Annual Governance Statement 2025-26 (Section 1)
Explanation for "No" Response to Assertion 10

This document has been prepared to accompany Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26, Annual Governance Statement.

Assertion 10 requires the Council to confirm that it has made suitable arrangements for IT and data management in accordance with proper practices during the year under review.

The 2025 Practitioners' Guide requirements for Assertion 10 include email management, website accessibility and having an IT policy in place. The guidance also links these requirements to wider digital and data management obligations, including data protection, Freedom of Information, transparency and the secure handling of Council information.

Stapeley & District Parish Council has met the wider Assertion 10 arrangements. In particular, the Council has:

- Established .gov.uk email addresses for officers and councillors.
- Established a Council-owned domain for official Council email use.
- Adopted an IT Policy on 17th November 2025.
- Reviewed and adopted an updated Email Communications and Acceptable Use Policy on 16th February 2026.
- Approved and published an updated Website Accessibility Statement on 16th March 2026.
- Maintained a Council website for the publication of Council information.
- Continued to publish required information on the Council website, including AGAR and governance information.
- Maintained arrangements for data protection and information governance.
- Maintained arrangements for dealing with Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests.
- Used Scribe and other administrative systems to support financial records, hall hire records and Council administration.
- Maintained appropriate arrangements for the storage and handling of Council records.

The Council's website arrangements are relevant to Assertion 10 because council websites are expected to meet the required accessibility standards and have an up-to-date accessibility statement. Websites should meet WCAG 2.2 AA standards and comply with the Public Sector Bodies accessibility regulations where applicable.

The Council's IT policy arrangements are also relevant to Assertion 10. Smaller authorities should have an IT policy which explains how clerks, members and other users should conduct authority business securely and legally when using IT equipment and software.

The Council has taken steps to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for IT and data management.

The Council has answered "No" to Assertion 10 for 2025-26 because the internal auditor has identified an ongoing issue with the use of personal email addresses for Council-related business.

The internal auditor's 2025-26 report states that, although the Council has established .gov.uk email addresses for all officers and councillors, there remains an ongoing issue with some councillors either using personal email addresses to send emails for Council-related business, or Council-related correspondence being sent from .gov.uk email accounts to other councillors' personal email addresses.

The internal auditor has confirmed that Assertion 10 requires councils to use generic, Council-owned domain email accounts for Council business, rather than personal email addresses.

The Council accepts that, even though the required Council email infrastructure is in place and the wider Assertion 10 arrangements have been met, the inconsistent use of Council-owned email accounts means that the Council cannot confidently assert full compliance with Assertion 10 for the 2025-26 governance year.

Due to the above information the Council has answered "No" to Assertion 10 on the Annual Governance Statement. (Section 1)

The Council recognises that the use of personal email addresses for Council business creates governance, retention, Freedom of Information, Subject Access Request and data protection risks.

This issue has been raised in previous internal audit reports and members have been reminded that Council business must be conducted using Council email addresses only.

Going forward, members must immediately cease using personal email addresses for Council business. Council-related correspondence must not be sent from, or to, personal email accounts. The Clerk/RFO will continue to monitor compliance and will raise any ongoing concerns with Council as required.

This explanation is published alongside the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) so that the reason for the "No" response to Assertion 10 is clear.