

REPORT TO: Audit and Governance Board

DATE: 20 November 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Director, Finance

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: 2023/24 Statement of Accounts, Audit Findings Report and Letter of Representation

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Council's Letter of Representation, to consider the Audit Findings Report of the External Auditor (Grant Thornton), and to approve the Council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- 1) The draft Letter of Representation in Appendix 1 be approved;**
- 2) The External Auditor's 2023/24 Audit Findings Report in Appendix 2 be received; and**
- 3) The Council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts in Appendix 3 be approved.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Statement of Accounts sets out the Council's financial performance for the year in terms of revenue and capital spending and presents the year-end financial position as reflected in the balance sheet.

3.2 The Statement of Accounts draft version will be updated based on adjustments agreed with External Audit during the course of the audit. Non-trivial adjusted misstatements, misclassifications and disclosure changes to the draft accounts are reported at Appendix D to the Audit Findings Report.

3.3 The format of the Statement of Accounts is heavily prescribed by the Accounts and Audit Regulations and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting (The Code).

3.4 The Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 has been prepared in full compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

3.5 Grant Thornton will attend the meeting to present the report of their findings, the Audit Findings Report.

- 3.6 Section 2 of the Audit Findings Report presents the findings of the External Auditor in respect of matters and risks identified at the planning stage of the audit and additional and significant matters that arose during the course of their work.
- 3.7 Each year the Council is required to provide the External Auditor with a Letter of Representation relating to the financial statements. This provides a number of assurances to the External Auditor in connection with the preparation of the Council's accounts. The letter is required to be signed by the Chair of the Board on behalf of the Council.

4.0 KEY SECTIONS WITHIN THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

- 4.1 The Council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts is presented in Appendix 3. The Narrative Report by the Operational Director, Finance summarises the Council's financial performance for 2023/24, including revenue and capital spending.
- 4.2 The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) presents gross expenditure, gross income and net expenditure for 2023/24 along with the previous year's comparison. The Net Cost of Continuing Operations is adjusted by a number of appropriations to give the Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure. The CIES reports on how the Council performed during the year and whether its operations resulted in a surplus or deficit.
- 4.3 The Council's Balance Sheet sets out the Council's financial position as at 31 March 2024, along with a comparison to the position as at 31 March 2023. The balance sheet is a snapshot of the Council's financial position at a specific point in time, showing what it owns and owes at 31 March.
- 4.4 The Movement in Reserves Statement presents a summary of the changes in the Council's main reserves during the year. Reserves represent the Council's net worth and show its spending power. Reserves are analysed into two categories: usable and unusable.
- 4.5 The Cashflow Statement provides an overall analysis of the movements in cash and cash equivalents during the year.
- 4.6 Detailed notes relating to items within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, Balance Sheet, Movement in Reserves Statement and Cashflow Statement are shown under Notes to the Core Financial Statements.
- 4.7 The Collection Fund and associated notes summarise the transactions in respect of the collection of Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax, along with the distribution to the Council's own General Fund and to the Precepting Authorities (Fire, Police, LCR Combined Authority and Parishes).

4.8 The Statement of Responsibilities outlines the basis upon which the Statement of Accounts has been prepared and is followed by a statement of the Council's Accounting Policies.

4.9 The External Auditor has used the draft Statement of Accounts as the basis for undertaking the annual audit of accounts, for which their Audit Report and Certificate is included within the final Statement of Accounts.

5.0 **ACTION PLAN**

5.1 Appendix B of the Audit Findings Report presents an action plan of recommendations for future improvement to the Statement of Accounts. The recommendations made by the External Audit team will be reviewed by management for appropriate action.

6.0 **PRIOR YEAR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 The 2022/23 Audit Findings Report identified a number of recommendations to improve the process and presentation of the Council's Statement of Accounts. These recommendations were reviewed by the Audit and Governance Board on 20 March 2024. All but two of the recommendations have been incorporated. Management consider the existing controls in place for journal authorisation are appropriate, therefore no additional action needs to be taken. Secondly, work is ongoing in improving the process to ensure school bank account reconciliations are routinely prepared and retained.

7.0 **NEXT STEPS**

7.1 Following the meeting the Letter of Representation will be signed and the External Auditor will provide their audit opinion. The Statement of Accounts will then be published and made available to the public via the Council's website.

8.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None.

9.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

9.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

There are no specific implications

9.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

There are no specific implications

9.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

There are no specific implications

9.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

There are no specific implications

9.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

There are no specific implications

9.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

There are no specific implications

10.0 RISK ANALYSIS

10.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations require that the Statement of Accounts is certified by the External Auditor and published by 30 September 2024. If this date is breached the Council will publish a Public Notice giving reasons for the delay.

11.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

11.1 None.

12.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None

13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015	Halton Stadium	Steve Baker Divisional Manager, Revenues and Financial Management
Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2023/24	Halton Stadium	Steve Baker Divisional Manager, Revenues and Financial Management

Grant Thornton UK LLP
4 Hardman Square
Spinningfields
Manchester
M3 3EB

Date: TO BE DATED SAME DATE AS DATE OF AUDIT OPINION

Dear Sirs

Halton Borough Council
Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024

This representation letter is provided in connection with the audit of the financial statements of Halton Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 for the purpose of expressing an opinion as to whether the Council financial statements give a true and fair view in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards, and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 and applicable law.

We confirm that to the best of our knowledge and belief having made such inquiries as we considered necessary for the purpose of appropriately informing ourselves:

Financial Statements

- i. We have fulfilled our responsibilities for the preparation of the Council's financial statements in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 ("the Code"); in particular the financial statements are fairly presented in accordance therewith.
- ii. We have complied with the requirements of all statutory directions affecting the Council and these matters have been appropriately reflected and disclosed in the financial statements.
- iii. The Council has complied with all aspects of contractual agreements that could have a material effect on the financial statements in the event of non-compliance. There has been no non-compliance with requirements of any regulatory authorities that could have a material effect on the financial statements in the event of non-compliance.
- iv. We acknowledge our responsibility for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud.
- v. Significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value, are reasonable. Such accounting estimates include valuation of land and buildings and the net defined pension liability. We are satisfied that the material judgements used in the preparation of the financial statements are soundly based, in accordance with the Code and adequately disclosed in the financial statements. We understand our responsibilities includes identifying and considering alternative methods, assumptions or source data that would be equally valid under the financial reporting framework, and why these alternatives were rejected in favour of the estimate used.
- vi. We confirm that we are satisfied that the actuarial assumptions underlying the valuation of pension scheme assets and liabilities for IAS19 Employee Benefits disclosures are consistent with our knowledge. We confirm that all settlements and curtailments have been identified and properly accounted for. We also confirm that all significant post-employment benefits have been identified and properly accounted for.
- vii. Except as disclosed in the financial statements:

- a. there are no unrecorded liabilities, actual or contingent
 - b. none of the assets of the Council has been assigned, pledged or mortgaged
 - c. there are no material prior year charges or credits, nor exceptional or non-recurring items requiring separate disclosure.
 - viii. Related party relationships and transactions have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards and the Code.
 - ix. All events subsequent to the date of the financial statements and for which International Financial Reporting Standards and the Code require adjustment or disclosure have been adjusted or disclosed.
 - x. We have considered the adjusted misstatements, and misclassification and disclosures changes schedules included in your Audit Findings Report. The Council's financial statements have been amended for these misstatements, misclassifications and disclosure changes and are free of material misstatements, including omissions.
 - xi. We have considered the unadjusted misstatements schedule included in your Audit Findings Report and attached below. We have not adjusted the financial statements for these misstatements brought to our attention as they are immaterial to the results of the Council and its financial position at the year-end. The financial statements are free of material misstatements, including omissions.
 - xii. Actual or possible litigation and claims have been accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards.
 - xiii. We have no plans or intentions that may materially alter the carrying value or classification of assets and liabilities reflected in the financial statements.
 - xiv. The prior period adjustments disclosed in Note 43 to the financial statements are accurate and complete. There are no other prior period errors to bring to your attention.
 - xv. We have updated our going concern assessment. We continue to believe that the Council's financial statements should be prepared on a going concern basis and have not identified any material uncertainties related to going concern on the grounds that:
 - a. the nature of the Council means that, notwithstanding any intention to liquidate the Council or cease its operations in their current form, it will continue to be appropriate to adopt the going concern basis of accounting because, in such an event, services it performs can be expected to continue to be delivered by related public authorities and preparing the financial statements on a going concern basis will still provide a faithful representation of the items in the financial statements
 - b. the financial reporting framework permits the entry to prepare its financial statements on the basis of the presumption set out under a) above; and
 - c. the Council's system of internal control has not identified any events or conditions relevant to going concern.
- We believe that no further disclosures relating to the Council's ability to continue as a going concern need to be made in the financial statements
- xvi. The Council has complied with all aspects of ring-fenced grants that could have a material effect on the Council's financial statements in the event of non-compliance.

Information Provided

- xvii. We have provided you with:
 - a. access to all information of which we are aware that is relevant to the preparation of the Council's financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
 - b. additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of your audit; and
 - c. access to persons within the Council via remote arrangements from whom you determined it necessary to obtain audit evidence.

- xviii. We have communicated to you all deficiencies in internal control of which management is aware.
- xix. All transactions have been recorded in the accounting records and are reflected in the financial statements.
- xx. We have disclosed to you the results of our assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud.
- xxi. We have disclosed to you all information in relation to fraud or suspected fraud that we are aware of and that affects the Council and involves:
 - a. management;
 - b. employees who have significant roles in internal control; or
 - c. others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.
- xxii. We have disclosed to you all information in relation to allegations of fraud, or suspected fraud, affecting the financial statements communicated by employees, former employees, analysts, regulators or others.
- xxiii. We have disclosed to you all known instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations whose effects should be considered when preparing financial statements.
- xxiv. We have disclosed to you the identity of the Council's related parties and all the related party relationships and transactions of which we are aware.
- xxv. We have disclosed to you all known actual or possible litigation and claims whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements.

Annual Governance Statement

- xxvi. We are satisfied that the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) fairly reflects the Council's risk assurance and governance framework and we confirm that we are not aware of any significant risks that are not disclosed within the AGS.

Narrative Report

- xxvii. The disclosures within the Narrative Report fairly reflect our understanding of the Council's financial and operating performance over the period covered by the Council's financial statements.

Approval

The approval of this letter of representation was minuted by the Council's Audit and Governance Board at its meeting on 20 November 2024.

Yours faithfully

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....