

17 November 2025

Auditor's Annual Report 2024/25

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Lead Portfolio – Finance, All

Purpose: For information

1. Aim

- 1.1 To present the External Auditors Annual Report on their findings in respect of the council's value for money (VFM) arrangements during 2024/25.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report provides the External Auditors Annual Report in respect of the council's value for money arrangement for 2024/25. One significant weakness has been identified in respect of the council's VFM arrangements in regard to financial stability as a result of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. The report identifies 1 key recommendation and 4 improvement recommendations which the council accepts and for which it is putting in place actions to address. Management responses have been provided for all recommendations. Once finalised following the sign off of the annual accounts this report will be formally published and presented to full Council.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Audit Committee receives the Annual Audit Report (Appendix 1) and management responses to the 1 key recommendation and 4 improvement recommendations and comments accordingly.

4. Report detail – know

Headlines from the Post-Audit Statement of Accounts 2024/25

- 4.1 The council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, are required by the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice to consider whether the council has put into place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Code also requires the auditors to produce a report to the council detailing these arrangements along with any key recommendations on significant weaknesses that were identified.
- 4.2 On 1 April 2020, the National Audit Office (NAO) introduced a new Audit Code of Practice which came into effect from audit year 2020/21. The Code introduced a

revised approach to the audit of value for money (VFM), which included three main changes:

- I. A new set of key criteria, covering:
 - a) Financial sustainability – the arrangements for ensuring the council can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (305 years);
 - b) Governance – the arrangements for ensuring the council makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and management, risk management, and ensuring the council makes decisions based on appropriate information;
 - c) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness – the arrangements for improving the way council delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users
 - II. More extensive reporting, with external auditors required to provide a commentary on arrangements across the key criteria, rather than on an exception basis.
 - III. Replacement of the 'qualified/unqualified' judgement on the VFM conclusion with judgements on performance, as well as recommendations on any significant weaknesses identified during the audit.
- 4.3 The Auditor's Annual Report and is attached at Appendix 1. One significant weakness was identified for the financial sustainability criteria in 2024/25. One key recommendation and four improvement recommendations were identified for the council to consider across the three criteria. These are outlined within the report. The report also includes progress on the improvement recommendations identified for 2023/24.

Control Environment

- 4.4 This report relates to the arrangements the council has in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; its governance including financial governance and its risk management arrangements; and in relation to financial sustainability.
- 4.5 The report identifies 1 significant weakness in relation to financial sustainability. The weakness identified is in respect of the increase of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) cumulative deficit, and an improvement recommendation has been raised in relation the weakness identified.

Assurance of Controls

- 4.5 The Council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, are required under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to satisfy themselves that the council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

- 4.6 Further, the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office requires them to produce an Annual Audit Report giving details of their findings relating to these proper arrangements.

Strategic Risks

- 4.7 This report reviews actual performance in relation to the 2024/25 financial year. There was one significant weakness identified and therefore a strategic risk directly related to the Annual Audit Report and VFM assessment specifically. This does link to and form part of the assurances in place in relation to strategic risk 7 which is focussed on the overall financial resilience of the Council.

5. Financial information

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. Securing VFM is a key objective of the Council.

6. Reducing Inequalities

- 6.1 Effective VFM arrangements ensure a focus on delivery of Corporate Plan objectives, a key drive of which is reducing inequalities.

7. Decide

- 7.1 Once considered by Audit Committee and the Statement of Accounts has been certified, the final report will be presented to full Council.

8. Respond

- 8.1 Audit Committee may wish to comment on the report.

9. Review

- 9.1 There is one significant weakness reported within the Annual Report 2024/25 (Appendix 1). Key and Improvement recommendations will be considered and implements within the Council's proper arrangements going forward.

Background papers

Annual Audit Report 2024/25

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