

## Contact details

Name of smaller authority: Maiden Bradley with Yarnfield Parish Council

County Area (local councils and parish meetings only): Wiltshire

Please complete this form and send it back to us with the AGAR or exemption certificate

	<b>Clerk/RFO (Main contact)</b>	<b>Chair</b>
<b>Name</b>	Sarah Jeffries	Angus Neish
<b>Address</b>	9 Beech Grove Warminster Wiltshire BA12 0AB	Rodmead Farm Rodmead Maiden Bradley Warminster Wiltshire BA12 7HP
<b>Daytime telephone number</b>	01985213436	01985844689
<b>Mobile telephone number</b>	07540611906	
<b>Email address</b>	maidenbradley@virginmedia.com	awn@farmline.com

# Local Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and other Smaller Authorities in England Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2017/18 Part 2

**To be completed only by smaller authorities\* where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure was £25,000 or less, that meet the qualifying criteria, and that wish to certify themselves as exempt from a limited assurance review**

## **Guidance notes on completing Part 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2017/18**

1. Every smaller authority in England where the higher of gross income **or** gross expenditure was £25,000 or less **must** following the end of each financial year, complete Part 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices*, unless the authority:
  - a) does not meet the qualifying criteria;
  - b) does not wish to certify itself as exempt
2. Smaller authorities where the higher of gross annual income **or** gross annual expenditure **does not exceed** £25,000 and meet the qualifying criteria as set out in the Certificate of Exemption **are exempt** from sending the completed Annual Governance and Accountability Return to the external auditor for a limited assurance review **provided** the authority **completes both** the
  - a) **Certificate of Exemption**, page 3 and returns it to the external auditor
  - b) **Annual Governance and Accountability Return (Part 2)** which is made up of:
    - **Annual Internal Audit Report (page 4)** to be completed by the authority's internal auditor.
    - **Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement (page 5)** to be completed by the authority.
    - **Section 2 – Accounting Statements (page 6)** to be completed by the authority.
3. The authority **must** approve Section 1 Annual Governance Statement before approving Section 2 Accounting Statements and both **must** be approved **before 2 July 2018**.

## **Publication Requirements**

Smaller authorities must publish various documents on a public website as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015 and the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities. These include:

- **Certificate of Exemption**, page 3
- **Annual Internal Audit Report 2017/18**, page 4
- **Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2017/18**, page 5
- **Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2017/18**, page 6
- Analysis of variances
- Bank reconciliation
- Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and other information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

## **Limited Assurance Review**

Providing the authority certifies itself as exempt, and completes and publishes the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, there is **no** requirement for the authority to have a limited assurance review.

Any smaller authority may, however, request a limited assurance review. In these circumstances the authority should **not certify itself as exempt, ie not complete** Certificate of Exemption, but complete Part 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2017/18 and return it to the external auditor for review.

The cost to the smaller authority for the review will be £200 +VAT.

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

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

## Guidance notes on completing Part 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2017/18, Sections 1 and 2

- Where an authority is exempt from the requirement for a limited assurance review, it need not submit its Annual Governance and Accountability Return to the external auditor. However, as part of a more proportionate regime, the authority **must** comply with the requirements of the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities.
- The authority **must** comply with Proper Practices in completing this Annual Governance and Accountability Return and the Certificate of Exemption. 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.
- The authority **should** receive and note the annual internal audit report prior to approving the annual governance statement and before approving the accounts.
- Make sure that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is complete (i.e. no empty highlighted boxes), and is properly signed and dated. Avoid making amendments to the completed annual return. Any amendments must be approved by the authority and properly initialled.
- Use the checklist provided below to review the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for completeness at the meeting at which it is signed off.
- You **should** inform your external auditor about any change of Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer or Chairman, and provide relevant email addresses and telephone numbers.
- It is recommended that the authority has numerical and narrative explanations for significant variances in the accounting statements on **page 4**, should a question be raised by a local elector. There is guidance provided in the *Practitioners' Guide\** that may assist.
- Make sure that the accounting statements add up and the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2017) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2018).
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), on behalf of the authority, **must** set the commencement date for the exercise of public rights. From the commencement date for a single period of 30 consecutive working days, the accounts and accounting records can be inspected. Whatever period the RFO sets **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.

Completion checklist – 'No' answers mean you may not have met requirements		Yes	No
All sections	Have all highlighted boxes have been completed?	✓	
	Have the dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights been published?	✓	
Internal Audit Report	Have all highlighted boxes have been completed by the internal auditor and explanations provided?	✓	
Section 1	For any statement to which the response is 'no', is an explanation available should a question be raised by a local elector and/or an interested party?	N/A	
Section 2	Has the authority's approval of the accounting statements been confirmed by the signature of the Chairman of the approval meeting?	✓	
	Is an explanation of significant variations from last year to this year available, should a question be raised by a local elector and/or an interested party?	✓	
	Is an explanation of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8 available, should a question be raised by a local elector and/or an interested party?	✓	
Sections 1 and 2	Trust funds – have all disclosures been made if the authority is a sole managing trustee?	N/A	

\*More guidance on completing this annual return is available in *Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices*, which can be downloaded from [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk) or from [www.slcc.co.uk](http://www.slcc.co.uk) or from [www.ada.org.uk](http://www.ada.org.uk)

## Certificate of Exemption

To be completed only by smaller authorities where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure did not exceed £25,000 in the year of account ended 31 March 2018, and that wish to certify themselves as exempt from a limited assurance review under Section 9 of the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015

There is no requirement to have a limited assurance review or to submit an Annual Governance and Accountability Return to the external auditor, **provided** that the authority has certified itself as exempt at a meeting of the authority after 31 March 2018 and a completed Certificate of Exemption is submitted notifying the external auditor.

**MAIDEN BRADLEY WITH YARNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

certifies that during the financial year 2017/18, the higher of the authority's gross income for the year or gross annual expenditure, for the year did not exceed **£25,000**

Annual gross income for the authority 2017/18:

**£23020.35** 000

Annual gross expenditure for the authority 2017/18:

**£17334.75** 000

There are certain circumstances in which an authority will be **unable to certify itself as exempt**, so that a limited assurance review will still be required. If an authority is **unable to confirm the statements below then it cannot certify itself as exempt** and it **must** submit the completed Annual Governance and Accountability Return Part 3 to the external auditor to undertake a limited assurance review for which a fee of £200 +VAT will be payable.

By signing this **Certificate of Exemption** you are confirming that:

- The authority has been in existence since before 1st April 2014
- In relation to the preceding financial year (2016/17), the external auditor **has not**:
  - issued a public interest report in respect of the authority or any entity connected with it
  - made a statutory recommendation to the authority, relating to the authority or any entity connected with it
  - issued an advisory notice under paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 8 to the Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ("the Act"), and has not withdrawn the notice
  - commenced judicial review proceedings under section 31(1) of the Act
  - made an application under section 28(1) of the Act for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful, and the application has not been withdrawn nor has the court refused to make the declaration
- The court has not declared an item of account unlawful after a person made an appeal under section 28(3) of the Act.

If you are able to confirm that the above statements apply and that the authority neither received gross income, nor incurred gross expenditure, exceeding £25,000, then the Certificate of Exemption can be signed and submitted to the external auditor.

The Annual Internal Audit Report, Annual Governance Statement, Annual Accounting Statements, an analysis of variances and the bank reconciliation plus the information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 including the period for the exercise of public rights still need to be fully completed and, along with a copy of this certificate, published on a public website\* before 2 July 2018. **By signing this certificate you are also confirming that this will be done.**

Signed by the Responsible Financial Officer

Date

**04/06/18**

Signed by Chairman

Date

**04/06/18**

Email

**maidenbradley@virginmedia.com**

Telephone number

**01985 213436**

\*Published web address (not applicable to Parish Meetings)

**www.maidenbradley.org.uk**

**This Certificate of Exemption should be returned as soon as possible after certification to your external auditor.**

# Annual Internal Audit Report 2017/18

## MAIDEN BRADLEY WITH YARNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

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 2018.

The internal audit for 2017/18 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.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I. Periodic and year-end bank account reconciliations were properly carried out.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
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.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
<b>K. (For local councils only)</b>			
Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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

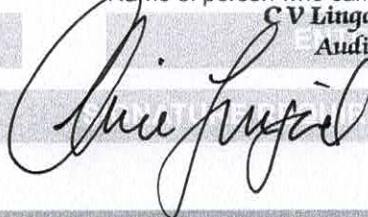
Date(s) internal audit undertaken

30/05/18

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

CV Lingard for and on behalf of  
Auditing Solutions Ltd

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit



Date

30/05/18

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

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

## Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2017/18

We acknowledge as the members of:

**MAIDEN BRADLEY WITH YARNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

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 2018, 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 it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.
			✓	

This Annual Governance Statement is approved by this authority and recorded as minute reference:

MINUTE REF **18/056**

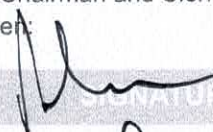
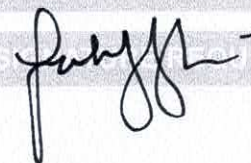
dated

**04/06/18**

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

Chairman

Clerk

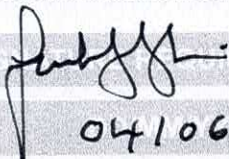
## Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2017/18 for

ENTER NAME OF AUTHORITY  
**MAIDEN BRADLEY WITH VARNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2017 £	31 March 2018 £	
1. Balances brought forward	2707	4970	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.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	13743	14342	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	1935	3709	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	4150	4551	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include salaries and wages, PAYE and NI (employees and employers), pension contributions and employment expenses.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	NIL	NIL	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	9235	12784	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	4970	5686	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	4970	5686	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – <b>To agree with bank reconciliation.</b>
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	38082	38197	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.
10. Total borrowings	NIL	NIL	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).
11. (For Local Councils Only) Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	Yes	No	The Council 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 certify that for the year ended 31 March 2018 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return present fairly the financial position of this authority and its income and expenditure, or property present receipts and payments, as the case may be.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer

Signed:   
 Date: **04/06/18**

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

**04/06/18**

and recorded as minute reference:

**MIN 18/057**

Signed by Chairman of the meeting where approval of the Accounting Statements is given

  
 SIGNATURE REQUIRED

## Reconciliation between Box 7 and Box 8 in Section 2 – pro forma

(applies to Accounting Statements prepared on an income and expenditure basis only)

Name of smaller authority: Maiden Bradley with Yarnfield Parish Council

County area (local councils and parish meetings only): Wiltshire

There should only be a difference between Box 7 and Box 8 where the Accounting Statements (Section 2 of the AGAR) have been prepared on an income and expenditure basis and there have been adjustments for debtors/prepayments and creditors/receipts in advance at the year end. Please provide details of the yearend adjustments, showing how the net difference between them is equal to the difference between Boxes 7 and 8.

	£	£
<b>Box 7: Balances carried forward</b>		<b>5686</b>
Deduct:		
Debtors		
•		
•		
•		
Deduct:		
Payments made in advance (prepayments)		
•		
•		
<b>Total deductions</b>		
Add:		
Creditors (must not include community infrastructure levy (CIL) receipts)		
•		
•		
Add:		
Receipts in advance (must not include deferred grants/loans received)		
•		
•		
<b>Total additions</b>		
<b>Box 8: Total cash and short term investments</b>		<b>5686</b>



## Explanation of variances – pro forma

Name of smaller authority: **Maiden Bradley with Yarnfield Parish Council**

County area (local councils and parish meetings only): **Wiltshire**

**Please provide full explanations, including numerical values,** for the following:

- variances of more than 15% between totals for individual boxes (except variances of less than £200);
- a breakdown of approved reserves if the total reserves (Box 7) figure is more than twice the annual precept/rates & levies value (Box 2).

<b>Section 2</b>	<b>2016/17 £</b>	<b>2017/18 £</b>	<b>Variance £</b>	<b>Variance %</b>	<b>Detailed explanation of variance (with amounts £)</b>
<b>Box 2</b> <i>Precept or Rates and Levies</i>	13743	14342	+599	+4.4%	
<b>Box 3</b> <i>Total other receipts</i>	1935	3709	+1774	+91.7%	Grant recieved from Wiltshire Council £1147.50 VAT reclaim SID £495.02
<b>Box 4</b> <i>Staff costs</i>	4180	4551	+371	+8.9%	
<b>Box 5</b> <i>Loan interest/ capital repayments</i>	NIL	Nil	Nil	Nil	
<b>Box 6</b> <i>All other payments</i>	9235	12784	3549	+38.4%	Speed Indicator Device Purchased £2295.00 Printer Replaced £264.43 Play Area refurbished £950.00
<b>Box 9</b> <i>Total fixed assets &amp; long term investments &amp; assets</i>	38082	40491	2409	+6.3%	
<b>Box 10</b> <i>Total borrowings</i>	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	
<b>Explanation for 'high' reserves</b>	Box 7 is more than twice Box 2 because the authority held the following breakdown of reserves at the year end:				

Smaller authority name: **Maiden Bradley with Yarnfield Parish Council**

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

**ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018**

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

NOTICE	NOTES
<p>1. Date of announcement <u>Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018</u> (a)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 2018, these documents will be available on reasonable notice by application to:</p> <p>(b) Mrs Sarah Jeffries PSLCC 9 Beech Grove Warminster Wiltshire BA12 0AB 01985213436</p> <p>commencing on (c) <u>Monday 4 June 2018</u> <u>Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018</u></p> <p>and ending on (d) <u>Friday 13 July 2018</u> <u>Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2018</u></p> <p>3. Local government electors and their representatives also have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The opportunity to question the appointed auditor about the accounting records; and</li><li>• 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.</li></ul> <p>The appointed auditor can be contacted at the address in paragraph 4 below for this purpose between the above dates only.</p> <p>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:</p> <p>PKF Littlejohn LLP (Ref: SBA Team) 1 Westferry Circus Canary Wharf London E14 4HD (<a href="mailto:sba@pkf-littlejohn.com">sba@pkf-littlejohn.com</a>)</p> <p>5. This announcement is made by (e) Sarah Jeffries PSLCC</p>	<p>(a) Insert date of placing of the notice which must be not less than 1 day before the date in (c) below</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(d) The inspection period between (c) and (d) must be 30 working days inclusive and must include the first 10 working days of July.</p> <p>(e) Insert name and position of person placing the notice – this person must be the responsible financial officer for the smaller authority</p>

## 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 2-13 July 2018 for 2017/18 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*.

## WHAT SMALLER AUTHORITIES NEED TO DO TO ADVERTISE THE PERIOD DURING WHICH ELECTORS AND INTERESTED PERSONS MAY EXERCISE RIGHTS RELATING TO THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS?

The [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#) and the [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#) require that:

1. 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, during a period of 30 working days set by the smaller authority and including the first 10 working days of July.
2. The period referred to in paragraph (1) starts with the day on which the period for the exercise of public rights is treated as having been commenced i.e. the day following the day on which all of the obligations in paragraph (3) below have been fulfilled.
3. The responsible financial officer for a relevant authority must, on behalf of that authority, publish **(which must include publication on the authority's website)**:

(a) the Accounting Statements (i.e. Section 2 of either Part 2 or 3, whichever is relevant, of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)), accompanied by:

(i) a declaration, signed by that officer to the effect that the status of the Accounting Statements are unaudited and that the Accounting Statements as published may be subject to change;

(ii) the Annual Governance Statement (i.e. Section 1 of either Part 2 or Part 3, whichever is relevant, of the AGAR); and

(b) a statement that sets out—

(i) the period for the exercise of public rights;

(ii) details of the manner in which notice should be given of an intention to inspect the accounting records and other documents;

(iii) the name and address of the local auditor;

(iv) the provisions contained in section 26 (inspection of documents etc.) and section 27 (right to make objections at audit) of the Act, as they have effect in relation to the authority in question;

## HOW DO YOU DO IT?

1. You will meet statutory requirements if you fully and accurately complete the notice of public rights pro forma in this document, and

2. Publish **(including publication on the smaller authority's website)** the following documents, the day before the public rights period commences:

- a. the approved Sections 1 and 2 of either Part 2 or 3, whichever is relevant to your smaller authority, of the AGAR; and
- b. the completed Notice of Public Rights and Publication of Unaudited Annual Governance & Accountability Return. Please note that we have pre-completed it with the following **suggested** dates: Monday 4 June – Friday 13 July 2018. (The latest possible dates that comply with the statutory requirements are Monday 2 July – Friday 10 August 2018); and
- c. the notes which accompany the Notice (Local authority accounts: a summary of your rights).