

REPORT TO: Audit & Governance Board
DATE: 20 November 2024
REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Finance
PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services
SUBJECT: External Auditor's Annual Report 2023/24
WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider the 2023/24 Auditor's Annual Report shown in the Appendix, which will be presented to the Board by the Council's External Auditor, Grant Thornton UK LLP.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- (i) the contents of the 2023/24 External Auditor's Annual Report shown in the Appendix be noted, including the recommendations presented within the report; and**
- (ii) Council be asked to consider the two statutory recommendations contained within the report, at its meeting on 4th December 2024.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The External Auditor is required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Auditor's Annual Report details the Council's overall arrangements, as well as providing recommendations regarding any significant weaknesses identified during the review. In addition, improvement recommendations are made which the Council may also decide to implement.

3.2 The External Auditor is required to report under three specific criteria, being:

- Financial Sustainability
- Governance
- Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

3.3 The report provides details of the findings of the External Auditor's review, which will be presented at the Board by Grant Thornton UK LLP.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The report provides an external viewpoint on the financial sustainability of the Council. As is now the case for many local authorities, there are significant financial challenges for the Council in balancing future year budgets and managing spending within budgets.

5.2 The report identifies a number of significant weaknesses regarding the arrangements the Council has in place to secure financial sustainability, governance, and improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Two statutory recommendations have been made, which require consideration by Council within one month. Key recommendations have also been made and management's responses to those recommendations are included within the report.

5.3 In addition, a number of improvement recommendations are identified within the report, along with management's responses.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

There are no implications for any of the Council's priorities listed above.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The risks that have been considered as part of the Council having in place arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness, are detailed in the attached report.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None.

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.