

2023/24 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AUDIT UPDATE**Report of the Interim Section 151 Officer****1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The council's Section 151 officer is responsible for the preparation of the council's annual Statement of Accounts in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code).
- 1.2 In addition, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 set out statutory deadlines for the public inspection period, audit and approval of the annual Statement of Accounts. This report provides an update as to the progress made on the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.
- 1.3 Forvis Mazars LLP are the council's external auditors and are responsible for the audit of the council's 2023/24 annual Statement of Accounts.

2. 2023/24 Statement of Accounts Publication Deadlines

- 2.1 Ongoing audit delays of local authority Statement of Accounts have been widely reported. The council is in a fortunate position being one of 45 councils to have its 2022/23 Statement of Accounts audited and signed off before the 30 November 2023 statutory deadline.
- 2.2 In February 2024, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) issued a statement confirming their approach to addressing this issue by creating a series of backstop dates by which previous years' audits must be complete. All 2022/23 and prior year audits were to be completed by September 2024. However, legislative changes required to implement this and backstop dates for future financial years were not passed before the dissolution of Parliament ahead of the General Election. There has been no statement from DLUHC with regards the backstop dates and until such time that there is an announcement from DLUHC or the new Minister the position remains unchanged. In other words, there is currently no legal requirement for all 2022/23 and prior year audits to be completed by September 2024, although National Audit Office has encouraged external auditors to continue to complete prior year audits as planned.
- 2.3 Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 state that draft unaudited accounts must be made available for public inspection during the first ten working days of June, which means that the draft unaudited accounts must be published by 31 May following the financial year being reported. The Statement of Accounts is a complex document, particularly in terms of asset and pension valuations and consolidation of the council's group company accounts. This makes publication by the prescribed date incredibly challenging. Following discussion with the external auditors, noting the audit process is planned to start in September, it was agreed to push back publication of the draft unaudited 2023/24 Statement of Accounts by two weeks to

allow final technical entries and a full quality assurance process to be completed. There are no implications for the council missing the 31 May publication date.

- 2.4 Following certification of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts by the then Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) on 13 June 2024, the document was published on the council's website on 14 June 2024, which can be accessed [here](#) .
- 2.5 The external auditors will start the audit of the council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts in September

3. Public Rights under Local Audit and Accountability Act

- 3.1 Sections 25, 26 and 27 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 gives rights to local electors of the council to inspect the Statement of Accounts, inspect documents in relation to the Statement of Accounts and to raise objection to the council's Statement of Accounts.
- 3.2 The Notice of Public Rights was published on 14 June 2024, setting out the period of public inspection, which runs from Monday 17 June 2024 until Friday 26 July 2024.

4. Audit Committee Role

- 4.1 As reported above, the external audit of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts is due to start in September 2024. Once the external audit is complete, Forvis Mazars LLP will present a report of their audit findings and Audit Committee members will be asked to approve the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.
- 4.2 A training session on the Statement of Accounts will be arranged for members in advance of this meeting and details of this will be issued in due course.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 5.1 The Audit Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Lisa Joy on telephone number Tel: 0161 474 4044 or alternatively email lisa.joy@stockport.gov.uk