

Council

Agenda
Item No.

08 January 2024

14

Auditor's Annual Report 2022/23

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Lead Portfolio – Strategic Finance (Councillor M. Bird), 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 arrangements

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report provides the External Auditors Annual Report in respect of the council's Value For Money arrangements (VFM) for 2022/23. There are no significant weaknesses identified in respect of the council's VFM arrangements. The report identifies ten 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. The draft report was considered by Audit Committee at their meeting on 20 November 2023. There it was approved that once the final report is received following sign off of the annual Statement of Accounts 2022/23 that it would be formally published and presented to full Council. The report has now been finalised and there have been no changes from the draft version.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Council receives the Annual Audit Report (Appendix 1).

4. Report detail – know

- 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 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 (3 -5 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 This is the third Auditor's Annual Report and is attached at Appendix 1. For all three criteria no significant weaknesses were identified in 2022/23. Ten 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 2021/22.
- 4.5 Since the draft report was presented to Audit Committee on 20 November 2023 the only changes made to the final report are to confirm the completion of the annual audit of the financial statements, the issuing of an unqualified opinion and that no significant matters or adjustments were made to the financial statements other than an adjustment to the net pension liability following receipt of the final actuarial report.

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.

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 2022/23 financial year. As no significant weaknesses were identified there are no strategic risks directly related to the Annual Audit Report and value for money assessment specifically, however it does link strongly 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 none directly related to this report. Securing value for money is a key objective of the council.

6. *Reducing Inequalities*

- 6.1 Effective value for money arrangements ensure a focus on delivery of Corporate Plan objectives, a key driver of which is reducing inequalities.

7. *Decide*

- 7.1 There are no decisions required by this report.

8. *Respond*

- 8.1 Council may wish to comment on the report

9. *Review*

- 9.1 There are no significant weaknesses reported within the Auditors Annual Report 2022/23 (Appendix 1). Recommendations for improvement will be considered and implemented within the council's proper arrangements going forward.

Background papers

Annual Audit Report 2022/23

Author

Shaun Darcy
Director – Finance, Corporate Landlord & Assurance

☎ 652707

✉ shaun.darcy@walsall.gov.uk