

Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022/23 Form 3

To be completed by Local Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and other Smaller Authorities*:

- where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure exceeded £25,000 but did not exceed £6.5 million; or
- where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure was £25,000 or less but that:
 - are unable to certify themselves as exempt (fee payable); or
 - have requested a limited assurance review (fee payable)

Guidance notes on completing Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022/23

1. Every smaller authority in England that either received gross income or incurred gross expenditure exceeding £25,000 **must** complete Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return at the end of each financial year in accordance with *Proper Practices*.
2. **The Annual Governance and Accountability Return is made up of three parts, pages 3 to 6:**
 - The **Annual Internal Audit Report must** be completed by the authority's internal auditor.
 - **Sections 1 and 2 must** be completed and approved by the authority.
 - **Section 3** is completed by the external auditor and will be returned to the authority.
3. The authority **must** approve Section 1, Annual Governance Statement, before approving Section 2, Accounting Statements, and both **must** be approved and published on the authority website/webpage **before 1 July 2023**.
4. An authority with either gross income or gross expenditure exceeding £25,000 or an authority with neither income nor expenditure exceeding £25,000, but which is unable to certify itself as exempt, or is requesting a limited assurance review, **must** return to the external auditor by email or post (not both) **no later than 30 June 2023**. Reminder letters will incur a charge of £40 +VAT:
 - the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Sections 1 and 2, together with
 - a bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2023
 - an explanation of any significant year on year variances in the accounting statements
 - notification of the commencement date of the period for the exercise of public rights
 - Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23

Unless requested, do not send any additional documents to your external auditor. Your external auditor will ask for any additional documents needed.

Once the external auditor has completed the limited assurance review and is able to give an opinion, the Annual Governance and Accountability **Section 1, Section 2 and Section 3 – External Auditor Report and Certificate** will be returned to the authority by email or post.

Publication Requirements

Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, authorities must publish the following information on the authority website/webpage:

Before 1 July 2023 authorities **must** publish:

- Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and a declaration that the accounting statements are as yet unaudited;
- **Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2022/23**, approved and signed, page 4
- **Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2022/23**, approved and signed, page 5

Not later than 30 September 2023 authorities **must** publish:

- Notice of conclusion of audit
- **Section 3 - External Auditor Report and Certificate**
- **Sections 1 and 2 of AGAR** including any amendments as a result of the limited assurance review.

It is recommended as best practice, to avoid any potential confusion by local electors and interested parties, that you also publish the Annual Internal Audit Report, page 3.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return constitutes the annual return referred to in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Throughout, the words 'external auditor' have the same meaning as the words 'local auditor' in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

*for a complete list of bodies that may be smaller authorities refer to schedule 2 to the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Guidance notes on completing Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2022/23

- The authority **must** comply with *Proper Practices* in completing Sections 1 and 2 of this AGAR. *Proper Practices* are found in the *Practitioners' Guide** which is updated from time to time and contains everything needed to prepare successfully for the financial year-end and the subsequent work by the external auditor.
- Make sure that the AGAR is complete (no highlighted boxes left empty) and is properly signed and dated. Any amendments must be approved by the authority and properly initialled.
- The authority **should** receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report before approving the Annual Governance Statement and the accounts.
- Use the checklist provided below to review the AGAR for completeness before returning it to the external auditor by email or post (not both) no later than 30 June 2023.
- The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) must be approved on the same day or before the Accounting Statements (Section 2) and evidenced by the agenda or minute references.
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) must certify the accounts (Section 2) before they are presented to the authority for approval. The authority must in this order; consider, approve and sign the accounts.
- The RFO is required to commence the public rights period as soon as practical after the date of the AGAR approval.
- You must inform your external auditor about any change of Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer or Chairman, and provide relevant authority owned generic email addresses and telephone numbers.**
- Make sure that the copy of the bank reconciliation to be sent to your external auditor with the AGAR covers all the bank accounts. If the authority holds any short-term investments, note their value on the bank reconciliation. The external auditor must be able to agree the bank reconciliation to Box 8 on the accounting statements (**Section 2, page 5**). An explanation **must** be provided of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8. More help on bank reconciliation is available in the *Practitioners' Guide**.
- Explain fully significant variances in the accounting statements on **page 5**. Do not just send a copy of the detailed accounting records instead of this explanation. The external auditor wants to know that you understand the reasons for all variances. Include complete numerical and narrative analysis to support the full variance.
- If the bank reconciliation is incomplete or variances not **fully** explained then additional costs may be incurred.
- Make sure that the accounting statements add up and that the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2022) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2023).
- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), on behalf of the authority, **must** set the commencement date for the exercise of public rights of 30 consecutive working days which **must** include the first ten working days of July.
- The authority **must** publish on the authority website/webpage the information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, including the period for the exercise of public rights and the name and address of the external auditor **before 1 July 2023**.

Completion checklist – 'No' answers mean you may not have met requirements		Yes	No
All sections	Have all highlighted boxes have been completed?		
	Has all additional information requested, including the dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights , been provided for the external auditor?		
Internal Audit Report	Have all highlighted boxes been completed by the internal auditor and explanations provided?		
Section 1	For any statement to which the response is 'no', has an explanation been published?		
Section 2	Has the Responsible Financial Officer signed the accounting statements before presentation to the authority for approval?		
	Has the authority's approval of the accounting statements been confirmed by the signature of the Chairman of the approval meeting?		
	Has an explanation of significant variations been published where required?		
	Has the bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2023 been reconciled to Box 8?		
	Has an explanation of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8 been provided?		
Sections 1 and 2	Trust funds – have all disclosures been made if the authority as a body corporate is a sole managing trustee? NB: do not send trust accounting statements unless requested.		

***Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices**, can be downloaded from www.nalc.gov.uk or from www.ada.org.uk

Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23

ENTER PUBLICITY Rocester Parish Council

ENTER PUBLIC www.rocesterparishcouncil.com PAGE ADDRESS

During the financial year ended 31 March 2023, 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 2022/23 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. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty 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 2021/22, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2021/22 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 2022-23 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2021-22 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 2021/22 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).		✓	
O. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	Yes	No	Not applicable
			✓

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

09/05/2024

15/05/2015

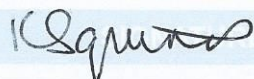
DD/MM/YYYY

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

Kim Squires

ME OF INTERNAL AUDITOR

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit



REQUIRED

Date

15/05/2024

*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). SEE ATTACHED SHEET

**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).

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

We acknowledge as the members of:

ROCESTER PARISH 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 2023, that:

	Agreed		
	Yes	No*	
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.		✓	<i>prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.</i>
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.		✓	<i>made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.</i>
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure 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.		✓	<i>has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.</i>
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.		✓	<i>during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.</i>
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.		✓	<i>considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.</i>
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.		✓	<i>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.</i>
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.		✓	<i>responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.</i>
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.		✓	<i>disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.</i>
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
			✓

***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:

22/05/2024

and recorded as minute reference:

ITEM 4

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

Chairman

Mrs G Mellor

Clerk

NEL

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Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2022/23 for

ROLESTER PARISH COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2022 £	31 March 2023 £	
1. Balances brought forward	37515	35374	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. 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	21443	22836	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	2494	5959	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	14493	10432	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	0	0	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	11585	18027	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	35374	35710	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	35374	35710	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	RESTATED 1649581	1652735	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	0	0	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)				The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)			N/A	The figures in the accounting statements above do not include any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2023 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

Neil

Date 22/05/2024

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

22/05/2024

as recorded in minute reference:

ITEM 6

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

Mrs G A Mellor

Section 3 – External Auditor’s Report and Certificate 2022/23

In respect of

Rochester Parish Council

1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/> .

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2023; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

2 External auditor’s limited assurance opinion 2022/23

Except for the matters reported below on the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

See separate report.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

See separate report.

3 External auditor certificate 2022/23

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2023.

*We do not certify completion because:

Not applicable.

External Auditor Name

Forvis Mazars LLP, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1DF

External Auditor Signature

Forvis Mazars LLP

Date

14 August 2024



Rocester Parish Council

External Auditor Continuation Report
2022/2023

forv/s
mazars

Introduction

This page is part of Section 3 – External Audit Report 2022/2023

The following matters have been raised to draw items to the attention of Rocester Parish Council. These matters came to the attention of Mazars LLP during the review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Report (AGAR) for the year ended 31 March 2023. This report must be presented alongside the AGAR to a full meeting of the smaller authority for review.

The review of the annual return may not disclose all shortcomings of the systems as some matters may not have come to the attention of the auditor. For this reason, the matters raised may not be the only ones that exist.

Except for the matters reported below on the basis of our review of the annual return, in our opinion the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met.

There is a material uncertainty about the figures in the accounts in Section 2, Box 9 of the Councils' Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) as the Village Hall and Children's Centre assets have been included in the fixed asset register with incorrect values. The figures disclosed for both 2021/22 and 2022/23 should therefore have been restated to account for the values of these assets. In 2023/24 the Council should ensure that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is prepared in accordance with proper practices.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the smaller authority:

The internal auditor reported the Council had not monitored progress against its budget during the year, as evidenced by ticking objective D 'No' in the Internal Audit report. The Council correctly ticked assertion 1 as 'No' in the Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that budgets are monitored effectively throughout the financial year.

The internal auditor reported the Council had not carried out bank reconciliations throughout the financial year, as evidenced by ticking objective I 'No' in the Internal Audit report. The Council correctly ticked assertion 1 as 'No' in the Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that bank reconciliations are performed on a regular basis throughout the financial year.

The internal auditor reported the authority had not claimed VAT during the year and no records of recoverable VAT had been found, as evidenced by ticking objective B as 'No' in the Internal Audit report. The Council correctly ticked assertion 2 as 'No' in the Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that VAT claims are submitted to HMRC on a timely basis during the financial year.

The internal auditor reported the authority did not have a formal contract of employment in place for the clerk, as evidenced by ticking objective G as 'No' in the Internal Audit report. The Council correctly ticked assertion 2 as 'No' in the Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that VAT claims are submitted to HMRC on a timely basis during the financial year.

The Council has not approved and published the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and started the period of public rights in accordance with the timetable in the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015. The regulations require these processes to have been completed by the first working day of July. The Council

acknowledged its non-compliance by answering 'No' to assertion 3 in the Annual Governance Statement. For 2023/24 the Council needs to put arrangements in place to ensure that it can discharge its responsibilities in line with the statutory timetable.

The Council did not publish the completion notice at the conclusion of the 2021/22 audit on a free to access website in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015). The Council correctly ticked assertion 3 of the Annual Governance Statement to acknowledge this. In 2023/24 the Council needs to put in place arrangements to ensure that it fully complies with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations require that the Authority retains copies of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return readily accessible for 5 years (Paragraph 13.2). This requirement has not been met; however, the Council answered "No" to Assertions 3 and 4 in Section 1 regarding compliance with laws and regulations in general and specifically observing the elector's rights contained in the Accounts and Audit Regulations. In 2023/24 the Council needs to put in place arrangements to ensure that it fully complies with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

In undertaking the review of the 2022/23 Annual Return it came to our attention that the Council had not met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 in providing electors with a period of 30 working days to inspect the accounts. The Council correctly answered 'No' to the relevant assertion in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement. The Council should ensure that it complies with the Regulations in 2023/24.

The internal auditor reported the Council had not reviewed its risk register and risk assessment procedures during the year, as evidenced by ticking objective C as 'No' in the Internal Audit report. The Council correctly ticked assertion 5 as 'No' in the Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that budgets are monitored effectively throughout the financial year.

The internal auditor reported the Council had not provided supporting records such as invoices for review by the internal auditor. This is evidenced by the internal auditor ticking objectives A and J as 'No' in the Internal Audit report. The Council correctly ticked assertion 6 as 'No' in the Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that budgets are monitored effectively throughout the financial year.

In undertaking the review of the 2022/23 Annual Return it came to our attention that Council has not documented in meeting minutes consideration of the external auditor report from the prior year. The Council has correctly answered 'No' to assertion 7 in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that appropriate action in response to audit recommendations is taken within a reasonable time.

In undertaking the review of the 2022/23 Annual Return it came to our attention that Council has not documented an action plan to address issues raised by the internal auditor report from the prior year. The Council has correctly answered 'No' to assertion 7 in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that appropriate action in response to audit recommendations is taken within a reasonable time.

In undertaking the review of the 2022/23 Annual Return it came to our attention that Council has not fully implemented recommendations made in 2021/22 internal and / or external audit reports. The Council has correctly answered 'No' to assertion 7 in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement. In future, the Council should ensure that appropriate action in response to audit recommendations is taken within a reasonable time.

As the Annual Governance and Accountability Return has not been approved by the Council until 2024, rather than 2023, the Council could not have considered whether any litigation, liabilities, events or transactions occurring after the year-end on a timely basis. The Council has correctly answered 'No' to assertion 8 in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement. In 2023/24, the Council should prepare the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations to allow for any litigation, liabilities or events occurring around the year-end to be considered on a timely basis.

In undertaking the review of the 2022/23 Annual Governance and Accountability Return it came to our attention that in 2023 the Council has not met the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations to provide electors with a period of 30 working days including the first 10 working days of July, to inspect the accounts. The Council should ensure that in 2023/24 they comply with the Regulations and respond 'No' to the relevant assertion in its Annual Governance Statement as the assertion is retrospective and refers to compliance during the relevant financial year rather than in respect of it.

The Council holds general reserves of £35,710, compared to its annual precept of £22,836 and expenditure of £18,027. The Council has no powers to hold revenue reserves for general purposes other than for reasonable working capital and should consider earmarking funds for specific purposes.

No other matters came to our attention.

For and on behalf of Forvis Mazars LLP

Date: 14 August 2024

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