

# Independent auditor's report to the members of Bromsgrove District Council

## Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

### Disclaimer of opinion

We were engaged to audit the financial statements of Bromsgrove District Council (the 'Authority') for the year ended 31 March 2022, which comprise the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Account, the Movement in Reserves Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Collection Fund Statement and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2021/22.

We do not express an opinion on the accompanying financial statements of the Authority. Because of the significance of the matter described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion section of our report, we have not been able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion on these financial statements.

### Basis for disclaimer of opinion

The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2024 ('the Regulations') require the Authority to publish audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 by 13 December 2024 ('the backstop date'). The backstop date has been put in law with the purpose of clearing the backlog of historical financial statements. We have not been able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence by the backstop date to conclude that the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 as a whole are free from material misstatement. We were also unable to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence for the corresponding figures for the same reason. We have therefore issued a disclaimer of opinion on the financial statements. This enables the Authority to comply with the requirement in the Regulations that they publish audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 by the backstop date. We have concluded that the possible effects on the financial statements of undetected misstatements arising from this matter could be both material and pervasive.

### Other information we are required to report on by exception under the Code of Audit Practice

Because of the significance of the matter described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion section of our report, we have been unable to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement<sup>1</sup> does not comply with 'delivering good governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition' published by CIPFA and SOLACE or is misleading or inconsistent with the information of which we are aware from our audit. We are not required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement addresses all risks and controls or that risks are satisfactorily addressed by internal controls.

### Opinion on other matters required by the Code of Audit Practice

The Director of Finance and Resources is responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Statement of Accounts, other than the Authority's financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Because of the significance of the matter described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion section of our report, we have been unable to form an opinion, whether based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit of the financial statements and our knowledge of the Authority gained through our work in relation to the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, whether the other information published together with the financial statements in the Statement of Accounts for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

### Matters on which we are required to report by exception

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to report to you if:

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- we issue a report in the public interest under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make a written recommendation to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or;
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit.

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matters except:

On 31 October 2022 we made a written recommendation to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in relation to issues with financial systems and related financial governance arrangements. We recommended that the Authority should:

- ensure the Authority has access to the necessary knowledge and expertise to resolve the key issues with the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in a timely manner to provide sufficient assurance over the completeness and veracity of the data included within the systems;
- undertake appropriate testing of the fixes and ensure that appropriate sign-off of these is received prior to running them on live system data; and
- ensure budget holders and other relevant officers possess the skills and knowledge to appropriately use the ERP system as intended, including relevant training and updates to key documentation and process manuals.

Once system issues are properly resolved, the Authority must:

- undertake key control activities such as bank and control account reconciliations on a monthly basis and ensure that these are kept up to date;
- produce the 2020/21 and 2021/22 draft financial statements, along with high quality working papers;
- conclude the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Revenue Outturn and Capital Outturn submissions, and other key Government returns include Whole of Government Accounts; and
- ensure timely reporting of budget outturns and report publicly on in-year financial monitoring, including updates on the capital programme and savings scheme achievement.

On 27 November 2023 we made a further written recommendation to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in relation to its financial systems and governance arrangements. We recommended that the Authority should produce 'true and fair' draft accounts for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 which are signed off by its Section 151 officer. In addition, the accounts must be supported by high quality working papers. Working papers must be subject to internal quality control checks prior to being provided to external audit to avoid further delays.

### **Responsibilities of the Authority, the Director of Finance and Resources and Those Charged with Governance for the financial statements**

As explained in the Statement of Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts, set out on page 11, the Authority is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. In this authority, that officer is the Director of Finance and Resources. The Director of Finance and Resources is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which includes the financial statements, in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2021/22, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Director of Finance and Resources determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the Director of Finance and Resources is responsible for assessing the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless there is an intention by government that the services provided by the Authority will no longer be provided.

The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee is Those Charged with Governance. Those Charged with Governance are responsible for overseeing the Authority's financial reporting process.

### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our responsibility is to conduct an audit of the Authority's financial statements in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) and to issue an auditor's report. However, because of the matter described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion section of our report, we were not able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion on those financial statements.

We are independent of the Authority in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

### **Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud**

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. Owing to the inherent limitations of an audit, there is an unavoidable risk that material misstatements in the financial statements may not be detected, even though the audit is properly planned and performed in accordance with the ISAs (UK).

The audit was defective in its ability to detect irregularities, including fraud, on the basis that we were unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence due to the matter described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion section of our report.

## **Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources**

### **Matter on which we are required to report by exception – the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources**

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to report to you if, in our opinion, we have not been able to satisfy ourselves that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2022.

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matter expect:

- On 31 October 2022 we identified a significant weakness in the Authority's governance arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2021. The Authority had not been able to produce the draft statement of accounts for 2020/21 due to long-standing issues with its new ledger system which had resulted in delays. We made a written recommendation under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 relating to this significant weakness.

On 27 November 2023 we made a further statutory written recommendation to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in relation to this significant weakness in governance and financial sustainability. These written recommendations are reported within 'Matters on which we are required to report by exception' section of this report. This significant weakness in arrangements remains in place for the year ended 31 March 2022.

- On 31 October 2022 we identified a further significant weakness in the Authority's governance arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2021. An internal audit report from June 2019 identified a significant weakness in risk management arrangements and since that date, no formal update reports had been provided to Members nor had a Corporate Risk Register been presented. We recommended that the Authority review and implement effective governance arrangements in respect of risk monitoring to allow Members to make informed decisions.

During 2021/22, there was no formal risk reporting arrangements at the Authority. Therefore, the significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements remains in place for the year ended 31 March 2022.

- On 31 October 2022 we identified significant weakness in the Authority's governance arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2022. There were no clear budget monitoring activities undertaken during the 2021/22 financial year, with inadequate reporting being provided to Members with regards to the financial position of the Authority to allow Members to scrutinise, challenge and make properly informed decisions. We recommended that the Authority ensure timely and relevant financial monitoring reporting is undertaken and presented to the appropriate public forum.
- On 31 October 2022 we identified a significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness for the year ended 31 March 2021. The last performance management report to Cabinet was 30 May 2018, which pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic and decision makers were therefore unable to publicly monitor the Authority's performance and identify areas for improvement. We recommended that the Authority should review and implement effective governance arrangements in respect of performance monitoring to allow Members to make informed decisions. During 2021/22, the Authority did not publish performance reports therefore the significant weakness in arrangements remains in place for the year ended 31 March 2022.
- On 31 October 2022 we identified a significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness for the year ended 31 March 2021. In June 2019, the Authority approved a contract for the implementation of a new financial ledger system. Significant issues remained 19 months after implementation with the cash receipting part of the system not functioning as intended. We recommended that the Authority improve management of key projects to ensure that expected benefits are realised. Actions were not implemented until the 2022/23 financial year and therefore this recommendation was also relevant to 2021/22.

### **Responsibilities of the Authority**

The Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and to review regularly the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.

### **Auditor's responsibilities for the review of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources**

We are required under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to be satisfied that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We are not required to consider, nor have we considered, whether all aspects of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

We have undertaken our review in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2024. This guidance sets out the arrangements that fall within the scope of 'proper arrangements'. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code of Audit Practice requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability: how the Authority plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance: how the Authority ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the Authority uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

We documented our understanding of the arrangements the Authority has in place for each of these three specified reporting criteria, gathering sufficient evidence to support our risk assessment and

commentary in our Auditor's Annual Report. In undertaking our work, we have considered whether there is evidence to suggest that there are significant weaknesses in arrangements.

## **Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – Audit certificate**

We certify that we have completed the audit of Bromsgrove District Council for the year ended 31 March 2022 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice.

### **Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the members of the Authority, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and as set out in paragraph 43 of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies published by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Authority's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Authority and the Authority's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

**Jackson Murray**

Jackson Murray, Key Audit Partner

for and on behalf of Grant Thornton UK LLP, Local Auditor

Bristol

6 December 2024