Dear Clerk

Thank you for this note.

Where a complaint is dealt with informally by NHDC, there is no finding on a breach of the code either way. NHDC policies make that clear. Your external auditors have made that clear. The Vice-Chair has argued that informal resolution is the same as having been cleared of a breach of the code. (Incidentally I consider him to be conflicted having been the subject of a negative decision letter). It appears that notwithstanding your external auditor's letter, you may concur with the Vice-Chair. Would you please be so kind as to advise if that is the case?

The law (Section 28(11) of the 2011 Act); your external auditors and NALC are all at odds with the idea that the Parish Council must not discuss the matter. Could you please clarify if you feel those three sources are mistaken?

23/24 AGAR – please be so kind as to clarify if you still maintain that "yes" was the appropriate answer to questions 2 and 3 on the 23/24 AGAR?

There seems to be some issues previously raised which are still unresolved....

Do you concur that your external auditors refer to 5 occasions when the Parish Council failed to meet its mandatory requirements, in respect of 2 questions on the 23/24 AGAR?

Is it still your position that referring matters to external auditors is evidence of vexation?

Do you stand by your advice (even if you have thrown this away) that there was no reason to consider answering anything other than "yes" to all the questions on the 25/26 AGAR?

Why were the names of councillors redacted on the external audit letter with the agenda, even though the information is in the public arena?

Do you believe the Chair and Vice-Chair do not need to declare an interest in audit matters concerning themselves?

Finally, may I please ask if you are content that you can be impartial in all these matters, given your previous advice, particularly in the context of the contents of your external auditors' letter?

I do appreciate these are difficult issues, but as the Council's principal governance advisor, I am keen to establish your views on these key matters.

Thank you in anticipation.

Best regards

xxxxxxx

On Friday, 13 November 2026 at 10:35:39 GMT, clerk@ashwell.gov.uk <clerk@ashwell.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear xxxxxxx

I am writing to acknowledge your emails of 4th November 2026 ; your previous emails of 3rd November 2026 and 29th October 2026 and my responses on 4th November 2026 and 2nd November 2026.

Please see the following:

- *North Herts Council Complaints Handling Procedure for matters relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct*

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-06/Councillor%20Complaints%20Handling%20Procedure%2025.6.24.pdf

5.3.2

Where a complaint is dealt with informally, it is important to note that there has been no finding that the Code has been breached.

5.9

When the Monitoring Officer has taken a decision, they will inform the complainant and the Councillor (and in cases involving a Parish/ Town or Community Councillor) the Clerk (or Chair as may be appropriate) of the decision and the reasons for that decision. These will remain confidential.

- Confirmation email from the NHC Service Director - Legal & Community acting as the Monitoring Officer dated 30th November 2023 as included in documents submitted to the External Auditor, see attached.

Minutes of previous Parish Council meetings are available on the website

https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/full-council/

Kind regards

Sally Roberts, Clerk - Ashwell Parish Council

From: xxxxxxxxxxxxx
Sent: 04 November 2026 11:59
To: clerk@ashwell.gov.uk
Subject: Re: Potential issues including GDPR matters

Dear Clerk

Please allow me to deal with each of your paragraphs in turn.

23/24 AGAR - The Parish Council, both the previous Clerk and yourself, have consistently advised the Parish Council that there is no merit in any of the objections raised with the external auditors. If I recall correctly, you advised the Parish Council in September 2025, that there was no reason not to answer "yes" to all the AGAR questions in respect of 23/24. You may recall Councillor Button suggested that I might not be wrong when I said I thought it was inconsistent to say "yes" in 23/24 when there was more than one negative decision letter, on more than one subject, whilst saying "no" in 24/25 when there was one negative decision letter, on one subject.

I am sure you will recall the meeting – (it was the meeting where you went outside to seek the advice of the Vice-Chair, who had declared and interest and withdrawn). I do appreciate you did not submit the AGAR in 23/24, but I do think it is fair to say, that you have stood behind the accuracy of it, at least until now. Do you think it is unreasonable of me to conclude that you have stood behind the accuracy of the 23/24 AGAR, and moreover that you did communicate that to councillors?

July Minutes - I am not referring to the July 2026 minutes. I don't believe I have made reference to the July 2026 minutes, but I will gladly apologise if I have got something wrong.

The bigger picture - If we look at the external auditor's letter, we can see the auditors think there are a total of 5 occasions where the Parish Council has failed to meet "*mandatory requirements"* in respect of 2 questions on the AGAR.

I wonder if I might respectfully suggest, that amongst the issues that the Parish Council is going to need to wrestle with are,

· how could these deficiencies have prevailed, despite the issues being pointed out to the Parish Council?

· Is it still credible to claim referral to auditors is evidence of vexation?

· Do you stand by your advice (even if you have now thrown it away), that there was no reason to consider not answering "yes" to all the questions in the 25/26 AGAR?

· Why are the names of councillors redacted when the information is in the public arena?

I have said before, you are in a difficult position. I have said before, and say again, I can and will help unconflicted representatives of the Parish Council navigate their way through this. Please do convey that offer to councillors.

Best regards

xxxxxxxxxxx

On Wednesday, 4 November 2026 at 09:35:09 GMT, clerk@ashwell.gov.uk <clerk@ashwell.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear xxxxxxxx

Thank you for your email. If you are referring to the Parish Council's formal response to the External Auditor in respect of the 2023/24 AGAR would you please provide a copy of the specific page and paragraph highlighting the statement that you are referring to so that I can consider the matter further.

If you are referring to a separate incident referring to July 2026, please clarify what you consider is wrong with the Minutes issued.

Please note this is a non-working day for me so I will not have another opportunity to respond prior to the meeting this evening.

Kind regards

Sally Roberts

Clerk - Ashwell Parish Council

From: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Sent: 03 November 2026 14:02
To: clerk@ashwell.gov.uk
Subject: Re: Potential issues including GDPR matters

Dear Clerk

Thank you for your email of 2nd November. May I begin by saying, what a refreshing change it is to have a clear-cut apology. I hope you can forgive me for saying, I can only hope that approach prevails on Wednesday evening, when the Parish Council considers the external auditor's letter.

I appreciate that a councillor pointed it out to you on Thursday night. It was of course, in my email much earlier that afternoon, but perhaps that was outside of the normal office hours.

Turning now to your point about responsibilities between yourself and Nicky. Do I take it that you agree, that on Wednesday evening, it would be more appropriate for Nicky to be advising the Parish Council?

I also would like to gently remind you that there is, in my view, no reason to redact the names of councillors, when all the issues associated are in the public arena. I would respectfully remind that it was the Chair of the Parish Council who put a number of the issues referred to in the auditor's report, into the public arena.

May I now turn to the issue of whether Councillor Lee declared his interest before speaking on the item in July 2024, and whether or not his comments were in the public participation part of the agenda.

Can we save ourselves a lot of time, and just agree that the recording of the meeting shows the following as matters of fact.

1. Councillor Lee made his personal statement before he declared an interest.

2. Councillor Lee did not make his personal statement during the public participation part of the meeting.

I am sure as Clerk to the Parish Council, you would want to ensure that there was no misunderstanding about the factual sequence of events – even if that is uncomfortable.

You will forgive me for not delving into the volume of pages of information that you and the author of the "Notes of Objections" document submitted to the Parish Council in September & October 2025. Those documents may or may not assert certain specifics – if I've got that detail wrong, I apologise. Can we just agree the assertions that you and those documents made that there was no merit whatsoever in any of the objections was not accepted by your independent external auditors?

I would welcome a response before Wednesday evening, if at all possible, so we may avoid any unnecessary tension. In light of the comments in the auditor's letter, can you advise me if any conflicted party has been involved in discussions regarding how this matter should be handled.

Best regards

xxxxxxxxxxxxx

On Monday, 2 November 2026 at 08:36:55 GMT, clerk@ashwell.gov.uk <clerk@ashwell.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxx

On behalf of the Clerk's Office, please accept our apologies for publishing a version of the External Auditor's Final Decision Letter that could be technically unredacted and for it's subsequent publication on Facebook.

The error was identified by one of our Councillors early on Thursday evening and was rectified immediately with a replacement copy, which could not be unredacted and uploaded to the website. The additional error highlighted in your email was also identified at the time and subsequently corrected.

Please see the link below:

https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/downloads/agendas_and_minutes/agendas/2026/november/agenda_for_apc_-_4th_november_2026.pdf

I was unaware that the document had been published on Facebook. This was removed immediately it was discovered (Friday morning) and replaced with a new post and the above link.

With regard to your other points, you will no doubt have seen from the previous HR Committee meeting minutes that discussions are currently taking place concerning the respective roles and responsibilities of the Clerk and Deputy Clerk. Please refer to the minutes at the following link:

https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/downloads/hr_committee/draft_minutes_hr_committee_meeting_25_august_2026.pdf

With regard to Item 5, I believe you claim that in our response to the External Auditor that the Parish Council stated that the Chair had made his remarks in the public part of the meeting. I would be grateful if you would indicate where in our response this occurred.

Regards

Sally Roberts

Clerk - Ashwell Parish Council

From: xxxxxxxxxxx

Sent: 29 October 2026 14:18
To: clerk <clerk@ashwell.gov.uk>
Subject: Potential issues including GDPR matters

Dear Clerk

In addition to my previous note to your auditors, copied to you on the subject of the 23/24 audit decision letter, I would like to respectfully suggest the following require your urgent consideration.

1. Redactions

The audit letter makes it clear the identity of the objector should be protected.

The rest of the auditor's letter does not raise any issue, or give any detail which is not already in the public arena. Consequently, there seems no justification for the redacting of councillor names.

2. The Facebook link took me to an unredacted copy of the SBA letter.

3. The agenda includes the letter under the item for the 25/26 accounts, not the 23/24 accounts.

4. Given the advice yourself and the former clerk have presented to the council about the accuracy of the answers to the 23/24 AGAR, do you consider that you can both be – and be seen to be – impartial?

(I would respectfully say that this may be an occasion when a deputy, who has never expressed a view, might be a more appropriate advisor to the council).

5. It is clear from the video recording of the July meeting, that, contrary to what you advised the auditors, the Chair of the parish council did not make his remarks in the public participation part of the meeting. I am sure that, even without the Nolan Principles, you would not want to be a Clerk who had mislead the parish council's external auditors on matters of fact. Presumably, you will, therefore be writing to the external auditors and correcting the assertion that the Chair of the parish council only spoke in the public participation part of the meeting.

I would appreciate it if you would advise me of your approach on each of these issues ahead of the meeting next week, so I may be able to avoid raising them in the public arena, and thus avoid any unnecessary stress.

Best regards

xxxxxxxxxxx

p.s. given the contents of the auditor's decision letter, please allow me to repeat my offer to assist unconflicted representatives of the Parish Council in navigating these governance issues.