

# **MITFORD PARISH COUNCIL INTERNAL CONTROL POLICY**

*Approved: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025*

## **1. Scope of Responsibility**

- 1.1 Mitford Parish Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require smaller authorities, each financial year to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement in accordance with proper practices in relation to accounts.

## **2. The Purpose of the System of Internal Control**

- 2.1 The system of internal control is designed to ensure that the Council's activities are carried out properly and as intended. Internal controls are set up by the Clerk who is the Responsible Financial Officer but the Council members must ensure that they have an understanding of those controls and that they are operated effectively.

## **3. Personnel Involved with the Internal Control Environment**

### **3.1 The Council:**

- (i) The Council has appointed a Chairman who is responsible for the smooth running of meetings and for ensuring all of Council's decisions are lawful. The Chairman signs each page of the minutes at the Council meetings.
- (ii) Decisions are made in accordance with Mitford Parish Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, reviewed and approved annually by the Council.
- (iii) The Council meets at least 4 times a year and receives a financial statement which it approves at its Council meeting. Payments are made in accordance with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.
- (iv) The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approves budgets for the following year no later than December. The Council approves the level of precept for the following financial year no later than December.

- (v) Three members of the Council and the Clerk shall be appointed as signatories.
- (vi) In the case of electronic banking, the Clerk is the Service Administrator and shall set up all items due for payment.
- (vii) A full list of all payments made in a month shall be provided to the next Council meeting and displayed on the Council's website.
- (ix) At the year end, a councillor shall ensure that the cash book totals are reconciled to the year-end bank statement and shall sign the cash book and the year-end bank statement as evidence of this check.

### 3.2 The Clerk to the Council/Responsible Financial Officer:

- (i) The Council has appointed a Clerk to the Council who acts as the Council advisor and administrator. The Clerk is the Council's Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the Council's finances.
- (ii) The Clerk is responsible for the day to day compliance with laws and regulations that the Council is subject to and for managing risks. The Clerk also ensures that the Council's procedures, control systems and policies are maintained.
- (iii) The duties of the Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer are laid down in a job description which is reviewed as and when necessary.
- (iv) The Responsible Financial Officer submits all the requested information to the External Auditor by the required date.

## **4. Conduct of the Audit**

- 4.1 An independent internal auditor is appointed and carries out such checks as are needed to satisfy themselves that the internal controls are adequate and working (See appendix 1).
- 4.2 The effectiveness of the internal audit is reviewed annually, and the Council agrees to the appointment of the internal auditor. The auditor, who is competent and independent (See appendix 2), is advised of the scope of the work to be carried out.
- 4.3 The report and any recommendations of the internal auditor are presented to the Council and agreed actions are monitored to ensure that they have been carried out and auctioned within the agreed timescale.
- 4.4 The Council seeks and receives appropriate property, legal, insurance and health and safety advice to manage risk (See appendix 3).
- 4.5 All statements etc. must be certified in time for the annual return to be submitted to the external auditor by 30<sup>th</sup> June.

- 4.6 Members of the Council can ask for any area of the Council's business to be looked at by the internal auditor during inspection.

## APPENDIX 1 – Mitford Parish Council - Internal Audit Checklist

| INTERNAL CONTROL          | TEST  | COMMENTS | INITIALS |
|---------------------------|---|----------|----------|
| <b>Proper Bookkeeping</b> | Is the cashbook maintained and up to date?                                |          |          |
|                           | Is the cashbook arithmetic correct?                                       |          |          |
|                           | Is the cashbook regularly balanced?                                       |          |          |
|                           |   |          |          |
| <b>Standing Orders</b>    | Has the Council formally adopted Standing Orders?                         |          |          |
|                           | Has a Responsible Financial Officer been appointed?                       |          |          |
|                           |   |          |          |
| <b>Payment Controls</b>   | Are payments in the cashbook supported by invoices etc?                   |          |          |
|                           | Has VAT on payments been identified, recorded and reclaimed?              |          |          |
|                           | Is s137 expenditure separately recorded and within statutory limits?      |          |          |
|                           |   |          |          |
| <b>Risk Management</b>    | Do the minutes record the Council carrying out an annual risk assessment? |          |          |
|                           | Is insurance cover appropriate and adequate?                              |          |          |
|                           | Are internal controls documented and regularly reviewed?                  |          |          |
|                           |   |          |          |
| <b>Budgetary Control</b>  | Has the Council prepared an annual budget in support of its precept?      |          |          |
|                           | Is actual expenditure against budget regularly reported to Council?       |          |          |
|                           | Are any significant variances explained?                                  |          |          |
|                           |   |          |          |
| <b>Income Controls</b>    | Is income properly recorded and promptly banked?                          |          |          |

| <b>INTERNAL<br/>CONTROL Cont.d</b> | <b>TEST</b>  | <b>COMMENTS</b> | <b>INITIALS</b> |
|------------------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Income Controls<br/>Cont.d</b>  | Are security controls over cash adequate and effective?                    |                 |                 |
|                                    | Does the precept recorded agree to notification?                           |                 |                 |
|                                    |  |                 |                 |
| <b>Payroll Controls</b>            | Do salaries paid agree to those approved by the Council?                   |                 |                 |
|                                    | Has PAYE/NIC been properly operated as an employer?                        |                 |                 |
|                                    |  |                 |                 |
| <b>Asset Controls</b>              | Does the Council keep an asset register of all assets?                     |                 |                 |
|                                    | Do asset valuations agree to those in the asset register?                  |                 |                 |
|                                    |  |                 |                 |
| <b>Bank Reconciliation</b>         | Is the bank reconciliation carried out regularly on receipt of statements? |                 |                 |
|                                    | Are there any unexplained balancing entries?                               |                 |                 |
|                                    |  |                 |                 |
| <b>Year End Procedures</b>         | Are the yearend accounts prepared on the correct accounting basis?         |                 |                 |
|                                    | Do accounts agree to cashbook?   |                 |                 |
|                                    | Is there an audit trail from financial records to accounts?                |                 |                 |
|                                    | Where appropriate have debtors and creditors been properly recorded?       |                 |                 |

## **APPENDIX 2 – Mitford Parish Council – Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit**

1. Scope of Internal Audit – Does the internal audit sufficiently cover all aspects of the financial controls relevant to the Council and is there a policy in place and approved?
2. Independence – is the Internal Auditor independent?
3. Competence – Is the Internal Auditor Competent and do they carry out their work ethically, with integrity and objectively?
4. Relationships – Is the Clerk consulted in the internal audit plan and training undertaken when necessary?
5. Audit Planning and Reporting – Is there a plan in place for when the internal audit will be undertaken and does the plan properly take account of risk?

### APPENDIX 3 - Mitford Parish Council – Risk Assessment of Financial and Non-Financial Internal Audit Controls

| No.                       | Internal Controls  | Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure | Action Required |
|---------------------------|--|---|-----------------|
| <b>1.</b>                 | <b>Governance</b>  |   |                 |
| 1.1<br>1.1.1              | <u>Standing Orders</u><br>Standing Orders have been adopted setting out the Council's constitution and procedures. They are reviewed at least every four years   |   |                 |
| 1.2<br>1.2.1<br><br>1.2.2 | <u>Financial Regulations</u><br>The Clerk is the Responsible Financial Officer with the duties detailed in the Financial Regulations.<br><br>Financial Regulations have been adopted which set out procedures. They are reviewed annually. |   |                 |
| 1.3<br>1.3.1              | <u>Freedom of Information</u><br>The Council has adopted the model publication scheme.   |   |                 |



| No.   | Internal Controls  | Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure | Action Required |
|-------|--|---|-----------------|
| 1.4   | <u>Measures to Prevent Fraud and Corruption</u>  |   |                 |
| 1.4.1 | The Council has adopted the NALC Model Code of Conduct.  |   |                 |
| 1.4.2 | All Councillors sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office on election or co-option.   |   |                 |
| 1.4.3 | All Councillors complete a Register of Interests and provide updated information as appropriate. Copies are held with the Council and Northumberland County Council. |   |                 |
| 1.4.4 | There is an agenda item for Councillor Declarations of Interests on every council agenda.  |   |                 |
|       |  |   |                 |
| 1.5   | <u>Insurable Risks</u>   |   |                 |
| 1.5.1 | Employers Liability Insurance (this is the only insurance the Parish Council is required to hold through legislation.  |   |                 |

| No.   | Internal Controls   | Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure | Action Required |
|-------|---|---|-----------------|
| 1.6   | <u>External Audit Annual Governance Statement Requirements</u>  |   |                 |
| 1.6.1 | Statement of accounts formally approved by Council.   |   |                 |
| 1.6.2 | Council only does things it has legal power to do and works within appropriate standards and codes of practice which could have a significant effect on the ability of the Council to conduct its business or on its finances.  |   |                 |
| 1.6.3 | <p>Notice of audit displayed on the Council notice board to allow electors to inspect accounts as required by The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.</p> <p>Appropriate steps are taken to deal with matters raised in reports from Internal and External Auditors through agenda items on Parish Council meeting agenda.</p> |   |                 |

| No.          | Internal Controls  | Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure | Action Required |
|--------------|--|---|-----------------|
| 1.7<br>1.7.1 | <p><u>Proper Booking</u><br/>The cash book is balanced against the bank statements to ensure arithmetically correct when bank statements received.</p> <p>Cash book stored in locked cupboard.</p> <p>Budget/Precept reports are held on the Clerks computer and backed up onto USB flash drive.</p> |   |                 |
| 1.8<br>1.8.1 | <p><u>Payment Controls</u><br/>A list of payments is prepared for the Parish Council meeting with the invoices also available for inspections. These payments are presented at the Council meeting.</p>  |   |                 |
| 1.8.2        | <p>VAT is recorded in a separate column in the cashbook. Annual reclaims are made.</p>   |   |                 |

| No.   | Internal Controls  | Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure | Action Required |
|-------|--|---|-----------------|
| 1.8.3 | S137 payments are shown in a separate column in the cashbook.  |   |                 |
|       |  |   |                 |
| 1.9   | <u>Budgetary Controls</u>  |   |                 |
| 1.9.1 | The Council sets a budget which is approved and recorded in the minutes at the November Parish meeting.                                    |   |                 |
| 1.9.2 | The Clerk presents an income and expenditure report to the Council at every meeting.   |   |                 |
| 1.9.3 | The Council has the General Power of Competence.   |   |                 |
|       |  |   |                 |
| 2.0   | <u>Income Controls</u>   |   |                 |
| 2.0.1 | All income is recorded in the cashbook.  |   |                 |
| 2.0.2 | Northumberland County Council issues a remittance advice which confirms the precept that is paid directly into the Council's bank account. |   |                 |
|       |  |   |                 |

|            |  |  |                        |
|------------|--|--|------------------------|
| 2.1        | <u>Payroll Controls</u>  |  |                        |
| 2.1.1      | The Clerk is responsible for submitting all relevant information to the Inland Revenue.  |  |                        |
| 2.1.2      | The Clerk is eligible to be paid travel expenses for any official mileage.   |  |                        |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Internal Controls</b>   | <b>Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure</b> | <b>Action Required</b> |
| 2.2        | <u>Asset Controls</u>  |  |                        |
| 2.2.1      | An asset register with insurance valuation updated annually.   |  |                        |
| 2.2.2      | The list of assets is maintained and updated during the year, insurance cover extended for new acquisitions when appropriate. Copy presented to Councillors with annual statement of accounts. |  |                        |
| 2.2.3      | Insurance provider reviewed from time to time for competitive pricing.   |  |                        |
|            |  |  |                        |
| 2.3        | <u>Bank Reconciliation</u>   |  |                        |
| 2.3.1      | The bank account is reconciled by the Clerk.   |  |                        |
| 2.3.2      | Regular bank reconciliations are undertaken by the Clerk and signed off on the bank statements.  |  |                        |

|            |  |  |                        |
|------------|--|--|------------------------|
| 2.3.3      | Any adjustments for interest/bank charges/unpaid cheques are noted in the cashbook if they occur.  |  |                        |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Internal Controls</b>   | <b>Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure</b> | <b>Action Required</b> |
| 2.4        | <u>Year End Procedures</u>   |  |                        |
| 2.4.1      | Accounts are prepared on a payment and receipts basis.   |  |                        |
| 2.4.2      | Full cross casting of the cashbook is agreed to the final accounts. The Chairman signs the cashbook.   |  |                        |
| 2.4.3      | An audit trail is provided by recording the minute number and meeting date the payment was agreed.   |  |                        |
|            |  |  |                        |
| 2.5        | <u>Qualifications of the Clerk</u>   |  |                        |
| 2.5.1      | The Clerk holds CilCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) and is a Principle member of the Society of Local Council Clerks.                      |  |                        |
|            |  |  |                        |
| 2.6        | <u>Meetings</u>  |  |                        |
| 2.6.1      | The meeting policy is set out in Standing Orders, notices are provided three clear days before the meeting on the noticeboard. Draft minutes are published |  |                        |

|            |   |  |                        |
|------------|---|--|------------------------|
|            | prior to the next meeting, time is set aside for public participation.  |  |                        |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Internal Controls</b>  | <b>Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure</b> | <b>Action Required</b> |
| 2.7        | <u>Communications</u>   |  |                        |
| 2.7.1      | The Parish Council has an accessible website.   |  |                        |
| 2.7.2      | The Parish Council has an email address that is widely published on noticeboards, emails and websites.  |  |                        |
| 2.7.3      | Parish Council information is placed on the Parish noticeboard and updated as and when required.  |  |                        |
|            |   |  |                        |
| 2.8        | <u>Annual Report</u>  |  |                        |
| 2.8.1      | Annual Report is completed and published by 30 <sup>th</sup> June of the following year. It is available to any elector and includes a summary of accounts and the Chairman's overview, and is presented at the Parish Council meeting. |  |                        |
|            |   |  |                        |

| No.                       | Internal Controls   | Risks identified/potential for improvements/current procedure | Action Required |
|---------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| 2.9<br>2.9.1              | <u>Accounts</u><br>Accounts are prepared in accordance with statutory requirements, approved within three months of the accounting date and published within six months.    |   |                 |
| 3.0<br>3.1                | <u>Clerk's Contract</u><br>The Parish Council has adopted the National Association of Local Council's terms and conditions and contract of employment.                      |   |                 |
| 3.1<br>3.1.1              | <u>Training</u><br>The Council has evaluated and identified training needs for staff and members.   |   |                 |
| 3.2<br>3.2.1<br><br>3.2.2 | <u>General Power of Competence</u><br>Two thirds of vacancies filled at last election.<br><br>Clerk is CilCA qualified and has passed unit 7 – General Power of Competence. |   |                 |