

Guidance notes on completing Part 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20

- The authority **must** comply with *Proper Practices* in completing Sections 1 and 2 of this Annual Governance and Accountability Return. *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 Annual Governance and Accountability Return is complete (no highlighted boxes left empty), and is properly signed and dated. Where amendments are made by the authority to the AGAR after it has been approved by the authority and before it has been reviewed by the external auditor, the Chairman and RFO should initial the amendments and if necessary republish the amended AGAR and recommence the period for the exercise of public rights. If the AGAR contains unapproved or unexplained amendments, it may be returned and additional costs will be incurred.
- The authority **should** receive and note the annual internal audit report if possible before approving the annual governance statement and the accounts.
- Use the checklist provided below to review the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for completeness before returning it to the external auditor by email or post (not both) no later than 30 June 2020.
- Do not send the external auditor any information not specifically requested. However, **you must inform your external auditor about any change of Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer or Chairman, and provide relevant email addresses and telephone numbers.**
- Make sure that the copy of the bank reconciliation to be sent to your external auditor with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 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.
- If the external auditor has to review unsolicited information, or receives an incomplete bank reconciliation, or variances are not fully explained, additional costs may be incurred.
- Make sure that the accounting statements add up and that the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2019) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2020).
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), on behalf of the authority, **must** set the period for the exercise of public rights. From the commencement date for a single period of 30 consecutive working days, the approved accounts and accounting records can be inspected. Whatever period the RFO sets it **must** include a common inspection period – during which the accounts and accounting records of all smaller authorities must be available for public inspection – of the first ten working days of July.
- The authority **must** publish 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 2020**.

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 authority's approval of the accounting statements been confirmed by the signature of the Chairman of the approval meeting?		
	Has an explanation of significant variations from last year to this year been published?		
	Has the bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2020 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.		

Annual Internal Audit Report 2019/20

Council of the Parish of Esh

This authority's internal auditor, acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with relevant procedures and controls to be in operation **during** the financial year ended 31 March 2020.

The internal audit for 2019/20 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	Agreed? Please choose one of the following		
	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. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty 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 and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out.	✓		
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 2018/19, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2018/19 AGAR tick "not covered")			✓
L. The authority has demonstrated that during summer 2019 it correctly provided for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		
M. (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

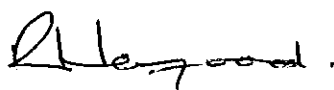
19/06/2020

24/06/2020

29/06/2020

Roger Heywood

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit



Date

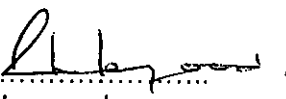
30/06/2020

*If the response is 'no' you must include a note to 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).

Internal Audit Report
The Council of the Parish of Esh
Year to 31 March 2020

I have carried out an internal audit of the Council's accounts and financial records for 2019/2020 and have certified the Annual Governance & Accountability Return accordingly. I am pleased to say all areas of concern detailed in the 2018/2019 report have been addressed satisfactorily.


.....
R Heywood

30 June 2020
.....
Date

The Council of the Parish of Esh
Summary of Income for the Year to 31 March 2020

<u>2018/2019</u>		<u>2019/2020</u>
£79,683.61	Precept	£79,941.82
£9,007.00	Grants	£2,899.00
£24,255.29	AAP/EQuaL Partnership	£5,137.00
£539.40	RPA	£0.00
£700.00	Allotment Rents	£500.00
£6,554.00	Hall & Room Hire	£5,032.00
£572.00	Sale of Dog Bags	£1,030.00
£2,222.00	Garage Rent	£830.00
£850.00	Donations	£0.00
£13,243.95	HMRC Refund - VAT	£6,382.08
£55.50	Bank Interest	£300.36
£0.00	Business Rates Refund	£409.55
£0.00	Esh Play Area	£10,116.33
£0.00	Miners Institute	£5,000.00
£123.93	Miscellaneous	£1,285.60
£137,806.68		£118,863.74

The Council of the Parish of Esh
Summary of Expenditure for the Year to 31 March 2020

<u>Total Cost</u> <u>2018/2019</u>		<u>Total Cost</u> <u>2019/2020</u>
£23,654.45	Staff Costs	25,727.57
£11,852.20	Admin/General	7,987.10
£28,808.19	Premises	17,773.00
£22,194.58	Environment	28,177.42
£2,150.00	Donations	8,495.13
£3,922.86	Rent Paid	0.00
£4,801.76	Christmas Lights/Decorations	6,967.52
£299.06	Garage Costs	176.82
£0.00	CAB	0.00
£1,618.80	Dog Bags	1,685.40
£1,948.98	Legal/Professional	1,840.80
£3,578.42	Insurance	3,762.42
£10,098.00	Fixed Assets	33,832.08
£950.00	Cleaning	0.00
£148.07	Bank Charges	199.61
£208.32	Miscellaneous	910.94
<u>£116,233.69</u>		<u>137,535.81</u>

The Council of the Parish of Esh
Statement of Accounts for the Year to 31 March 2020

Balances as at 1 April 2019			£172,956.69
Income:	Precept	£79,941.82	
	Other Income	£38,621.56	
	Interest	£300.36	
		<hr/>	£118,863.74
Expenditure:	Staff Costs	£25,727.57	
	Other Payments	£111,808.24	
		<hr/>	£137,535.81
Balances as at 31 March 2020			<hr/> <hr/>

REPORT OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR
TO THE COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ESH

I have examined the Statement of Accounts for the year to 31 March 2020 showing receipts of £118,863.74 less payments of £137,535.81 producing a balance of funds of £154,284.62 as at 31 March 2020 and confirm that this statement accurately reflects the financial records of the council.

.....
R Heywood

.....
Date

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

We acknowledge as the members of:

The Council of the Parish of Esh

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 2020, that:

	Agreed		'Yes' means that this authority:	
	Yes	No*		
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✓		prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✓		made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.	
3. 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.	✓		has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.	
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.	
5. 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.	✓		considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.	
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✓		arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.	
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✓		responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.	
8. 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.	✓		disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.	
9. (For local councils only) 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.	Yes	No	N/A	has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.
	✓			

*Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.

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

11/08/2020

and recorded as minute reference:

ITEM 13. REFERENCE

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

Chairman

R. DRION REQUIRED

Clerk

REQUIRED

Other information required by the Transparency Codes (not part of Annual Governance Statement)

Authority web address

www.eshparishcouncil.gov.uk


Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2019/20 for

The Council of the Parish of Esh

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2019 £	31 March 2020 £	
1. Balances brought forward	151,384	172,957	<i>Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.</i>
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	79,684	79,942	<i>Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.</i>
3. (+) Total other receipts	58,123	40,470	<i>Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.</i>
4. (-) Staff costs	23,655	27,276	<i>Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.</i>
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	<i>Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).</i>
6. (-) All other payments	92,579	111,808	<i>Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).</i>
7. (=) Balances carried forward	172,957	154,285	<i>Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).</i>
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	172,957	154,285	<i>The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.</i>
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	182,777	200,060	<i>The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.</i>
10. Total borrowings	0	0	<i>The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).</i>
11. (For Local Councils Only) Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	Yes	No	<i>The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee for and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets. N.B. The figures in the accounting statements above do not include any Trust transactions.</i>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2020 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



Date

04/08/2020

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

11/08/2020

as recorded in minute reference:

ITEM 14.

Signed by Chairman of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

R. PRION

Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate 2019/20

In respect of

The Council of the Parish of Esh

1 Respective responsibilities of the body and the auditor

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 2020; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

Our responsibility is to review Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with guidance issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (see note below). Our work **does not** constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would do.

2 External auditor report 2019/20

(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. (*delete as appropriate).

(continue on a separate sheet if required)

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

(continue on a separate sheet if required)

3 External auditor certificate 2019/20

We certify/do not 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 2020.

*We do not certify completion because:

External Auditor Name

ENTER NAME OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR

External Auditor Signature

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Date

DD/MM/YY

Explanation of significant variances in the accounting statements - Section 2

Parish Council name: **The Council of the Parish of Esh**

Please explain any variances of more than 15% between the totals for individual boxes in Section 2. We do not require explanations for variances of less than £200; however, in some cases there may be 'compensating' variances which leave the overall total for a box relatively unchanged – e.g. where there was a major one-off project in one year (e.g. contribution to village hall extension of £30,000), but a totally different expense of a similar size in the next (e.g. purchase of playground equipment of £28,000). In such cases, it would be helpful to provide an explanation of movements within each box. **We also ask you to explain any change where there is a movement to or from zero.** Please either use the proforma below, or complete a separate schedule if more space is required.

Section 2	2018/19 £	2019/20 £	Variance (+/-) £	Detailed explanation of variance (for each reason noted please include monetary values (to nearest £10))
Box 2 <i>Precept</i>	79648	79942	+0.36% £294.00	
Box 3 <i>Other income</i>	58123	40470	-30.37% £17653	Reduction in income mainly due to the back rent which was recovered in 18/19 of 24255 which reduced to 5137 in 19/20
Box 4 <i>Staff costs</i>	23655	27276	+15.3% £3621	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased pay scale for the Clerk - Employment of cleaning staff
Box 5 <i>Loan interest/capital</i>	00.00	00.00	00.00	
Box 6 <i>Other payments</i>	92579	111808	+20.7% £19229	Play Area tree & Groundworks £1608 Knee Rail Fencing £3530 Miners Memorial project £7125 Kids Club Trips and programme summer 2019 £7693
Box 7 <i>Balances carried forward</i>	172957	154285	-10.7% £18672	If some of the year-end balances are earmarked for specific purposes rather than as a general reserve, please provide a breakdown. SEE BREAKDOWN ATTACHMENT.
Box 9 <i>Fixed assets & long term assets</i>	182777	200060	+9.45% £17283	Explain all movements in this category and not just those above 15% Esh Play Area Equipment £16,693.00 Safety Ladder £190.00 Christmas tree £399.95
Box 10 <i>Total borrowing</i>	00.00	00.00	00.00	

Box 7 – Balances Carried Forward

The Council of the Parish of Esh

Elections May 2021	£ 4000
Village Centre Improvements	£ 3500
Emergency/Contingency monies	£ 11000
Christmas Light enhancements	£ 4000
Environmental and recreational improvements	£ 7000
Miners Institute Building maintenance and repairs	<u>£ 24000</u>
	£ 53 500



The Council of the
Parish of Esh

Asset Register 31st March 2020

Item	Brought Forward	Disposals	Additions	Carried Forward
Lock up Rear of Garden Ave	£ 7,365.00			£ 7,365.00
Esh Play Area Land	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Esh Play Area Equipment & Surfacing	£ 11,500.00		£ 16,693.00	£ 28,193.00
Quebec Play Area Land	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Quebec Play Area Equipment	£ 37,000.00			£ 37,000.00
Langley Park Play Area SBRP	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Langley Park Play Area Equipment	£ 84,000.00			£ 84,000.00
Langley Park Centenary Field, Old Rec Land	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Langley Park Centenary Field, Fencing	£ 9,000.00			£ 9,000.00
Earl of Durham Allotment Land	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Crossfell Allotment Land	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Esh Village Green Land	£ 1.00			£ 1.00
Ancient Cross at Esh Village	£ 6,773.00			£ 6,773.00
Christmas Decorations Parish Wide	£ 9,295.00			£ 9,295.00
Hassas Fencing x 10 Metre	£ 350.00			£ 350.00
Lenovo Think Centre (Clerks Desktop)	£ 802.00			£ 802.00
Digital Camera	£ 150.00			£ 150.00
Notice Boards x3 LP, ESH, QUE	£ 4,874.00			£ 4,874.00
Wooden Planters x7	£ 280.00			£ 280.00
20 seats throughout Parish	£ 6,300.00			£ 6,300.00
Litter Bin Quebec Play Area	£ 100.00			£ 100.00
Litter Bin Esh Play Area	£ 100.00			£ 100.00
Litter Bin Front Street Quebec	£ 150.00			£ 150.00
Litter Bin Quebec Car Park	£ 229.00			£ 229.00
Litter Bin SBRP Play Area Langley Park	£ 229.00			£ 229.00
6 Parish Paintings	£ 350.00			£ 350.00
Litter Picking Sticks & Hoops	£ 200.00			£ 200.00
Clerks Back Support Chair	£ 283.00			£ 283.00
Oil Filled Radiator	£ 45.00			£ 45.00
Centenary Gas Beacons x 3	£ 1,080.00			£ 1,080.00
Centenary Plaques x 3 LP, Esh Que	£ 697.00			£ 697.00
Anti vandal Seats x2	£ 1,511.00			£ 1,511.00
Karcher Vaccum Cleaner	£ 107.00			£ 107.00
Safety ladder			£ 190.00	£ 190.00
Christmas Tree Miners institute			£ 399.95	£ 399.95
Totals	£ 182,777.00	£ -	£ 17,282.95	£ 200,059.95

Local Council name: **The Council of the Parish of Esh**

Confirmation of contact details

Please confirm the contact details for the Clerk, RFO (if not the clerk) and Chair, to assist us in ensuring that our records are kept up to date:

Clerk's name: Patricia Jean Embleton	RFO's name (if not clerk) Patricia Jean Embleton	Chair's name Ryan Drion
Clerk contact address: The Miners Institute Church Street Langley Park Durham DH7 9TZ	RFO contact address: The Miners Institute Church Street Langley Park Durham DH7 9TZ	Chair contact address: The Miners Institute Church Street Langley Park Durham DH7 9TZ
Telephone: Primary contact number: 0191 373 6687 Mobile/Alternative number: 07312035638	Telephone: Primary contact number: 0191 373 6687 Mobile/Alternative number:	Telephone: Primary contact number: 0191 373 6687 Mobile/Alternative number:
Clerk e-mail: clerk@eshparishcouncil.gov.uk	RFO e-mail: clerk@eshparishcouncil.gov.uk	Chair e-mail: Ryan.drion@eshparishcouncil.gov.uk

Please return this form together with the Annual Governance & Accountability Return and other information requested.

Confirmation regarding the exercise of public rights

Parish Council name: **The Council of the Parish of Esh**

The Parish Council must inform the electorate of an exact 30 working day period during which public rights may be exercised.

The inspection period must **commence no later than 1 September 2020**

It must start at least one day after the annual return has been published on your website (or other free to access website used by the Council) and publication must be as soon as practical after the unaudited annual return has been approved by the Parish Council.

Working days are defined as Monday – Friday. They **do not** include Saturdays, Sundays and Bank holidays.

(See calendar guide overleaf)

The inspection period commences on: Thursday 13th August 2020

And ends on: 24th September 2020

Signed:  Date: 04/08/20

Position held: Clerk to the Council

Local council name: The Council of the Parish of Esh

Notice of appointment of date for the exercise of public rights
Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2020

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, and
 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 (SI 234)

<p>1. Date of announcement: 12th August 2020 (a)</p> <p>2. Any person interested has the right to inspect and make copies of the accounts to be audited and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers and receipts relating to them. For the year ended 31 March 2020 these documents will be available on reasonable notice on application to:</p> <p>(b) <i>Patricia J Embleton Clerk to the Council</i> <i>The Miners Institute, Church Street, Langley Park, Durham DH7 9TZ</i> <i>clerk@eshparishcouncil.gov.uk</i></p> <p>commencing on (c) 13th August 2020</p> <p>and ending on (d) 24th September 2020</p> <p>3. Local Government Electors and their representatives also have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the opportunity to question the auditor about the accounts; and • the right to make objections to the accounts or any item in them. Written notice of an objection must first be given to the auditor and a copy sent to the Council (f). <p>The auditor can be contacted at the address in paragraph 4 below for this purpose during the inspection period at 2 above.</p> <p>4. The audit is being conducted under the provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 and the National Audit Office' Code of Audit Practice. Your audit is being carried out by:</p> <p>Mazars LLP, Salvus House, Aykley Heads, Durham, DH1 5TS</p> <p>5. This announcement is made by (e))Patricia J Embleton, Clerk to the Council</p>	<p>(a) Insert date of placing of this notice on your website.</p> <p>(b) Insert name, position and contact details of the Clerk or other person to whom any person may apply to inspect the accounts.</p> <p>(c)And (d) The inspection period must be 30 working days in total and commence no later than <u>1 September 2020</u>.</p> <p>(e) Insert name and position of person placing the notice</p>
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Councils' Accounts: A Summary of Public Rights

The basic position

By law any interested person has the right to inspect a council's/meeting's accounts. If you are entitled and registered to vote in local council elections then you (or your representative) have additional rights to ask the appointed auditor questions about the council's accounts or object to an item of account contained within them.

The right to inspect the accounts

When your council has finalised its accounts for the previous financial year it must advertise that they are available for people to inspect. Having given the council reasonable notice of your intentions, you then have 30 working days to look through the accounting statements in the Annual Return and any supporting documents. By arrangement, you will be able to inspect and make copies of the accounts and the relevant documents. You may have to pay a copying charge.

The right to ask the auditor questions about the accounts

You can only ask the appointed auditor questions about the accounts. The auditor does not have to answer questions about the council's policies, finances, procedures or anything else not related to the accounts. Your questions must be about the accounts for the financial year just ended. The auditor does not have to say whether they think something the council has done, or an item in its accounts, is lawful or reasonable.

The right to object to the accounts

If you think that the council has spent money that it should not have, or that someone has caused a loss to the council deliberately or by behaving irresponsibly, you can request the auditor to apply to the courts for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law. You do this by sending a formal '*notice of objection*' to the auditor at the address below. **The notice must be in writing and copied to the council.** In it, you must tell the auditor why you are objecting and what you want the auditor to do about it. The auditor must reach a decision on your objection. If you are not happy with that decision, you can appeal to the courts.

You may also object if you think that there is something in the accounts that the auditor should discuss with the council or tell the public about in a '*public interest report*'. You must follow the same procedure as outlined in the previous paragraph. The auditor must then decide whether to take any action. The auditor does not have to, but usually will, give reasons for his/her decision and you cannot appeal to the courts. More information is available on the National Audit Office website (see contact details below).

You may not use this '*right to object*' to make a personal complaint or claim against your council. You should take such complaints to your local Citizens' Advice Bureau, local Law Centre or your solicitor. You may also be able to approach the Standards Committee of your local principal authority if you believe that a member of the council has broken the Code of Conduct for Members.

What else you can do

Instead of objecting, you can give the auditor information that is relevant to his/her responsibilities. For example, you can simply tell the auditor if you think that something is wrong with the accounts or about waste and inefficiency in the way the council runs its services. You should make it clear that you are providing information rather than making a formal objection. You do not have to follow any set time limits or procedures. The auditor does not have to give you a detailed report of any subsequent investigation, but will usually tell you the outcome.

A final word

Councils, and so local taxpayers, must 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. The auditor will only continue with the objection if it is in the public interest to do so. If you appeal to the courts, you might have to pay for the action yourself.

Who should you contact?

For more detailed guidance on electors' rights and the special powers of auditors, copies of the publication **Council Accounts – a guide to your rights** are available by calling the National Audit Office on 020 7798 7000 or downloading from the website <https://www.nao.org.uk/>

If you wish to contact your Council's appointed external auditor please write to:

Cameron Waddell, Partner, Mazars LLP,
local.councils@mazars.co.uk