



Dodington Parish Council

DRAFT MINUTES of **Full Council Meeting** of the Parish Council held in Council Chamber adjacent to Dodington Parish Hall on **Monday 12th May 2025** at 8:15pm .

PRESENT: Councillors Richard Evans, David Fitt, Bob Graham, Louise Harris, Christine Howard, Paul Hulbert, Sarah Hurley, Adrian Hutton (Chairing Meeting), Sandra Jee, Oliver Lodge, Laura Pearson Tong, Karl Tomasin, Jean Thomas and Chris Zapata

ALSO PRESENT: Hannah Saunders Clerk to the Council – Clerking the Meeting, Ward Councillor Ben Stokes

451/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Were received and accepted from Ward Councillors Marilyn Palmer and Cheryl Kirby.

452/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

Clerk declared an interest in **Item 17** and will leave Chambers whilst that item is being discussed (Cllr Laura Pearson Tong will take notes).

453/25 PARISHIONERS QUESTIONS

None

454/25 TO APPROVE MINUTES OF FULL COUNCIL MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Full Council Meeting on 28th April 2025 as printed / circulated were a true record – and they were duly signed by Cllr Adrian Hutton.

Matters Arising:-

- Clerked thanked Councillors for their help on evening of 8th May 2025 – with VE 80 commemoration.
- Clerk confirmed that letters had been sent to Twinning Association and Yate Town FC.
- Horizon Parking have been in touch – but given issues Co-op experiencing at moment with Cyber Attack the scheme hasn't progressed any further yet.

455/25 MINUTES FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Draft minutes from standing committees were noted – and will be approved accordingly at next relevant committee meeting.

456/25 WARD COUNCILLORS

Due to recent WECA elections it has been relatively quiet.

Cllr Ben Stokes reported on the fact that Adult Social Care which forms a large part of SGC budget spend has been found to be needing improvement in all area's. Cllr Ben Stokes also reported that from 12th May parents with children 9 months and over may be able to apply for 30 hours free childcare a week. This is aimed at helping parents back into work. Further information can be found via the link below. (Those note eligible for 30 hours may be eligible for 15 hours).

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/05/how-to-apply-for-30-hours-free-childcare-and-find-out-if-youre-eligible/#:~:text=15%20and%2030%20hour%20funded%20childcare%20schemes%20explained&text=Places%20are%20funded%20from%20the,eligible%20for%2015%20hours%20instead.>

Cllr Louise Harris followed up stating that following the CQC inspection – SGC were found to be just 4 points below a 'Good' score meaning that they require improvement – and SGC are currently putting a plan together. Cllr Louise Harris reported that following cabinet meeting earlier that day funding for a new primary school in N Yate (Ladden Garden Villages) has been approved. This could affect some primary schools within parish of Dodington – as once it is open – Children won't have to travel out to school as they currently do.

Cllr Louise Harris updated members that following the WECA election there have been positive discussions with the new mayor – particularly around the issue of public transport and buses. September is when next lot of changes to timetables are due. Cllr Louise Harris confirmed that Cllr Willmore raises the matter of buses at every opportunity....including trying to get area re categorized from 'Rural' status (which Yate clearly isn't).

Finally, Cllr Louise Harris reminded members that car parking charges in SG owned car parks will be coming into force from Monday 19th May 2025. In Yate – if you are using Yate Leisure Centre – and parking there – you won't have to pay.

<https://sites.southglos.gov.uk/newsroom/business-and-economy/off-street-car-park-charging-scheme-to-launch-in-south-gloucestershire-on-monday-19-may/>

457/25 STANDING ORDERS & FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Both the standing orders and financial regulations were updated earlier in year (following changes to contract law). It was agreed to **defer** item to next full council meeting – once Clerk had chance to double check if any further amendments required.

458/25 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference (TofR) for standing committees were reviewed.

Amendments to be made to Staffing & Personnel Committee TofR following decision at AMPC regarding how committee membership is established.

It was proposed by Cllr Laura Pearson Tong and seconded by Cllr Paul Hulbert and **RESOLVED** to adopt – following amends.

(Copy of updated Terms of Reference can be viewed – **Appendix 1** attached to these minutes).

459/25 INSURANCE RENEWAL

Clerk apologized that information hadn't been sent out prior to meeting – however quotes had only been received late afternoon.

Clerk explained that none of the providers offer 5 year long term agreements (LTA) any longer – they offer 1 or 3 years and all providers have quoted for 1 or 3 years.

As well as existing provider (Zurich) 2 further companies had been approached for quotes (Gallagher and Clear Councils Insurance).

Gallagher initially didn't want to quote – as they weren't able to offer discount due to DPCs claim history – but they did submit top line information.

Clerk presented a comparison table to members for consideration. It was unanimously agreed to discount Gallagher as they weren't competitive compared to the other 2 companies – (regardless of that they hadn't given full details on level of cover they would provide).

Looking at quotes on table for 1 or 3 year agreement – it was proposed by Cllr Paul Hulbert and seconded by Cllr Adrian Hutton and **RESOLVED** that a 3 year LTA be entered into – as this prudent way forward.

The premiums for 3 year LTA for Zurich and Clear Council's were very similar (£100 difference) – so clerk explained levels of cover that each provider was offering. Clerk stated that due to lateness of quotes – was happy if members wanted to defer decision to following week (CL&E committee) – but didn't feel recommendation to council would change.

Reviewing level of cover provided, plus the service given over last 5 years – Clerk would recommend appointing Zurich.

Members agreed with this and it was proposed by Cllr Paul Hulbert and seconded by Cllr Oliver Lodge and **RESOLVED** to appoint Zurich as insurance provider going forward from 1st June 2025 – cost of £5,577.29 for the year.

Appendix 2 attached to these minutes illustrates comparison table.

460/25 INTERNAL AUDITORS REPORT

The internal audit report had been shared with members prior to meeting. There was one question regarding Petty Cash – and how parish council handles adhoc purchases if they don't have Petty Cash.

Clerk explained that Estates team have fuel cards and trade cards (as per Financial Regulations) and if anything is ordered via Murray Tool Hire, etc. it is invoiced to the office to be paid on next pay run.

The Parish Council also have a Natwest Credit Card – so if any items have to be ordered online or purchased locally – this can be used (and is reconciled accordingly each month). No cash is held in office – and even with payments for bookings – 99% is done electronically – so where as cash used to be paid for party bookings – this no longer happens. Regular users pay via BACs or Cheque. Clerk confirmed that parish council don't take accept credit cards.

On the rare occasion that staff member purchases something and doesn't have credit card – a receipt is provided with explanation and staff member reimbursed accordingly on next pay run.

461/25 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The annual governance statement for 2024 – 25 was received by council – and it was proposed by Cllr Christine Howard and seconded by Cllr Paul Hulbert and **RESOLVED** to approve it. Chair and Clerk signed statement accordingly.

462/25 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The statement of accounts for 2024 – 25 was received by council – clerk explaining that any significant variances year on year (+/- 15%) had to be explained to External Auditors upon submission of AGAR.

It was proposed by Cllr Paul Hulbert and seconded by Cllr David Fitt and **RESOLVED** to approve Statement of Accounts and they were duly signed by Chair of Council.

463/25 EXERCISE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS

This gives an opportunity for electors and their representatives to inspect documents and to question external auditor. Dates for publication of Notice for Public Rights is governed by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 Sections 26 & 27 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234).

Dates must include first 10 working days of July.

The dates selected for Dodington – **3rd June 2025 – 14th July 2025** incl.

Copy of notice can be viewed **Appendix 3** attached to these minutes.

464/25 APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2025 – 26

Following on from recent Internal Audit – the IA was appointed for 2 years – and although don't have to review auditors as regularly as 2 years – members decision in 2023 / 2024 was to appoint Mrs Pat Trull for 2 years – and then review – but earlier in year (council calendar) than had done in 2023.

As such Clerk recommended that as per ToFR 2.6 for F&GP committee that a report is put together for next meeting (9th June 2025) with a report / recommendation to go to Full Council on 30th June 2025.

This was **agreed** and it was noted that requirements for IA are that they are 'competent' and 'independent'.

465/25 ADVERTISING

After due consideration it was **RESOLVED** to approve advertising in Voice for 3 months (June, July and August). Half page adverts – promoting Summer Concert and premises to hire / volunteers needed.

It was also requested that on hall booking forms – a question is added regarding how person heard about 'Dodington Parish Hall / Chambers / Facilities' so that can ascertain if advertising is having a positive impact or not.

466/25 FINANCE MATTERS

Payments and receipts for April 2025 were received – all in order.

Bank reconciliation for April 2025 – were duly received and signed by Chair and Clerk.

467/25 ITEMS TO REPORT

- Cllr Christine Howard reported that hedge / brambles that had needed cutting back on Merlin – had been done by SGC Streetcare – she and neighbour – very pleased.
- Cllr Paul Hulbert reported that 1st Abbotswood Guides would be helping with the Merlin Mini Meadow in July.
- Cllr Oliver Lodge was pleased to report that 'nuisance / abandoned' vehicle on Merlin had been removed.

- Cllr Louise Harris questioned if it had been ascertained who was responsible for some grounds maintenance on Gold Crest – following an enquiry from a resident. Cllr Paul Hulbert confirmed that he was looking into matter with Deputy Clerk.

*Subject to SO 3e – meeting went into closed session and clerk left chambers.
Minutes are recorded confidentially.*

Open session resumed.

As there was no further business the meeting was closed at 9:25pm – with Chair thanking everyone for attending.

Next meeting of Full Council is on – Monday 30th June 2025

SignedChair

Date Monday 30th June 2025

APPENDIX ONE

DODINGTON PARISH COUNCIL (DPC)

Terms of Reference

Full Council

To be read in conjunction with Standing Orders (written rules of a local council) and essential to regulate the proceedings of a meeting.

As per SO 4di (The Council may appoint standing committees or other committees as may be necessary, and: shall determine their terms of reference.

The following items shall be for decision by Full Council only. Appropriate committees may make recommendations for consideration by Full Council.

1. The Precept
2. Public Works Loans / Borrowing
3. Agreeing Budget
4. Appointing Chair and Vice Chair of Council
5. Confirming schedule of meetings for Full Council / Committees for ensuing year
6. Granting of Dispensations*
7. Making, amending or revoking Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Terms of Reference and Policies
8. Making, amending or revoking of Bylaws
9. Making of Orders under Statutory Powers
10. Appointment of Internal Auditor
11. To receive letter of assurance, action plan, comments / recommendations made by the Internal / External Auditors
12. To receive and approve annual governance statement prior to 30th June
13. To receive and approve annual accounting statement prior to 30th June
14. To receive and note accounts following any amendment required by external auditor
15. Nomination or appointment of representatives of the Parish Council on any authority, organisation or body
16. Appointment of Committees. Appointment of Sub-Committees and Working Groups *
17. Receive details of new powers / duties
18. Prosecution or defence in a court of law
19. Nomination or appointment of representative of the Council to any enquiry or matters affecting the Parish Council
20. Receipt of reports and decisions on recommendations from Committees
21. Authorising the sealing of various documents (note DPC doesn't have a common seal – see SO 23b)
22. Staffing, establishment and governance matters (also included in F&GP Committee and S&P Sub Committee TOR)
23. To deal with all issues where time prevents them being referred to the relevant Committee
24. To consider and submit comments on planning applications and street trading where time prevents consideration they the Planning and Travel Committee
25. To agree banking arrangements and agree investment strategy (referred from F&GP Committee)
26. To write off bad debts (over £50) referred from Finance & General Purposes Committee

27. Virement between one cost centre and another
 28. Declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence GPC (at the Annual Meeting of Parish Council every 4th year – election year)
 29. Payments in relation to termination of staff contracts (included in F&GP TOR)
 30. Co-option of a councillor(s)
 31. Granting a special leave of absence to a councillor
 32. Risk Management – to review / approve risk assessments
 33. Any other matters not delegated to a Committee / Sub Committee
 34. To review Parish Council Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Code of Conduct as necessary, annually or on release of a revised NALC model
 35. To approve Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Code of Conduct (attached as Appendix 1,2 & 3 to this document).
- *Also included in Terms of Reference for CL&E, P&T, F&GP Committee and Staffing & Personnel Sub Committee

Terms of Reference

Community, Leisure & Environment Committee (CL&E)

1. Delegated Responsibilities

CL&E Committee has delegated authority to deal with following matters to conclusion: -

1.1 To grant dispensations *

1.2 Administration, maintenance and use of DPC existing facilities / assets

-) All Public Open Spaces (POS) & Parks (Lilliput Park)
-) DPC Sports facilities and sports buildings (QEII Playing Fields)
-) Children's play areas (Lilliput, Goldcrest & Woodchester)
-) Wapley Nature Reserve & Common & Picnic Field
-) DPC Allotments (2 sites)

1.3 Setting of terms and conditions and of use and provision of relevant equipment for areas under control

1.4 Setting of fees for use of areas under control

1.5 Liaison with community organisations which have an interest in recreational facilities under DPCs control

1.6 Working with community groups to support them in providing services in our community

1.7 Allocation of grants and donations within the agreed criteria and budget of DPC

1.8 To consider any matter concerning residents within parish

1.9 To consider all youth matters

-) Summer Playscheme
-) Football / Sports Coaching
-) Youth Group Funding
-) Uniformed Brigades

1.10 To consider recommendations put forward by all Sub-Committees / Working Groups which report to CL&E Committee and make decisions within budget without referring to Full Council ^

1.11 To set up and disband such Sub-Committees / Working Groups as and when necessary

1.12 To deal with consultations which time prevents being presented to Full Council *

1.13 To consider and comment on planning applications and street trading where time prevents consideration by Planning and Travel Committee

1.14 To consider options for community space should DPC take ownership of land /space in future community right to bid

- 1.15 To consider matters relating to events within Dodington (and Yate / Chipping Sodbury – neighbouring councils) whether organised by DPC or other organisations / councils
- 1.16 To grant delegated powers to sub-committees under remit of CL&E Committee

2. Referred Responsibilities

CL&E Committee will consider and make recommendations to Full Council on the following:-

- 2.1 Prepare budget estimates for CL&E Committee if required
- 2.2 Provision of additional recreational facilities
- 2.3 Improvements to services within CL&Es responsibilities
- 2.4 To make recommendations for the upgrading of DPC facilities within CL&Es responsibilities
- 2.5 Any other matter referred to the CL&E Committee by Full Council

(Other documents relevant – Community Leisure & Environment Objectives give further details that feed into the revenue budget for year). Attached Appendix 4 to these Terms of Reference

*Also in Terms of Reference for Full Council, P&T, F&GP Committees

^Any project utilising Section 106 monies or CIL Monies must be referred to Full Council for final approval

Current Sub Committees :-

LNAP / Climate & Nature Emergency

Terms of Reference

Planning & Travel Committee (P&T)

1. Delegated Responsibilities

P&T Committee has delegated authority to deal with following matters to conclusion: -

- 1.1 To grant dispensations *
- 1.2 Administration, maintenance and use of Wapley Burial Ground (DPC act as a Burial Authority)
- 1.3 Setting of terms and conditions and of use and provision of relevant equipment for Wapley Burial Ground
- 1.4 Setting of fees for use of Wapley Burial Ground
- 1.5 Liaison with various stakeholders which have an interest in Wapley Burial Ground under DPCs control
- 1.6 Administration, maintenance and use of Bus Shelters and Street Furniture under DPCs control.
- 1.7 Administration, maintenance and use of Car Parks under DPCs control
- 1.8 To consider and submit comments on planning applications, development proposals and street trading licenses sent for consultation by South Gloucestershire Council
- 1.9 To consider and resolve issues affecting highways and transportation, cycleways, development and / or the environment or relating to planning matters upon which DPC is consulted, or in which DPC has an interest
- 1.10 To collate, consider and agree comments on local and strategic planning issues
- 1.11 To discuss matters concerning sustainability (economic, environmental and social)
- 1.12 To liaise with local community regarding Green Energy Projects / Proposals / Developments
- 1.13 To deal with consultation on request for alcohol licenses
- 1.14 To receive request for street naming and make suggestions appropriate to the area
- 1.15 To deal with consultations which time prevents being presented to Full Council
- 1.16 To consider options for community space should DPC take ownership of land /space in future Community right to bid

1.17 To set up and disband such Sub-Committees / Working Groups as and when necessary

1.18 To grant delegated powers to sub-committees under remit of P&T Committee

2.Referred Responsibilities

P&T Committee will consider and make recommendations to Full Council on the following matters:-

2.1 Prepare budget estimates for P&T Committee if required

2.2 Provision of additional burial facilities

2.3 Improvements to services within P&Ts responsibilities

2.4 Any other matter referred to the P&T Committee by Full Council

(Other documents relevant – Planning & Travel Committee Objectives give further details that feed into the revenue budget for year). Attached Appendix 5 to these Terms of Reference

*Also in Terms of Reference for Full Council, CL&E, F&GP Committees

^Any project utilising Section 106 monies or CIL Monies must be referred to Full Council for final approval

Current Sub Committees :-

Terms of Reference

Finance & General Purposes Committee (F&GP)

1. Delegated Responsibilities

F&GP Committee has delegated authority to deal with the following matters to conclusion:-

- 1.1 To grant dispensations*
- 1.2 Administration, maintenance and use of Dodington Parish Hall and Meeting Rooms
- 1.3 Setting of terms and conditions and of use and provision of relevant equipment for Dodington Parish Hall and Meeting Rooms
- 1.4 Setting of fees for use of Dodington Parish Hall and Meeting Rooms
- 1.5 Allocation of grants and donations within the agreed criteria and budget of DPC
- 1.6 To agree Service Level Agreements with external agencies
- 1.7 All financial / accounting matters
- 1.8 Staffing, establishment & governance matters (included on Full Council and S&P Sub Committee TOR)
- 1.9 Leases, Licenses and Land Purchases
- 1.10 To set up and disband such Sub-Committees and Working Groups as and when necessary
- 1.11 To consider recommendations put forward by all Sub-Committees / Working Groups which report to F&GP Committee
- 1.12 To review insurance company providers every 5 years, or earlier if felt to be necessary (including vehicle insurance)
- 1.13 To oversee Civic Duties and Chairmans expenditure
- 1.14 To deal with consultations which time prevents being presented to Full Council
- 1.15 To consider and submit comments on planning applications and street trading where time prevents consideration by the P&T Committee
- 1.16 Payments in relation to termination of Staff Contracts (included in Full Council TOR)
- 1.17 To receive investment report annually
- 1.18 To receive detailed Ear Marked Reserve Report annually.

2. Referred Responsibilities

F&GP Committee will consider and make recommendations to Full Council on the following matters:-

- 2.1 Prepare budget estimates for Finance and General Purposes Committee if required.
- 2.2 Improvements to Parish Hall and Meeting Rooms
- 2.3 To consider and make recommendations to Full Council any write off of bad debts over £50
- 2.4 Monitor income and expenditure with the budget estimates approved by DPC and make necessary recommendations
- 2.5 Any expenditure proposed by other committees, sub-committees or working groups that aren't included in budget estimates
- 2.6 To consider and report to Full Council re the appointment of the Internal Auditor and scope of Internal Audit. To be reviewed every 5 years or earlier if felt necessary
- 2.7 To review banking arrangements and investments annually and report to Full Council
- 2.8 Any other matter referred to F&GP by Full Council

(Other documents relevant – Finance & General Purpose Committee Objectives give further details that feed into the revenue budget for year). Attached Appendix 6 to these Terms of Reference

*Also in Terms of Reference for Full Council, CL&E, P&T Committees

^Any project utilising Section 106 monies or CIL Monies must be referred to Full Council for final approval

Current Sub Committees :-

Staffing & Personnel Committee

Terms of Reference

Staffing & Personnel Sub Committee

(responsible to Full Council and Finance & General Purposes Committee)

1. Membership

1.1 *Vice Chairs of Full Council and Standing Committee's **plus** up to 5 other councillors that **aren't** Chair of Council or any committee. Minimum of 6 councillors / maximum of 9. Quorum to be 3. Committee membership to be confirmed following AMPC and round of committee meetings each year. Should an independent panel be required – then this would be made up of Chairs of Full Council and Standing Committee's.*

2. Delegated Responsibilities

The sub-committee has delegated authority to deal with the following matters to conclusion – subject to DPC policy and budget.

2.1 To support Clerk with recruitment and appointment of staff – with 3 nominated councillors to participate in recruitment for senior officers

2.3 To support Council with recruitment and appointment of Clerk – with 3 nominated councillors to participate in recruitment process

2.2 To support Clerk with ongoing review process – and to carry out Clerks review annually

2.3 To support Clerk and any working groups when appointing contractors / consultants

2.4 To report recommendations on staffing matters / voluntary positions to relevant committees or Full Council

2.5 Any staffing matters delegated by Full Council or F&GP Committee

2.6 To review training for councillors – and help enable / facilitate

2.7 To review and recommend Staff Salaries to Full Council

2.8 To review and recommend terms and conditions of employment to Full Council

2.9 Reviewing Service Level Agreements for HR Services and recommending to Full Council

2.10 Promotion of equal opportunities for all employees and volunteers of the Council in the Council's recruitment and selection process, and to monitor the effectiveness of such measures

2.11 To establish panel for hearings or appeal hearings when required (that have come from staffing policies – Managing Employee Performance, Managing Ill Health and Sickness and Grievance Policies etc).

2.12 To investigate all matters relating grievance, disciplinary matters and dismissals

2.13 To review staff structure

2.14 To propose payments in relation to termination of staff contracts

3. Referred Responsibilities

- 3.1 To recommend any changes to staffing structure
- 3.2 To discuss with Clerk, staff issues relating to staffing levels and regarding pay levels, staff structures and make recommendations to Full Council
- 3.3 Any other matter referred to the Staffing and Personnel Sub-Committee by Finance & General Purpose Committee or Full Council

** (not included yet – May 2025 – but document including all of below will be available online once Standing Orders and Financial Regulations have been reviewed at end June 2025).

Appendix 1

Standing Orders

Appendix 2

Financial Regulations

Appendix 3

Code of Conduct

Appendix 4

CL&E Objectives / Budget 25 – 26

Appendix 5

P&T Objectives / Budget 25 – 26

Appendix 6

F&GP Objectives / Budget 25 – 26

Staffing Element 25 - 26

Appendix 7

Policy Schedule

Appendix 8

Combined budget for year

APPENDIX TWO

Insurance Core Cover Comparison

Covers	Zurich New	Clear Council	Gallagher
Public Liability	£12,000,000	£10,000,000	
Hirers Liability	£2,000,000	£2,000,000	
Employers' Liability	£10,000,000	£10,000,000	
Officials Indemnity	??		
Libel and Slander	£500,000	Yes but amount not conf	
Fidelity Guarantee	£500,000	£500,000	
Personal Accident Changed in this quote split into employee's, members, volunteers and key personnel and then broken down per type of accident	Cover limited to £50,000 to anyone person	Cover limited to £10,000 Clerk absence not insured Key person insured...	
Legal Expenses	£200,000	?? tbc	
Loss of money in transit	£5000	£5000	
Defibrillators & cabinets	£3200		
Loss of Revenue	£20,000	£20,000	
Cost of current Insurance			
Annual cover cost: -			
1 year cover cost	£6151.26	£5904.65	£9843.82
2 year cover cost	-	-	-
3 year cover cost	£5577.29	£5684.00	£9843.82

Building Sum Insured

Parish Hall - £ 1,597,727.38

QE II Changing Rooms - £567,000.000

Plus contents as per asset register..... Budget 2025 / 2026 for Insurance £7,000

APPENDIX THREE

Name of Smaller authority: **DODINGTON PARISH COUNCIL**

NOTICE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS AND PUBLICATION OF UNAUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

**Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 Sections 26 and 27
The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)**

NOTICE	NOTES
1. Date of announcement <u>MONDAY 2ND JUNE 2025</u> (a) 2. Each year the smaller authority's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) needs to be reviewed by an external auditor appointed by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd. The unaudited AGAR has been published with this notice. As it has yet to be reviewed by the appointed auditor, it is subject to change as a result of that review. Any person interested has the right to inspect and make copies of the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records must be made available for inspection by any person interested. For the year ended 31 March 2025, these documents will be available on reasonable notice by application to: (b) <u>HANNAH SAUNDERS – CLERK TO THE COUNCIL</u> <u>CLERK@DODINGTONPC.ORG.UK</u> OR 01454 866546 commencing on (c) <u>TUESDAY 3RD JUNE 2025</u> and ending on (d) <u>MONDAY 14TH JULY 2025</u> 3. Local government electors and their representatives also have: • The opportunity to question the appointed auditor about the accounting records; and • The right to make an objection which concerns a matter in respect of which the appointed auditor could either make a public interest report or apply to the court for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful. Written notice of an objection must first be given to the auditor and a copy sent to the smaller authority. The appointed auditor can be contacted at the address in paragraph 4 below for this purpose between the above dates only. 4. The smaller authority's AGAR is subject to review by the appointed auditor under the provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the NAO's Code of Audit Practice 2015. The appointed auditor is: BDO LLP Arcadia House Maritime Walk Ocean Village Southampton SO14 3TL ✉ councilaudits@bdo.co.uk 5. This announcement is made by (e) <u>H C SAUNDERS – CLERK & RFO</u>	(a) Insert date of placing of the notice which must be not less than 1 day before the date in (c) below (b) Insert name, position and address/telephone number/ email address, as appropriate, of the Clerk or other person to which any person may apply to inspect the accounts (c) Insert date, which must be at least 1 day after the date of announcement in (a) above and at least 30 working days before the date appointed in (d) below (d) The inspection period between (c) and (d) must be 30 working days inclusive and must include the first 10 working days of July. (e) Insert name and position of person placing the notice – this person must be the responsible financial officer for the smaller authority

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LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNTS: A SUMMARY OF YOUR RIGHTS

Please note that this summary applies to all relevant smaller authorities, including local councils, internal drainage boards and 'other' smaller authorities.

The basic position

The [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#) (the Act) governs the work of auditors appointed to smaller authorities. This summary explains the provisions contained in Sections 26 and 27 of the Act. The Act and the [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#) also cover the duties, responsibilities and rights of smaller authorities, other organisations and the public concerning the accounts being audited.

As a local elector, or an interested person, you have certain legal rights in respect of the accounting records of smaller authorities. As an interested person you can inspect accounting records and related documents. If you are a local government elector for the area to which the accounts relate you can also ask questions about the accounts and object to them. You do not have to pay directly for exercising your rights. However, any resulting costs incurred by the smaller authority form part of its running costs. Therefore, indirectly, local residents pay for the cost of you exercising your rights through their council tax.

The right to inspect the accounting records

Any interested person can inspect the accounting records, which includes but is not limited to local electors. You can inspect the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records. You can copy all, or part, of these records or documents. Your inspection must be about the accounts, or relate to an item in the accounts. You cannot, for example, inspect or copy documents unrelated to the accounts, or that include personal information (Section 26 (6) – (10) of the Act explains what is meant by personal information). You cannot inspect information which is protected by commercial confidentiality. This is information which would prejudice commercial confidentiality if it was released to the public and there is not, set against this, a very strong reason in the public interest why it should nevertheless be disclosed.

When smaller authorities have finished preparing accounts for the financial year and approved them, they must publish them (including on a website). There must be a 30 working day period, called the 'period for the exercise of public rights', during which you can exercise your statutory right to inspect the accounting records. Smaller authorities must tell the public, including advertising this on their website, that the accounting records and related documents are available to inspect. By arrangement you will then have 30 working days to inspect and make copies of the accounting records. You may have to pay a copying charge. The 30 working day period must include a common period of inspection during which all smaller authorities' accounting records are available to inspect. This will be 1-14 July 2025 for 2024-25 accounts. The advertisement must set out the dates of the period for the exercise of public rights, how you can communicate to the smaller authority that you wish to inspect the accounting records and related documents, the name and address of the auditor, and the relevant legislation that governs the inspection of accounts and objections.

The right to ask the auditor questions about the accounting records

You should first ask your smaller authority about the accounting records, since they hold all the details. If you are a local elector, your right to ask questions of the external auditor is enshrined in law. However, while the auditor will answer your questions where possible, they are not always obliged to do so. For example, the question might be better answered by another organisation, require investigation beyond the auditor's remit, or involve disproportionate cost (which is borne by the local taxpayer). Give your smaller authority the opportunity first to explain anything in the accounting records that you are unsure about. If you are not satisfied with their explanation, you can question the external auditor about the accounting records.

The law limits the time available for you formally to ask questions. This must be done in the period for the exercise of public rights, so let the external auditor know your concern as soon as possible. The advertisement or notice that tells you the accounting records are available to inspect will also give the period for the exercise of public rights during which you may ask the auditor questions, which here means formally asking questions under the Act. You can ask someone to represent you when asking the external auditor questions.

Before you ask the external auditor any questions, inspect the accounting records fully, so you know what they contain. Please remember that you cannot formally ask questions, under the Act, after the end of the period for the exercise of public rights. You may ask your smaller authority other questions about their accounts for any year, at any time. But these are not questions under the Act.

You can ask the external auditor questions about an item in the accounting records for the financial year being audited. However, your right to ask the external auditor questions is limited. The external auditor can only answer 'what' questions, not 'why' questions. The external auditor cannot answer questions about policies, finances, procedures or anything else unless it is directly relevant to an item in the accounting records. Remember that your questions must always be about facts, not opinions. To avoid misunderstanding, we recommend that you always put your questions in writing.

The right to make objections at audit

You have inspected the accounting records and asked your questions of the smaller authority. Now you may wish to object to the accounts on the basis that an item in them is in your view unlawful or there are matters of wider concern arising from the smaller authority's finances. A local government elector can ask the external auditor to apply to the High Court for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful, or to issue a report on matters which are in the public interest. You must tell the external auditor which specific item in the accounts you object to and why you think the item is unlawful, or why you think that a public interest report should be made about it. You must provide the external auditor with the evidence you have to support your objection. Disagreeing with income or spending does not make it unlawful. To object to the accounts you must write to the external auditor stating you want to make an objection, including the information and evidence below and you must send a copy to the smaller authority. The notice must include:

- confirmation that you are an elector in the smaller authority's area;
- why you are objecting to the accounts and the facts on which you rely;
- details of any item in the accounts that you think is unlawful; and
- details of any matter about which you think the external auditor should make a public interest report.

Other than it must be in writing, there is no set format for objecting. You can only ask the external auditor to act within the powers available under the [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#).

A final word

You may not use this 'right to object' to make a personal complaint or claim against your smaller authority. You should take such complaints to your local Citizens' Advice Bureau, local Law Centre or to your solicitor. Smaller authorities, and so local taxpayers, meet the costs of dealing with questions and objections. In deciding whether to take your objection forward, one of a series of factors the auditor must take into account is the cost that will be involved, they will only continue with the objection if it is in the public interest to do so. They may also decide not to consider an objection if they think that it is frivolous or vexatious, or if it repeats an objection already considered. If you appeal to the courts against an auditor's decision not to apply to the courts for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful, you will have to pay for the action yourself.

For more detailed guidance on public rights and the special powers of auditors, copies of the publication [Local authority accounts: A guide to your rights](#) are available from the NAO website.

If you wish to contact your authority's appointed external auditor please write to the address in paragraph 4 of the *Notice of Public Rights and Publication of Unaudited Annual Governance & Accountability Return*.