
Agenda Item: Annual Governance Statement 2026 – Assertion 10

Meeting Date: Monday, 22 September 2025

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to update Councillors on new proper practices relating to the Annual Governance Statement for the 2025-26 accounting year.

Background

The Practitioners' Guide 2025 – Governance & Accountability for smaller Authorities in England is issued by the Smaller Authorities' Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) to support the preparation by smaller authorities in England of statutory annual accounting and governance statements found in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.

It lays down 'proper practices' which must be applied to the Annual Governance & Accountability Return at the end of each financial year.

Current Situation

Assertion 10 – Digital & Data Compliance

This is a new, standalone assertion introduced in the 2025 Guide which has been added to clarify data compliance previously covered under Assertion 3. It applies to the Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGAR) for the financial year starting 1st April 2025 and is therefore now in effect.

The details (as taken from the General Practitioner's Guide 2025) are;

- Email management - Every authority must have a generic email account hosted on an authority owned domain, for example clerk@abcparishcouncil.gov.uk or clerk@abcparishcouncil.org.uk rather than abcparishclerk@gmail.com or abcparishclerk@outlook.com for example.

Witney Town Council is compliant on this point

- All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must meet legal requirements for all existing websites regardless of what domain is being used.

All websites must meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (where applicable). All websites must include published documentation as specified in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Transparency code for smaller authorities (where applicable).

Witney Town Council is compliant on this point.

- All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must follow both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018.

Witney Town Council is compliant on this point. However, the collection and processing of personal data is constantly evolving. Audits take place regularly and both staff and Members have received training and are aware of their obligations.

- All smaller authorities, including parish meetings, must process personal data with care and in line with the principles of data protection. The DPA 2018 supplements the GDPR and classifies an authority as both a Data Controller and a Data Processor.

Witney Town Council is registered as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioner's Office.

- All smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must also have an IT policy. This explains how everyone - clerks, members and other staff - should conduct authority business in a secure and legal way when using IT equipment and software. This relates to the use of authority-owned and personal equipment.

The Town Council's IT Policy is under review following a change to the Council's IT provider. Updated policies will follow within the year.

In June 2026, the Council will need to approve the annual governance statement by resolution of members at a Full meeting as a whole and in advance of the authority approving the accounting statements in Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The Chair of the meeting and the Town Clerk need to sign and date the annual governance statement and enter a minute reference. Further details will follow at this time.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – no impact.
- b) Biodiversity – no impact.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no impact.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency– no impact.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The Council must ensure it is compliant in the areas listed under Assertion 10 above to avoid reputational damage.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Financial Implications

➤ There are no implications pertaining to this report.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.