WINSFORD TOWN COUNCIL
STATEMENT OF INTERNAL CONTROL FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2027

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Winsford Town 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 that resources are used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The Council is responsible for maintaining a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and includes arrangements for financial, operational and risk management.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than eliminate all risk of failure to achieve the Council's policies, aims and objectives. It therefore provides reasonable, rather than absolute, assurance of effectiveness. The system is based on an ongoing process to identify and prioritise risks, evaluate their likelihood and impact, and manage them through proportionate controls.

THE INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

Governance structure

Full Council remains collectively responsible for governance and for all matters which the Financial Regulations state must not be delegated, including setting the final budget and council tax requirement, reviewing the effectiveness of internal control, approving the accounting statements and Annual Governance Statement, borrowing, declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence, and addressing recommendations from internal or external auditors.

Body	Current role in the control environment
Full Council	Approves the budget and precept, policies, major decisions, payment schedules and reserved governance matters; receives committee minutes, recommendations and reports.
Staffing and Assets Committee	Provides member oversight of staffing and asset matters within its approved terms of reference and delegated authority.
External Committee	Provides oversight of external services, projects and community-facing activities within its approved terms of reference.
Events Committee	Oversee the Council's events programme and related budgets and risk controls within its approved terms of reference.
Planning Committee	Considers planning matters under the Council's approved delegation arrangements.
Working groups	The Brunner Guildhall Working Group and Winsford Neighbourhood Plan Working Group are advisory and make recommendations; they do not exercise delegated financial authority unless expressly resolved by Council.

Budget and financial reporting

The RFO prepares a draft budget no later than October, including detailed estimates and a three-year forecast. Committees may review draft budgets and submit proposed amendments by the end of November. Full Council must approve the final budget and set the precept no later than the end of January. Actual income and expenditure are then monitored against the approved budget through regular financial reports.

Officers and staffing

The Council appoints a Town Clerk who is the Proper Officer, principal adviser and administrator. The Town Clerk is also appointed as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and administers the Council's financial affairs, accounting records and control systems in accordance with legislation, proper practices and Council policy.

Role / team	Control responsibility
Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer	Overall administration, legal and procedural advice, risk management, accounting systems, financial reporting and certification of the annual accounting statements.
Deputy Town Clerk	Supports continuity of management and, where formally appointed or delegated, undertakes Proper Officer or RFO duties during absence.
Events Manager	Operates event budgets, procurement and risk controls within delegated authority and approved procedures.
Civic and Administrative Officer	Supports civic, administrative and record-management controls in accordance with Council procedures.
Grounds team	Four ground staff and up to four casual grounds staff operate under management arrangements, approved budgets, health and safety controls and documented purchasing procedures.

Payments and banking

All invoices are checked for accuracy, coded to the appropriate budget heading, verified to confirm receipt of the goods, works or services, and certified by the RFO. Payments are made through approved banking arrangements and must be both authorised and approved in accordance with the Financial Regulations. Wherever possible, more than one person is involved through dual online authorisation or dual cheque signing. A schedule of payments requiring Council authorisation is presented with the agenda and approved by resolution; a full list of payments is reported to the next Council meeting.

Delegated expenditure

Within an approved budget, the Clerk may authorise purchases below £1,000 excluding VAT and may authorise purchases below £5,000 excluding VAT in consultation with the Mayor or Deputy Mayor. Purchases over £5,000 require Council approval. Emergency expenditure of up to £2,000 excluding VAT may be authorised by the Clerk where there is a serious risk to service delivery or public safety, with prompt reporting to the Mayor and Council. All authorisations require a clear audit trail.

Electronic payments and supplier controls

Online credentials must not be disclosed to anyone who is not authorised in writing. Supplier bank account changes require written notification and independent verification by the Clerk. Council computers used for financial business must have appropriate security and current protective software. Regular payments may be made by direct debit where permitted by Financial Regulations.

Income
All sums due are collected under the supervision of the RFO, recorded promptly and deposited intact in the Council's name. Where significant cash is received, more than one person is present for the initial count, receipts are reconciled to a control record and appropriate security arrangements are used. Fees and charges are reviewed at least annually as part of budget setting.

Risk management, assets and insurance
The RFO prepares a risk management policy covering all Council activities and the Council reviews the policy and consequential arrangements at least annually. New activities are supported by a risk assessment. The asset register is maintained and tangible assets are verified at least annually. Insurance cover and fidelity guarantee arrangements are reviewed annually, and new or changed risks are notified promptly.

Records, information and business continuity
The Council maintains technical and organisational measures to secure information in paper and electronic form, controls access to personal data, retains and destroys information in accordance with approved policies, and maintains arrangements for data-breach management. Financial records are backed up regularly and access arrangements are designed to preserve continuity if an employee leaves or is incapacitated.

Internal audit
The Council appoints a competent and independent internal auditor. The auditor evaluates risk management, control and governance processes and reports in writing at least once in each financial year. The auditor has no operational role, does not initiate or approve transactions and does not direct Council employees except where staff have been assigned to assist the audit.

External audit and electors' rights
The RFO arranges the statutory exercise of electors' rights and publication of the required notices and documents. Correspondence and reports from internal and external auditors are brought to all councillors without undue delay. The external auditor's annual certificate is presented to the Council.

Policy alignment and annual review
This Statement is to be read with the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Where those documents retain references to a former committee title or officer title, the matter must be referred to Full Council or dealt with only under a formally approved delegation. The Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, risk arrangements, bank mandate and system of internal control are reviewed at least annually and following relevant organisational or statutory changes.

REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS
At least once each year, and before approving the Annual Governance Statement, Full Council reviews the effectiveness of its system of internal control, including the effectiveness and independence of internal audit. The outcome of the review and approval of this Statement are formally recorded in the minutes.

APPENDIX A
INTERNAL CONTROL STATEMENT

Winsford Town Council as a whole is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it maintains a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the management of risk. The following checks are completed regularly and evidenced proportionately:

- Accounting records and the cashbook are complete, current and arithmetically correct.
- Invoices and payment instructions agree, goods or services have been confirmed as received, and expenditure was properly authorised.
- Bank reconciliations are completed by the RFO and verified by Council each month.
- Income due is identified, received, recorded and banked intact.
- VAT is correctly recorded and returns are submitted by the due date.
- Payroll agrees with Council-approved pay and contractual terms; statutory and pension deductions are paid on time.
- Payment schedules, direct debits, debit-card transactions and delegated payments are supported by invoices or receipts and reported as required.
- Budget monitoring reports agree with the accounting records and identify actual or potential overspends.
- The asset register is updated and the continued existence of tangible assets is verified at least annually.
- Insurance, fidelity guarantee cover, risk assessments and the risk register are reviewed at least annually.
- Procurement and tendering comply with the applicable thresholds, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and current procurement legislation.
- Supplier bank-detail changes are independently verified and online banking access is restricted to authorised users.
- Electronic records are backed up and access can be maintained during staff absence, departure or incapacity.
- Personal data, confidential information and Council records are secured, retained, disclosed and destroyed in accordance with approved policies.
- Internal and external audit reports and recommendations are reported promptly to Full Council and followed up.
- Committee and officer decisions remain within approved terms of reference, budgets and delegated authority.

The Council considers these controls reasonable and proportionate. Internal control checks are intended to provide assurance and accountability without improper interference in the day-to-day administration of financial matters by the RFO.

Full Council reviews the system of internal control annually. The findings, this Statement and the review of internal audit effectiveness are considered and formally recorded before approval of the Annual Governance Statement.