SPROWSTON TOWN COUNCIL

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

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

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

NOTICE	NOTES
1. Date of announcement: 10th August 2026 (a)	(a) Insert date of placing of the notice which must be not less than 1 day before the date in (c) below
2. Each year the smaller authority's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) needs to be reviewed by an external auditor appointed by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd. The unaudited AGAR has been published with this notice. As it has yet to be reviewed by the appointed auditor, it is subject to change as a result of that review. **Any person interested has the right to inspect and make copies of the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records must be made available for inspection by any person interested. For the year ended 31 March 2026, these documents will be available on reasonable notice by application to:**	
(b) Mr Guy Ranawera (Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer). Sprowston Town Council Office, Recreation Ground Road, Norwich, NR7 8EW. Tel. 01603 408063. Email: townclerk@sprowston-tc.gov.uk ____	(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
commencing on (c) __**Tuesday 11th August 2026**_______________________	(c) Insert date, which must be at least 1 day after the date of announcement in (a) above and exactly 30 working days before the date appointed in (d) below
and ending on (d) ___**Tuesday 22nd September 2026**____________________	(d) The inspection period between (c) and (d) must be 30 working days inclusive and must include the first 10 working days of July.
3. Local government electors and their representatives also have: • The opportunity to question the appointed auditor about the accounting records; and • The right to make an objection which concerns a matter in respect of which the appointed auditor could either make a public interest report or apply to the court for a declaration that an item of account is unlawful. Written notice of an objection must first be given to the auditor and a copy sent to the smaller authority. The appointed auditor can be contacted at the address in paragraph 4 below for this purpose between the above dates only.	
4. The smaller authority's AGAR is subject to review by the appointed auditor under the provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the NAO's Code of Audit Practice 2024. The appointed auditor is: **PKF Littlejohn LLP (Ref: SBA Team)** **30 Churchill Place** **London E14 5RE** (sba@pkf-l.com)	
5. This announcement is made by (e) Mr Guy Ranawera (RFO).	(e) Insert name and position of person placing the notice – this person must be the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) for the smaller authority

LOCAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNTS: A SUMMARY OF YOUR RIGHTS

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

The basic position

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

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

The right to inspect the accounting records

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

When smaller authorities have finished preparing accounts for the financial year and approved them, they must publish them (including on a website). There must be a 30 working day period, called the 'period for the exercise of public rights', during which you can exercise your statutory right to inspect the accounting records. Smaller authorities must tell the public, including advertising this on their website, that the accounting records and related documents are available to inspect. By arrangement you will then have 30 working days to inspect and make copies of the accounting records. You may have to pay a copying charge. The 30 working day period must include a common period of inspection during which all smaller authorities' accounting records are available to inspect. This will be 1-14 July 2026 for 2025/26 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*.

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

We acknowledge as the members of:

SPROWSTON TOWN 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 2026, that:

	Agreed: Yes	Agreed: No*	N/A	'Yes' means that this authority:
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 have assured 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.*
10. We have put in place arrangements for the effective IT and data management in accordance with proper practices during the year under review.	✔			*has made suitable arrangements for its IT and data management and has complied with proper practices in doing so.*

***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:

29/07/2026

and recorded as minute reference:

183 (1)

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

Chair

Clerk

www.sprowston-tc.gov.uk

AGAR Financial Year 2025/2026

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2025/2026

Explanation of 'No' response to Assertion 1

Assertion 1: "We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements."

Assertion 1 comprises two clauses (see below). In deciding an answer to assertion 1, each local council should consider its response to both clauses.

1. Put in place effective financial management.

Sprowston Town Council is confident effective financial management is in place.

The Council's operating balances, reserves and income were sufficient for Council to conduct its business in full and to respond to unexpected (and therefore unbudgeted) events.

Outturn for financial year 2025/26 showed expenditure under budget (90.61%) even whilst service delivery continued at a high standard. Income exceeded target (106.90%).

Banking reconciliations (signed by the Chair) and budget monitoring took place on a quarterly basis.

To provide an even higher degree of assurance, the RFO requested the Independent Internal Auditor conduct a larger than usual sample of payments. 79 payments were sampled and no instances of error, fraud or other wrong doing were identified.

The Independent Internal Auditor conducted mid-year and year-end audits. Except for the on-paper year-end non-reconciliation of box 7 and box 8 of the AGAR, these audits found Council's finances and financial management to be in good order.

2. Put in place arrangements for preparation of the accounting statements

The reason the Town Council has answered 'No' to assertion 1 is that finance staff have not been able to reconcile box 7 and box 8 of the AGAR return.

Detailed investigations by the Council's finance staff, the Independent Internal Auditor and a finance-trained Councillor (appointed by Council) were unable to identify a specific cause of the unexplained variance prior to the AGAR submission deadline of 1st July 2026.

These investigations suggest the variance is most likely a consequence of the complexity of the Council's current accounting practices, which themselves are a consequence of the Council's current software accounts package – SAGE Business Cloud. SAGE is a leading commercial accounting package. However, it is not designed to manage finances on the standard Local Council 'Income and Expenditure' accounting basis, or to produce an AGAR return.

To use SAGE on an ‘Income and expenditure’ basis, in a way that complies with SAPPP ‘proper practices’ and the requirements of the AGAR, necessitates considerable manual intervention. This in turn increases the possibility of error.

Over the last 5 years, churn in the Council’s post of Administration and Finance Officer (which is responsible for the day-to-day operation of SAGE) has been high and it is possible that some inconsistencies, misclassification, or miscoding have crept in over time.

The process for checking accuracy of the cashbook and conducting bank reconciliation is straight forward and carried out regularly throughout the year. This provides extremely high confidence that Council’s bank accounts are correct (see internal auditor’s report, date June 2026). In contrast, formulation of the AGAR occurs only once per year (at year-end) and requires a multi-stage process involving SAGE and complex manual spreadsheet work. Even if proper practices have been followed and no classification/coding mistakes within SAGE have occurred, the level of spreadsheet work required to produce the AGAR in the required format is extremely high and itself vulnerable to error.

Action already taken

- Council has engaged CloudyIT (a specialist local government finance and software firm) to provide expert review of the Council’s accounts and accounting system usage. CloudyIT’s review work is ongoing, but as at 23/07/2026 they have identified one miscoded transaction which contributes significantly to the non-reconciliation of box 7 and box 8 (for further details, please see ‘Section 2 Accounting Statements_2025-26_Reconciliation between Box 7 and Box 8 - Explanation of Non-Reconciliation).

Action to be taken

- The Responsible Finance Officer had previously identified the above risks and initiated a change of finance system from SAGE to GovFinance (a bespoke finance package for Town and Parish Councils). GovFinance will streamline and automate much of the Council’s accounting processes (including production of the AGAR) thereby greatly reducing scope for error and reconciliation failure. However, as at year end 31st March 2026, GovFinance was still undergoing configuration and deployment and could not be used to produce the AGAR for financial year 2025/2026. The 2026/2027 AGAR will be produced using GovFinance.
- Finance staff will receive further training on SAGE, until gov Finance is operational.
- Going forward, banking reconciliations will take place monthly, instead of quarterly.
- Draft AGARs will be produced quarterly so that non-reconciliations can be identified and resolved earlier in the financial year.
- Upon completion of CloudyIT’s review of accounts, the Council will restate its 2025/26 AGAR figures.

Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2025/26 for

SPROWSTON TOWN COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2025 £	31 March 2026 £	*Please round all figures to nearest £1. Do not leave any boxes blank and report £0 or Nil balances. All figures **must** agree to underlying financial records.*
1. Balances brought forward	2,465,503	1,275,768	*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	840,859	897,054	*Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.*
3. (+) Total other receipts	329,227	357,976	*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	398,591	439,691	*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.*
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	133,424	132,532	*Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).*
6. (-) All other payments	1,827,806	940,188	*Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cash-book less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).*
7. (=) Balances carried forward	1,275,768	1,018,387	*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	1,422,112	926,792	*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.***
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	4,718,974	4,812,979	*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	1,298,321	1,200,700	*The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).*

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	
11 Do the figures in the accounting statements above exclude any trust transactions?	✔		*For guidance refer to the Practitioners' Guide sections 2.31 to 2.33.*

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2026 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 28/07/2026

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

29/07/2026

as recorded in minute reference:

183(2)

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

AGAR Financial Year 2025/2026

Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2025/2026

Explanation of Non-Reconciliation Between Box 7 and Box 8

We have been unable to reconcile box 7 and box 8 of our Accounting Statements for financial year 2025/26.

Production of the AGAR and reconciliation between box 7 and box 8 yielded an 'on-paper' unexplained variance of -£73,091.

The non-reconciliation and unexplained variance were notified to the Internal Auditor by the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

Owing to the Town Councils stringent recording keeping of outgoing payments and incoming receipts, quarterly banking reconciliations and the Independent Internal Auditor's own expanded assurance sample of 79 outgoing payments (which earned a clean bill of health); the Independent Internal Auditor's opinion is that Council's reported cashbook (including funds at bank) is accurate and correct (see internal auditor's report, dated June 2026).

Detailed investigations by the Council's finance staff, the Independent Internal Auditor and a finance-trained Councillor (appointed by Council) were unable to identify the cause of the unexplained variance prior to the AGAR submission deadline of 1st July.

As at time of submission, the most likely cause of the variance is thought to be human error in the use of the Council's accounting software and/or in the complex spreadsheet work required to produce the AGAR Accounting Statements.

Action already taken

- Council has engaged CloudyIT (a specialist local government finance and software firm) to provide expert review of the Council's accounts and accounting system usage. CloudyIT's review work is ongoing, but as at 23/07/2026 they have identified one internal transfer in the amount of £34,000, which was miscoded as income.
  Identification of this miscoded internal transfer reduces the unexplained variance (-£73,091) to £39,091. CloudyIT's review work is ongoing.

Action to be taken:

- Analysis will continue post-submission and shall focus on the accuracy of the underlaying figures pulled through from our accounting software (SAGE) into the AGAR return spreadsheet. In particular, further attention will be given to 'Creditors Control' as this presented an atypically large balance as at 31st March 2026. When the source of the error (or errors) is identified; Council will restate and resubmit its AGAR Accounting Statement figures.

- The Town Council is in the process of adopting a new accounting system (GovFinance) designed specifically for use in local Councils. This will remove much of the human intervention presently required to produce the AGAR (e.g. exporting a correct trial balance from our current accounting software (SAGE) and utilising multiple spreadsheet formulae).
- Finance staff will receive further training on SAGE, until gov Finance is operational.
- Going forward; banking reconciliations will take place monthly, instead of quarterly.
- Draft AGARs will be produced quarterly so that non-reconciliations can be identified and resolved earlier in the financial year.

Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26

Sprowston Town Council

https://sprowston-tc.gov.uk

During the financial year ended 31 March 2026, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2025/26 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	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. Cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all 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 bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	✔		
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 2024/25, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. *(If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2024/25 AGAR tick "not covered")*			✔
L. The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	✔		
M. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations *(during the 2025/26 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2024-25 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).*	✔		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2024/25 AGAR *(see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).*	✔		
O. The authority has complied with laws, regulations & proper practices relating to digital and data compliance.	✔		

	Yes	No	Not applicable
P. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.			✔

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: 23/02/2026 20/05/2026 DD/MM/YYYY

Name of person who carried out the internal audit: J. Miller

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit: J. Miller

Date: 05/06/2026

***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).