

Signed by the Responsible Financial Officer

Date



10/06/2026

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

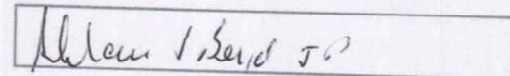
On this date

As recorded in minute reference

Signed by Chair

10/06/2026

103/2026



Do the figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions?

Yes

If your council's declaration in respect of trust funds has changed from the prior year, please provide an explanation for this change

No change

Restated figures

Do you need to restate figures from your previous years annual statements?

No

Please give full details why any figure needs to be restated

Section 3 – External Auditor’s Report and Certificate 2025/26

In respect of

Bethersden Parish Council

1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/> .

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2026 and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

2 External auditor’s limited assurance opinion 2025/26

Except for the matters reported below on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

See separate report.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

See separate report.

3 External auditor certificate 2025/26

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2026

*We do not certify completion because:

Not applicable

External Auditor Name

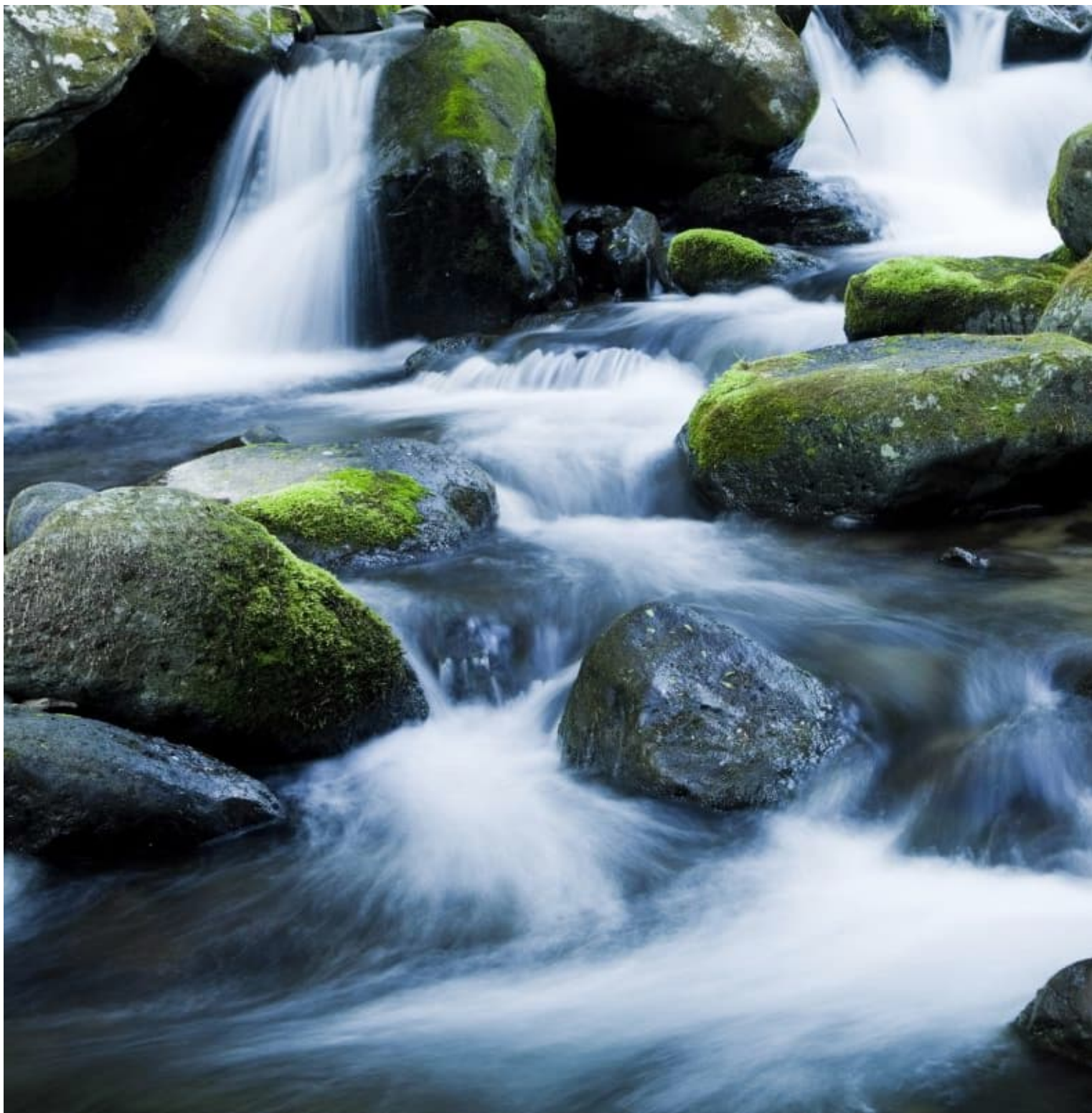
Forvis Mazars LLP, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 1DF

External Auditor Signature

Forvis Mazars LLP

Date

25 September 2026



Bethersden Parish Council

External Auditor Continuation Report
2025/2026

forv/s
mazars

Introduction

This page is part of Section 3 – External Audit Report 2025/2026

The following matters have been raised to draw items to the attention of Bethersden Parish Council. These matters came to the attention of Forvis Mazars LLP during the review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Report (AGAR) for the year ended 31 March 2026. This report must be presented alongside the AGAR to a full meeting of the smaller authority for review.

The review of the annual return may not disclose all shortcomings of the systems as some matters may not have come to the attention of the auditor. For this reason, the matters raised may not be the only ones that exist.

Except for the matters reported below on the basis of our review of the annual return, in our opinion the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met.

During our limited assurance review, it came to our attention the Council did not publish the final, externally audited version of the 2024/25 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and completion notice on a free to access website in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015). The Council have incorrectly answered assertion 4 as 'Yes'. In 2026/27 the Council needs to put in place arrangements to ensure that it fully complies with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

The Council has not corrected the following error(s) at Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) so the AGAR has not been prepared in accordance with proper practices:

- Fixed assets at Box 9 was initially incorrect because the entry was not adjusted for acquisitions and disposals during the year. This relates specifically to the purchase of a new play area which was included in the Box 6 variance at £89,594.

In 2026/27, the Council should review the spending on the play area to assess the amount to be included within fixed assets and should restate the box 9 balance within the AGAR to ensure it is prepared in accordance with proper practices.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the smaller authority:

In undertaking the review of the 2025/26 Annual and Accountability Return (AGAR) it came to our attention that the Council had not complied with laws, regulations and proper practices when conducting its business and/or managing its finances. The internal highlighted the notice of conclusion of audit was not on the council website, which resulted in internal audit objective L being ticked as 'No'. The Council correctly answered "No" to the relevant assertion in the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement. The Council should ensure all laws and regulations are complied with during 2026/27 and should tick the relevant assertion as "No" where known instances of non-compliance are identified by the Council.

In undertaking the review of the 2025/26 Annual and Accountability Return (AGAR) it came to our attention that the Council had not carried out a risk assessment and taken appropriate steps to manage risks. The Council

correctly answered “No” to the relevant assertion in the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that it has conducted a risk assessment and introduces internal controls to ensure that risks are effectively managed.

In undertaking the review of the 2025/26 Annual and Accountability Return (AGAR) it came to our attention that the Council had not put in place arrangements for effective information technology and data management in accordance with proper practices during the year under review. The Council has correctly answered “No” to the relevant assertion in the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure it complies with proper practices in this area and should tick ‘No’ to assertion 10 if this is not achieved in 2026/27.

No other matters came to our attention.

For and on behalf of Forvis Mazars LLP

Date: 25 September 2026

Contacts

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