Stockton Parish Council Internal Audit
Year Ending 31st March 2026

In accordance with the instructions and Internal Audit Terms of Reference 2024 – 2025 received from the Clerk of Stockton Parish Council, Mr W Robinson, I have conducted an Internal Audit of the Parish records, together with the Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements for the period 31st March 2025 to 1st April 2026. The report below sets out my findings and conclusions, and I confirm the Internal Audit was completed on 1st June 2026.

I have been informed that Stockton Parish Council updates their web site regularly to include the Government's directive 'Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities' which requires smaller Council's to publish all their policies and procedures, together with their financial records. As part of the Internal Audit, I confirm that I have undertaken a review of the website as well as the hard copies of the documents provided.

Bookkeeping

- Receipt and payment entries in the cashbook were checked and found to be up to date, correct and supported by the appropriate documentation.
- All payments were properly authorised by two authorised signatories of Stockton Parish Council by signing cheques and initialling cheque stubs.
- In addition, an audit trail of the following cheques was carried out, including examining cheque books, payments book, bank statements and invoices checking: -

Sample Payments reviewed for the Year 31st March 2025 to 1st April 2026

Payments

Cheque Number	Amount	Payee	Invoice date
001764	£ 308.40	Edge IT Systems	14/04/2025
001776	£ 16.00	Bus Shelter Cleaning	15/04/2025
Direct bank	£ 8.75	Bank charges	18/07/2025
001794	£ 312.00	Moore – Annual audit	18/08/2025
001812	£ 400.08	SSE – Street lighting	15/11/2025
001817	£ 840.00	S. Rowberry Consulting	19/01/2026
001833	£ 197.35	Konica Minolta (Village copier)	24/02/2026

Deposits/Receipts

- Receipts mostly paid by bank transfer, only two cheques/cash were paid into Stockton's Lloyds account, this is representative of the future of banking.
- Sample receipts and an audit trail of the following receipts was undertaken: -

Received from	Paying in ref	Amount	Date
Stockton FC-CC – sports field rent	Standing Order	£350.00	01/04/2025
HMRC – VST repayment	BGC	£17,069.75	14/05/2025
SDC (second ½ year Precept)	BGC	£15,500.00	10/09/2025
Stockton News – photocopier	FPI	££176.79	03/03/2026

Checks were made of all invoices and receipts to the end of year; no discrepancies were found. All cheque audit trails were correct, all cheques matched invoices.

Budget Monitoring Reports and bank reconciliation had been prepared regularly and presented to Stockton Parish Council.

Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Policies

- Standing Orders are reviewed 3 yearly, next review due 2026. The document is available on the parish website.

- All payments are supported by the appropriate invoices, and they have been properly authorised by an Officer/Member of Stockton Parish Council. There is also evidence that the details have been correctly recorded with the corresponding cheque numbers in the Receipts & Payments book.

- VAT is claimed on an annual basis or as required.

- Stockton PC meets the criteria to take the General Power of Competence, this was confirmed at their meeting on 11th May 2023 [Minute02(23-24) - Item 5] therefore, there are no records of any Section 137 payments.

- It was noted that there are minute numbers for each copy of the monthly minutes, available on the Stockton PC web site, also available as hard copies. This enabled confirmation that minute references in the cash book corresponded with those in the minutes.

- Evidence on the Stockton PC web site in the minutes show that many of the policies listed below were reviewed on 19th June 2023, dates for review are listed below:

POLICY	Date agreed	Review
• Asset Register	March 2018	As needed
• Asset disposal procedure	May 2026	
• Biodiversity Policy	August 2026	
• Broadcasting & social media guidelines	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Cemetery regulations (not on website)	-	-
• Code of Conduct	May 2023	SDC
• Communications Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Community Engagement Policy	May 2026	AGM 2029
• Complaints Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• General Data Protection Regulation	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Emergency Plan & Community Emergency Manual	January 2022	June 2029
• Equal Opportunities Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Financial Regulations	August 2023	Bi-annually
• Grant Awarding Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Health & Safety Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Publication Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Purchasing Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Reserves Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Retention of Documents Policy	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Risk Management Policy & Risk Assessment	June 2023	AGM 2029
• Safeguarding Policy for Children & Vulnerable Adults	June 2023	
• Safety Audit of playing field	Ongoing reference	
• Standing Orders	July 2023	AGM 2029
• Training Policy	June 2023	
• Tree Safety Management Protocol - SDC	As advised by SDC	
• Vexatious Complaints Procedure	June 2023	AGM 2029

<u>Risk Management Procedures</u>

- A full review of the minutes has been carried out by accessing the documents on the Stockton PC web site and looking in the Minute Book, no unusual activities identified.
- The Index to Register of Burials was included in the documents to view, there is no evidence that a Cemetery Safety Audit was carried out, during the fiscal year 2025/2026 in the minutes. However, it is recorded in the minutes as an on-going reference.
- Stockton Parish Council has insurance through A J Gallagher Community Schemes with Hiscox Insurance Company Ltd; the annual insurance premium was paid on 15th May 2025.

Budgetary Controls

- Stockton Parish Council has considered the level of precept required for the year 2026/2027 in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2025. An amount of **£31,500** will be requested from SDC. Any shortfall to be taken from Parish Council general reserves. The reserves of **£83,894** divided into earmarked reserves totalling £57,000 and a general reserve of £26,894 this is within the NALC recommendations.

- There is evidence on Stockton Parish Council's website and in the Minute Book that a monthly Budget Monitoring Statement was prepared by the Clerk and sent to Councillors. It is noted that the budget for Stockton Parish Council supports the level of precept requested.

- It was noted that there were hard copies of Budget Monitoring Statements in the documents provided, although there was no evidence that they had been uploaded on to the web site. However, it was also noted that the financial transactions were included in each copy of the minutes on the Stockton PC web site, and they were provided in hard copy in the Minute Book.

- There was no evidence of any loans in place.

Income Controls

- All income appears to have been recorded, and cheques promptly banked, where appropriate. It is noted that most receipts have been paid by bank transfer.

Petty Cash

- Stockton do not use a petty cash system; this has been recorded appropriately on the explanatory sheets for the External Auditor.

Payroll Controls

- The Clerk is the only employee there is no evidence of a review in 2025/2026. The Internal Auditor has seen evidence of Mr Robinson's tax liability for the year 2025/2026 which was discharged **on 1st April 2026 according to the Receipts and Payments Ledger**

Asset Controls

- Evidence has been seen in the minutes that Stockton PC has agreed and approved an Asset Register on 23rd March 2023, this was updated at the end of March 2026 – awaiting approval by council.

Bank Reconciliation

- There is evidence that regular bank reconciliations are carried out in the cash book, together with the provision of a statement for members of Stockton Parish Council.
- No unexplained entries were found.

Register of Interests and Code of Conduct

- **Councillors' register of interests can be found on the Stratford District Council website.**
- **Stockton PC adopted the new model Code of Conduct (published by SDC) in May 2023, it is understood that this will be reviewed by SDC.**

Quotations

- **There was no evidence that any quotations had been received during the financial year 2025/2026.**

Year End Procedures

- The year end accounts have been prepared on the correct accounting basis of receipts and payments.

Emergency Plan and Emergency Manual

- Stockton PC has an Emergency Plan which is available on the Stockton PC web site. There is evidence that the Chair of Stockton PC has reviewed and updated the Disaster Plan and was subsequently approved. Due for review in 2029 or as needed.

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The accounts and associated records and documents which were examined in detail are accurate and well maintained by the Clerk. The points below are brought to the Council’s attention for their consideration:

Stockton Parish Council had cash reserves of **£83,894** at the year-end in the Treasurers Account at Lloyds Bank. This is the carry forward on Statement 12 (2026/2027)

Recommendations:

- I understand council has discussed and is working towards internet banking.
- Consider compiling a financial procedures process – ongoing.
- Keep up-to-date record of playground inspections – ongoing.
- Stockton gains huge benefit from having a highly experienced clerk. It may be prudent to draft a Clerk’s handbook or guidance plan for use by a locum clerk or for a successor if the clerk decided to retire or took sick leave.

<u>Additional comments and observations</u>

- It is noted that Stockton now has a biodiversity policy, this is a good example of best practice that I would expect to see from this council.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Stockton Parish Council’s accounts and documents are well maintained and up to date. The comments mentioned above are made by the Internal Auditor for Stockton Parish Council to evaluate and implement, if they consider that they are necessary and appropriate, they may assist the Council in the smooth running of its business.

Congratulations to Stockton Parish Council, as always, you are continue to be proactive in finding opportunities, I am sure that you will looking at the NALC guidance encouraging local councils to produce a 5-year forward plan for the parish.

Georgina Beaumont, CiLCA
Retired Town Clerk (Shipston Town Council)

1st June 2026