

2023/24 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AUDIT UPDATE**Report of the Assistant Director for Finance (Interim Section 151 Officer)****1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The council's Interim 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 AUDIT BACKSTOP DEADLINES

- 2.1 Ongoing audit delays of local authority statement of accounts have been widely reported. In response to consultation on this issue, the Government set out a series of local audit backstop dates by which previous years' audits must be complete. In September 2024, the Government laid the updated Audit Code of Practice in Parliament.
- 2.2 The backstop deadline dates are as follows:-

Financial Year Accounts	Backstop Deadline
Up to and including 2022/23	13 December 2024
2023/24	28 February 2025
2024/25	27 February 2026
2025/26	31 January 2027
2026/27	30 November 2027
2027/28	30 November 2028

- 2.3 The council is in the fortunate position of having had their 2022/23 Statement of Accounts audited and signed off by 30 November 2023.
- 2.4 However, with the backstop deadline of 13 December 2024 being set for all local authority statement of accounts up to and including 2022/23, external audit work is very much focussed on these outstanding audits. As a result, the audit for the council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts, which started in September 2024 and originally planned to conclude by the end of November 2024, is now stretching out until early 2025.

2.5 It is anticipated that many local authorities will be in a position where audits are not completed by the backstop deadlines, and this may continue for a number of years. Where an audit is incomplete, the auditor will issue a 'modified' or 'disclaimed' opinion and they will be expected to provide clear reasons for issuing such an opinion to mitigate the potential reputational risk that a local authority may face as a result.

3. 2023/24 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AUDIT PROGRESS

3.1 The 2023/24 Statement of Accounts was published on the council's website on 14 June 2024 and the period of public inspection ran from Monday 17 June 2024 until Friday 26 July 2024, from which there have been no issues raised.

3.2 Forvis Mazars began their audit work on the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts in early September 2024 and Officers are currently assisting with their detailed testing. At the time of writing this report, there are no matters to bring to the attention of members.

3.3 It is anticipated that the audit work will be complete by early 2025 ahead of the 28 February 2025 backstop deadline.

4 AUDIT COMMITTEE ROLE

4.1 As reported above, the external audit of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts started in September 2024. Once the external audit is complete, Forvis Mazars LLP will present a report of their audit findings to Audit Committee members, who will be asked to consider them and 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 Jonathan Davies on telephone number Tel: 218 1025 or alternatively email jonathan.davies@stockport.gov.uk