



The Audit Findings for Taunton Deane Borough Council

Year ended 31 March 2019

31 October 2019



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The contents of this report relate only to those matters which came to our attention during the conduct of our normal audit procedures which are designed for the purpose of expressing our opinion on the financial statements. Our audit is not designed to test all internal controls or identify all areas of control weakness. However, where, as part of our testing, we identify control weaknesses, we will report these to you. In consequence, our work cannot be relied upon to disclose all defalcations or other irregularities, or to include all possible improvements in internal control that a more extensive special examination might identify. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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Headlines

This table summarises the key findings and other matters arising from the statutory audit of Taunton Deane Borough Council ('the Council') and the preparation of the Council's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2019 for those charged with governance.

Financial Statements	<p>Under International Standards of Audit (UK) (ISAs) and the National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), we are required to report whether, in our opinion, the Council's financial statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and its income and expenditure for the year; and • have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting and prepared in accordance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. <p>We are also required to report whether other information published together with the audited financial statements (including the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and Narrative Report), is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.</p>	<p>Our audit work is complete subject to the outstanding areas identified below. Our work is substantially complete and there are no matters of which we are aware that would require modification of our audit opinion or material changes to the financial statements, subject to the satisfactory conclusions of all outstanding matters highlighted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of evidence to support - the associated note on Termination Benefits, the Expenditure and Funding Analysis Note, and Capital Commitments • Review of post balance sheet events and transactions • Receipt of the management letter of representation • Receipt and review of the final set of financial statements • Quality checks and review of work performed <p>Our findings are summarised on pages 6 to 12. We have identified audit adjustments and these are detailed in Appendix C. We have also raised recommendations for management as a result of our audit work in Appendix A. Our follow up of recommendations from the prior year's audit are detailed in Appendix B.</p> <p>We have concluded that the other information to be published with the financial statements is consistent with our knowledge of your organisation and the financial statements we have audited.</p> <p>Our anticipated audit report opinion will be unqualified including an Emphasis of Matter paragraph to highlight the demise of the Council from 1 April 2019.</p>
Value for Money arrangements	<p>Under the National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), we are required to report if, in our opinion, the Council has made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources ('the value for money (VFM) conclusion').</p>	<p>We have completed our risk based review of the Council's value for money arrangements. We have concluded that Taunton Deane Borough Council has proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources</p>
Statutory duties	<p>The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ('the Act') also requires us to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report to you if we have applied any of the additional powers and duties ascribed to us under the Act; and • To certify the closure of the audit. 	<p>We have not exercised any of our additional statutory powers or duties.</p> <p>We have received an objection to the accounts for 2018/19 and are currently undertaking additional testing, additional procedures and specific work in order to address the points raised in the objection.</p>

Summary

Overview of the scope of our audit

This Audit Findings Report presents the observations arising from the audit that are significant to the responsibility of those charged with governance to oversee the financial reporting process, as required by International Standard on Auditing (UK) 260 and the Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'). Its contents have been discussed with management.

As auditors we are responsible for performing the audit, in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) and the Code, which is directed towards forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance. The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities for the preparation of the financial statements.

Audit approach

Our audit approach was based on a thorough understanding of the Council's business and is risk based, and in particular included:

- An evaluation of the Council's internal controls environment, including its IT systems and controls; and
- Substantive testing on significant transactions and material account balances, including the procedures outlined in this report in relation to the key audit risks.

We have not had to alter or change our audit plan, as communicated to you in December 2018. However, due to an objection being received in relation to the 2018-19 financial statements, we have increased the scope of the work to be undertaken with relation to redundancy payments.

During the course of our audit work we initially encountered problems obtaining supporting evidence in relation to:

- payroll supporting documentation;
- transaction level reports for debtors and creditors;
- supporting information to prove the completeness of journals;
- working papers in relation to areas in the financial statements, such as the Collection Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

We have also had to undertake additional testing as a result of guidance from regulators in relation to property plant and equipment and pension liabilities. We have had to undertake additional testing in relation to the Mc Cloud pension case. Furthermore, as a result of receiving an objection to the statements, we have had to undertake additional substantive testing and process reviews in relation to the redundancy costs accounted for.

Conclusion

Subject to the outstanding items as listed on page 3 being satisfactorily concluded we anticipate issuing an unqualified audit opinion following the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

Materiality

Our approach to materiality

The concept of materiality is fundamental to the preparation of the financial statements and the audit process and applies not only to the monetary misstatements but also to disclosure requirements and adherence to acceptable accounting practice and applicable law.

Materiality calculations remain the same as reported in our audit plan except for the materiality calculations in relation to redundancies. As part of our planning discussions, we identified that given the nature and value of redundancy costs, it would be appropriate to apply the financial statements materiality to this item of expenditure, rather than reduce it to 2% of the total redundancy costs. We detail in the table below our determination of materiality for Taunton Deane Borough Council.

	Council Amount (£)	Qualitative factors considered
Materiality for the financial statements	£1.6 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This equates to 1.7% of your 2018/19 gross expenditure for the year. This was determined as the appropriate benchmark for determining materiality. Our knowledge of the environment at Taunton Deane Borough Council, and the transformation programme have been factored into our decision to set materiality at 1.7%. Per our statement above, this materiality will also apply to redundancy costs. This is consistent with that reported in our Audit Plan in December 2018
Performance materiality	£1.1 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This equates to 75% of materiality. This was determined as the appropriate amount, as there were no significant audit issues highlighted in our audit of the 2017-18 financial statements. This is consistent with that reported in our Audit Plan in December 2018
Trivial matters	£80k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISA 260 (UK) defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. We have set triviality at 5% of materiality This is consistent with that reported in our Audit Plan in December 2018
Materiality for senior officers remuneration	£26k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Officers' Remuneration is a balance which requires a lower materiality due to its sensitive nature, hence materiality is set at 2% of the total senior officers remuneration note. This is consistent with that reported in our Audit Plan in December 2018

Significant findings – audit risks

Risks identified in our Audit Plan	Commentary
<p>1 Income from West Somerset Recharges</p>	<p>Auditor commentary</p> <p>As identified in our audit plan dated 17 December 2018, Income from West Somerset recharges is a significant risk at Taunton Deane Borough Council. We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated the Council’s accounting policy for recognition of income from the recharges for appropriateness • Gained an understanding of the Authority’s system and business processes for accounting for income from West Somerset recharges • Evaluated the design and effectiveness of the controls around recharges, by undertaking a walkthrough of associated controls • Agreed all income for the year to invoices raised and undertook a reconciliation between the general ledger and the bank <p>Our audit work in this area is complete and has not identified any issues in respect of income from West Somerset recharges</p>
<p>2 Management override of controls</p>	<p>Auditor commentary</p> <p>As identified in our audit plan dated 17 December 2018, management override of controls is a significant risk at Taunton Deane Borough Council. We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated the business processes and design effectiveness of management controls over journals • Analysed the journals listing and determined the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals • Undertaken an exercise to ensure the completeness of the journals listing • Undertaken risk based scoring, and testing of unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration • Gained an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgments made by management and considering their reasonableness • Evaluated the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions <p>Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of management override of controls.</p>

Significant findings – audit risks

Risks identified in our Audit Plan	Commentary
3 Valuation of land and buildings	<p>Auditor commentary</p> <p>We have performed the following work in respect of this risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to the valuation experts and the scope of their work; • evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert; • written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuations were carried out; • Challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding • Tested a sample of revaluations made during the year to see if they have been input correctly into the Authority's asset register • Evaluated the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management has satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to the current value at year end <p>We identified that land and buildings classified as specialist assets have been valued using the depreciated replacement cost (DRC) method, and other assets have been valued using the existing use value method. Investment properties are valued at fair value. A detailed review of estimation processes is included within the key judgement and estimates section on Page 8.</p> <p>Furthermore, we identified a material reclassification from land and buildings to investment properties. We challenged this reclassification in order to gain an understanding of the reasons and assumptions behind this re-classification. We identified that the Council appropriately took factors arising in the 2018-19 financial year into consideration in re-classifying this property</p> <p>Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of the valuation of land and buildings.</p>

Significant findings – audit risks



Risks identified in our Audit Plan	Commentary
<p>4 Valuation of the pension fund net liability</p>	<p>Auditor commentary</p> <p>We have performed the following work in respect of this risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Authority's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluated the design of the associated controls; • Evaluated the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work; • Assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Council's pension fund valuation; • Tested the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary; • Assessed the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Council to the actuary to estimate the liability; • Undertaken procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; • Obtained assurances from the auditor of Somerset Pension Fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of the membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements. <p>Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of the valuation of the pension fund net liability.</p>
<p>5 Accounting for Redundancies</p>	<p>Auditor commentary</p> <p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed the processes and evaluated the controls around accounting for redundancy payments • Reviewed a sample of redundancy costs and pension strain payments to check the calculation of and accounting for the redundancy costs, to ensure that amounts are accurate, and the basis for re-charging these between Councils is appropriate • Reviewed the policies and procedures around redundancy costs, and the legal advice received by the Council in relation to the redundancy programme • Reviewed the revised structures of the Council • Reviewed the disclosures of redundancy costs in the financial statements to ensure that they have been correctly included <p>Our audit work in this area is substantially complete, subject to satisfactory responses being received on two outstanding queries.</p>

Significant findings - other issues





This section provides commentary on new issues and risks which were identified during the course of the audit that were not previously communicated in the Audit Plan and a summary of any significant control deficiencies identified during the year.

Issue	Commentary	Auditor view
<p>1 Potential impact of the McCloud judgement</p> <p>The Court of Appeal has ruled that there was age discrimination in the judges and firefighters pension schemes where transitional protections were given to scheme members.</p> <p>The Government applied to the Supreme Court for permission to appeal this ruling, but this permission to appeal was unsuccessful.</p> <p>The legal ruling around age discrimination (McCloud - Court of Appeal) has implications not just for pension funds, but also for other pension schemes where they have implemented transitional arrangements on changing benefits.</p>	<p>The Council requested an estimate from its actuary of the potential impact of the McCloud ruling. The actuary's estimate was of a possible increase in pension liabilities of £61k, and an increase in service costs for the 2019/20 year of £8k.</p> <p>Management's view is that the impact of the ruling is not material for Taunton Deane Borough Council and the financial statements will therefore not be adjusted.</p>	<p>We have completed an overview of the analysis performed by the actuary and, based on this, consider that the approach that has been taken to arrive at this estimate is reasonable.</p> <p>We are of the view that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that a liability is probable. We do not propose to challenge the Council's decision not to amend its financial statements, however this has been added as an unadjusted error and specific representation will be sought from those charged with governance in relation to the non adjustment.</p>
<p>2 Potential impact of GMP Equalisation</p> <p>On 17 May 1990 the Barber ruling came into force requiring pension schemes to offer equal benefits to males and females going forward. Whilst pension scheme rules were amended to comply with this, the GMP element of scheme benefits remained unequal as a decision had not been reached on how to implement equalisation in respect of this tranche of benefit. A recent High Court decision confirms that schemes are to review the benefit entitlement of all relevant members. If this review shows that a member would have a higher benefit entitlement had their GMP been calculated as if they were the opposite sex, then benefits will need to be increased accordingly to reflect this.</p>	<p>Discussion is ongoing in the sector regarding the potential impact of the ruling on the financial statements of Local Government bodies.</p> <p>The Council have undertaken an assessment of the impact of the GMP Equalisation ruling is not material to the financial statements.</p> <p>Management's view is that the impact of the ruling is not material for Taunton Deane Borough Council and the financial statements will therefore not be adjusted.</p>	<p>We have completed an analysis of the potential impact of the GMP Equalisation ruling in conjunction with our internal actuaries, and based on this we are satisfied that GMP Equalisation does not have a material impact on the accounts. The impact is, however above trivial, and hence has been reported in Appendix C.</p> <p>We do not propose to challenge the Council's decision not to amend its financial statements, however this has been added as an unadjusted error and specific representation will be sought from those charged with governance in relation to the non adjustment.</p>

Significant findings – key judgements and estimates

Accounting area	Summary of management's policy	Audit Comments	Assessment
Provisions for NNDR appeals - £1.338m	The Council are responsible for repaying a proportion of successful rateable value appeals. Management calculate the level of provision required. Management's calculation is based upon the latest information about outstanding rates appeals provided by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and previous success rates. The provision has decreased by a net £190k for potential refunds related to 2018/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimate is based on historical data and on success rates in prior appeals. There has been no change to the valuation method The method of calculation is consistent with that used by other authorities. The value of the estimate will fluctuate dependent on a number of factors. The decrease of £190k is considered to be reasonable based on the amount of outstanding appeals disclosure of estimate in the financial statements is considered to be appropriate and in line with the Code <p>We have not identified any issues with the calculation of the NNDR provision</p>	
Land and Buildings – Council Housing - £286.386m	The Council owns Council dwellings and is required to revalue these properties in accordance with DCLG's Stock Valuation for Resource Accounting guidance. The guidance requires the use of beacon methodology, in which a detailed valuation of representative property types is then applied to similar properties. The Council has engaged Wilks Head and Eve to complete the valuation of these properties. The year end valuation of Council Housing was £286.386m, a net increase of £19.2m from 2017/18 (£267.175m).	<p>We reviewed management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work. We then considered the competence, expertise and objectivity the valuer in their capacity as the management experts used.</p> <p>We have also performed the following work in relation to Council Housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed and challenged the information used by the valuer to ensure it is robust and consistent with our understanding Challenged key assumptions where appropriate. Sample tested a sample of revaluations made during the year to ensure they are input correctly into the asset register and subsequently recorded in the financial statements. <p>We have not identified any issues with the revaluation of Council Housing</p>	

Assessment

-  We disagree with the estimation process or judgements that underpin the estimate and consider the estimate to be potentially materially misstated
-  We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider optimistic
-  We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider cautious
-  We consider management's process is appropriate and key assumptions are neither optimistic or cautious

Significant findings – key judgements and estimates

	Summary of management's policy	Audit Comments	Assessment
Land and Buildings – Other - £81.807m	Other land and buildings comprises of specialised assets, which are required to be valued at depreciated replacement cost (DRC) at year end, reflecting the cost of a modern equivalent asset necessary to deliver the same service provision. The remainder of other land and buildings are not specialised in nature and are required to be valued at existing use in value (EUV) at year end. The Council has engaged Wilks Head & Eve to complete the valuation of properties as at 31 March 2019 on a five yearly cyclical basis. 22% of total assets were revalued during 2018/19. The valuation of properties valued by the valuer has resulted in a net decrease of £8.912m. Management have considered the year end value of non-valued properties. We are in the process of discussing management's exercise.	<p>We have undertaken the following work in respect of valuation of land and buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We reviewed management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work. We then considered the competence, expertise and objectivity the valuer in their capacity as the management experts used. • We reviewed and challenged the information used by the valuer to ensure its robustness and consistency with our understanding • We challenged key assumptions where appropriate. • We tested a sample of revaluations made during the year to ensure they were input correctly into the asset register and subsequently recorded in the financial statements. • We have challenged the reclassifications of assets held for sale, and reviewed the valuer's assumptions and client's accounting treatment <p>We have not identified any issues in relation to the matters highlighted above.</p>	●

Assessment

- We disagree with the estimation process or judgements that underpin the estimate and consider the estimate to be potentially materially misstated
- We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider optimistic
- We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider cautious
- We consider management's process is appropriate and key assumptions are neither optimistic or cautious


Significant findings – key judgements and estimates

Summary of management's policy	Audit Comments	Assessment																								
<p>Net pension liability – £89.484m</p>	<p>The Council's net pension liability at 31 March 2019 is £89.484m (PY £93.673m) comprising the Somerset Pension Fund Local Government Scheme. The Council uses Barnett Waddingham to provide actuarial valuations of the Council's assets and liabilities derived from this scheme. A full actuarial valuation is required every three years. The latest full actuarial valuation was completed in 2016. A roll forward approach is used in intervening periods, which utilises key assumptions such as life expectancy, discount rates, salary growth and investment returns. Given the significant value of the net pension fund liability, small changes in assumptions can result in significant valuation movements. There has been a £8.742m net actuarial gain during 2018/19.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We identified the controls put in place by management to ensure that the pension fund liability is not materially misstated. We also assessed whether these controls were implemented as expected and whether they are sufficient to mitigate the risk of material misstatement. This includes gaining assurances over the data provided to the actuary to ensure it was robust and consistent with our understanding. We also evaluated the competence, expertise and objectivity of the actuary who carried out your pension fund valuations and gained an understanding of the basis on which the valuations were carried out. This included undertaking procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made. 																								
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Assumption</th> <th>Actuary Value</th> <th>PwC range</th> <th>Assessment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Discount rate</td> <td>2.40%</td> <td>2.35 - 2.45%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pension increase rate</td> <td>2.40%</td> <td>2.45 - 2.40%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Salary growth</td> <td>2.5%</td> <td>Scheme and employer specific</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Life expectancy – Males currently aged 45 / 65</td> <td>24.6 / 22.9</td> <td>22.2 – 25.0 / 20.6 – 23.4</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Life expectancy – Females currently aged 45 / 65</td> <td>25.8 / 24.0</td> <td>25.0 - 26.6 / 23.2 – 24.8</td> <td>●</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Assumption	Actuary Value	PwC range	Assessment	Discount rate	2.40%	2.35 - 2.45%	●	Pension increase rate	2.40%	2.45 - 2.40%	●	Salary growth	2.5%	Scheme and employer specific	●	Life expectancy – Males currently aged 45 / 65	24.6 / 22.9	22.2 – 25.0 / 20.6 – 23.4	●	Life expectancy – Females currently aged 45 / 65	25.8 / 24.0	25.0 - 26.6 / 23.2 – 24.8	●
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We checked the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in notes to the financial statements with the actuarial reports and did not identify any inconsistencies. Impact of any changes to valuation method The Authority has considered the impact of GMP equalisation on the net pension liability. They also commissioned the actuary to undertake a materiality assessment with respect to the McCloud/Sargeant judgment in relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme. They have assessed the overall impact of these matters as being below performance materiality. We have reviewed the assumptions and factors used by the actuary and management in undertaking this assessment. Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of the net pension liability 																										

Assessment

- We disagree with the estimation process or judgements that underpin the estimate and consider the estimate to be potentially materially misstated
- We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider optimistic
- We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider cautious
- We consider management's process is appropriate and key assumptions are neither optimistic or cautious

Significant findings – key judgements and estimates

	Summary of management's policy	Audit Comments	Assessment
Level 2 investments	<p>The Council has investments in a number of investment properties that are valued on the balance sheet as at 31 March 2019 at £18.683m. The investments are not traded on an open market and the valuation of the investment is subjective. In order to determine the value, management have employed Wilks Head and Eve as management experts. The commercial land and buildings located in the Council's area are measured using the income approach, by means of the discounted cash flow method, where the expected cash flows from the properties are discounted (using a market-derived discount rate) to establish the present value of the net income stream. The value of the investment has increased by £14.5m in 2018/19 due to reclassifications from property, plant and equipment of £14.4m, and net gains from fair value adjustments of £0.1m</p>	<p>We have undertaken the following work in respect of investment properties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We reviewed management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work. We then considered the competence, expertise and objectivity the valuer in their capacity as the management experts used. • We reviewed and challenged the information used by the valuer to ensure its robustness and consistency with our understanding and challenge of key assumptions. • Tested of a sample of revaluations made during the year to ensure they were input correctly into the asset register and in the financial statements. • Undertook detailed work around the categorisation and valuation techniques of investment properties <p>We identified a material reclassification from land and buildings to investment properties. We challenged this reclassification in order to gain an understanding of the reasons and assumptions behind this re-classification. We identified that the Council appropriately took factors arising in the 2018-19 financial year into consideration in re-classifying this property.</p> <p>Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of investment properties</p>	

Assessment

- We disagree with the estimation process or judgements that underpin the estimate and consider the estimate to be potentially materially misstated
- We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider optimistic
- We consider the estimate is unlikely to be materially misstated however management's estimation process contains assumptions we consider cautious
- We consider management's process and key assumptions to be reasonable

Going concern

Our responsibility

As auditors, we are required to “obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence about the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation and presentation of the financial statements and to conclude whether there is a material uncertainty about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern” (ISA (UK) 570).

Going concern commentary

Management's assessment process

Management has considered CIPFA's guidance on going concern for local government and has reviewed the financial position and reserves of the Council. Due to the transformation programme between Taunton Deane and West Somerset, the Council ceased on 31 March 2019.

Auditor commentary

- Management has undertaken an assessment of the use of the going concern assumption and demonstrated that no material uncertainties exist.
- We concur with management's assessment of the use of going concern basis of accounting.
- It should be noted that although the Council ceased on 31 March 2019, going concern in the context of local government should be considered in the context of the CIPFA code - 'an Authority's financial statements shall be prepared on a going concern basis; that is, the accounts should be prepared on the assumption that the functions of the authority will continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Transfers of services under combinations of public sector bodies (such as local government reorganisation) do not negate the presumption of going concern'.
- Preparation of the accounts on a going concern basis is therefore appropriate. Our opinion includes an emphasis of matter to draw the readers attention to the fact that the Council demise don 1 April 2019.

Work performed

We reviewed management's assessment of the use of the going concern basis of accounting and consideration of any material uncertainties.

Auditor commentary

- No issues were identified.

Concluding comments

Auditor commentary

- No issues were identified from our consideration of management's assessment of going concern or through our audit procedures. An unmodified opinion in respect of going concern will be given.
- We have however included an emphasis of matter paragraph reflecting the transfer of services to the new authority.

Other communication requirements

We set out below details of other matters which we, as auditors, are required by auditing standards and the Code to communicate to those charged with governance.

Issue	Commentary
① Matters in relation to fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have previously discussed the risk of fraud with the Corporate Governance Committee. We have not been made aware of any other incidents in the period and no other issues have been identified during the course of our audit procedures
② Matters in relation to related parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are not aware of any related parties or related party transactions which have not been disclosed
③ Matters in relation to laws and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have not made us aware of any significant incidences of non-compliance with relevant laws and regulations and we have not identified any incidences from our audit work.
④ Written representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A letter of representation has been requested from the Council, which will be included in the Committee papers. This will include those items that have not been adjusted.
⑤ Confirmation requests from third parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We requested from management permission to send confirmation requests for bank and investment balances. This permission was granted and the requests were sent. All of these requests were returned with positive confirmation, apart from confirmations from Lloyds bank and Santander. We have undertaken alternative audit procedures to gain assurance over these investments We requested from management permission to send confirmation requests to the pension fund auditor. This permission was granted and the requests were sent. We have received the final response from the pension fund auditor, and have completed our audit work in this area
⑥ Disclosures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our review identified some disclosure changes within the draft financial statements. See page 23 for further details.
⑦ Audit evidence and explanations/significant difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and explanations requested from management was provided. Initially, we experienced delays in completing our audit procedures, examples of which are provided below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payroll information was received late, which delayed our completion of this work during the interim as well as final accounts audit Several working papers were received late, which delayed completion of audit work in the relevant areas Receipt of transaction level reports has been difficult to obtain, thereby delaying our substantive testing <p>Furthermore, we have had to undertake additional testing in relation to the PPE and Pension liability balances as a result of guidance from regulators.</p> <p>We have also had to undertake additional substantive testing regarding redundancy payments and processes as a result of receiving an objection to the draft financial statements.</p>

Other responsibilities under the Code

Issue	Commentary
① Other information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are required to give an opinion on whether the other information published together with the audited financial statements (including the Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report), is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. <p>No inconsistencies have been identified</p>
② Matters on which we report by exception	<p>We are required to report on a number of matters by exception in a numbers of areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the Annual Governance Statement does not meet the disclosure requirements set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE guidance or is misleading or inconsistent with the other information of which we are aware from our audit If we have applied any of our statutory powers or duties <p>We have nothing to report on these matters.</p>
③ Specified procedures for Whole of Government Accounts	<p>We are required to carry out specified procedures (on behalf of the NAO) on the Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) consolidation pack under WGA group audit instructions.</p> <p>Note that work is not required as the Council does not exceed the threshold</p>
④ Certification of the closure of the audit	<p>Our work is currently ongoing with regard to the objection that we received from an objector on the 2018-19 accounts. We will be unable to issue the certificate of closure of the audit until that objection has been addressed.</p>

Value for Money

Background to our VFM approach

We are required to satisfy ourselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This is known as the Value for Money (VFM) conclusion.

We are required to carry out sufficient work to satisfy ourselves that proper arrangements are in place at the Council. In carrying out this work, we are required to follow the NAO's Auditor Guidance Note 3 (AGN 03) issued in November 2017. AGN 03 identifies one single criterion for auditors to evaluate:

"In all significant respects, the audited body takes properly informed decisions and deploys resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people."

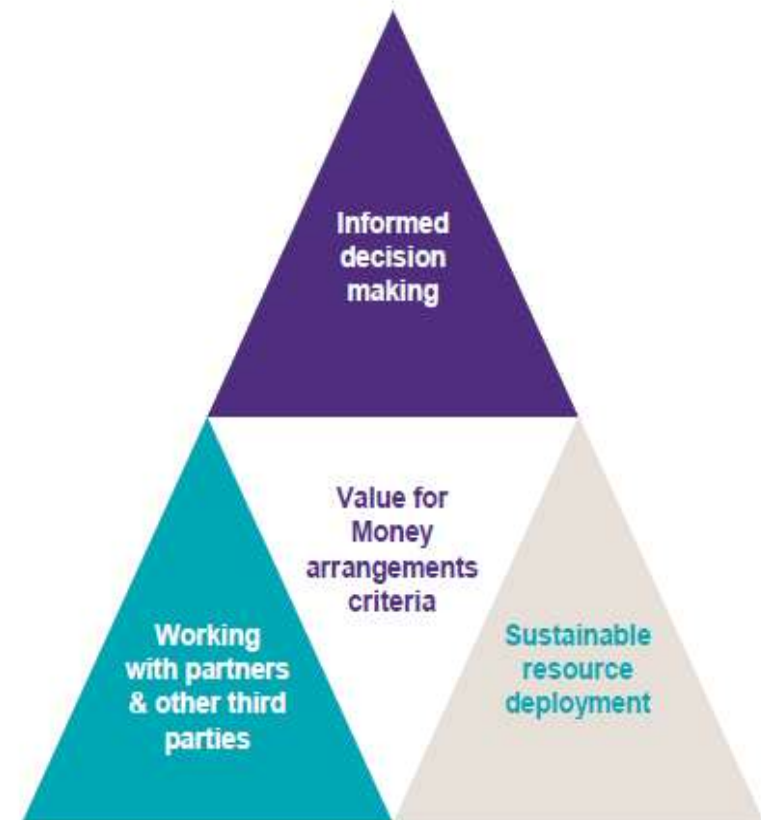
This is supported by three sub-criteria, as set out opposite

Risk assessment

We carried out an initial risk assessment in December 2018 and identified two significant risks in respect of specific areas of proper arrangements using the guidance contained in AGN03. We communicated these risks to you in our Audit Plan dated 17 December 2018.

We have continued our review of relevant documents up to the date of giving our report, and have not identified any further significant risks where we need to perform further work.

We carried out further work only in respect of the significant risks we identified from our initial and ongoing risk assessment. Where our consideration of the significant risks determined that arrangements were not operating effectively, we have used the examples of proper arrangements from AGN 03 to explain the gaps in proper arrangements that we have reported in our VFM conclusion.



Value for Money

Our work

AGN 03 requires us to disclose our views on significant qualitative aspects of the Council's arrangements for delivering economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

We have focused our work on the significant risks that we identified in the Council's arrangements. In arriving at our conclusion, our main considerations were:

- Medium Term Financial Planning and the need to identify further savings in the medium term to balance the budget; and
- The transformation programme, and monitoring and reporting of service delivery when the transformation programme reaches its peak in the final quarter of 2018-19

We have set out more detail on the risks we identified, the results of the work we performed, and the conclusions we drew from this work on pages 18 and 19

Overall conclusion

Based on the work we performed to address the significant risks, we are satisfied that the Council had proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Recommendations for improvement

We discussed findings arising from our work with management and have agreed recommendations for improvement.

Our recommendations and management's response to these can be found in the Action Plan at Appendix A

Significant difficulties in undertaking our work

We did not identify any significant difficulties in undertaking our work on your arrangements which we wish to draw to your attention.

Significant matters discussed with management

There were no matters where no other evidence was available or matters of such significance to our conclusion or that we required written representation from management or those charged with governance.

Key findings

We set out below our key findings against the significant risks we identified through our initial risk assessment and further risks identified through our ongoing review of documents.

	Significant risk	Findings	Conclusion
1	<p>Medium Term Financial position including Transformation</p> <p>We reported in our audit plan that the Council continues to face financial pressures with the 4 year settlement for 2016/17 to 2019/20 resulting in a significant grant cut . The new Somerset West and Taunton Council has set a balanced budget for the 2019/20 financial year, with an indicative cumulative surplus of £787k due to be achieved by the end of 2023/24. However the Council's annual budget report highlights that future funding is uncertain. The MTFP position includes the projected savings arising through the implementation of the Transformation Business Case and formation of the new Council. Without these savings, the forecasted budget gap would be a deficit of £2.057m per year by 2023/24.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We reviewed the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, including the assumptions and savings included within the modelling. We also considered the work being done by the Council to identify the additional savings that it needs to make over this period. The Authority's outturn for 2018/19 was £240k below budget, which was transferred to general reserves. At 31 March 2019 the Council has reserves of £16.417m, with £14.194m being in earmarked reserves and £2.223m in the general reserve. The Council set a balanced budget for the 2019/20 financial year, with a harmonised Council tax rate. This results in a Band D increase of £5 increase on the Taunton Deane rate, and a £2.32 increase on the West Somerset rate. Budgeted savings within this were £3.5m as a result of the transformation programme. It was identified in December 2018 that the overall costs for transformation are now estimated to exceed the original High Level Business Case estimates by £2,387,000, for which Taunton Deane's share is £1,880,000, however the revised Business Case increases the savings from £3,100,000 to £3,500,000 per annum. The Council should continue to monitor the transformation programme finances as any further increases could impact the medium term financial planning The additional costs mostly come from the average cost of redundancy not from higher numbers of redundancy. In 2016, the Council predicted the former to be £25,000 when in reality it has proven to be £34,000. This can be for a range of reasons the most likely being the age profile and length of service of the people involved. On reflection The Council states that they should have included a range for the redundancy estimate stress testing the Business Case to the pay back of three years which they remain within. The current Somerset West and Taunton MTFP runs to 2023/24 and is based on detailed modelling assumptions. These include inflation, pay and contract increases as well as anticipated reductions in grant funding, including the four year funding settlement accepted by the Council. These assumptions have been reviewed and appear to be reasonable based on the evidence and information currently available. The MTFP is updated regularly as information on grant settlements becomes available, outcomes from savings strategy are identified and any new cost pressures identified. 	<p>Auditor view</p> <p>Whilst significant pressures remain we conclude that, overall, the Council has demonstrated it has appropriate arrangements in place for sustainable resource deployment. The Council should continue to monitor the transformation costs finances as any further increases could impact the medium term financial planning and report the movements and changes on an ongoing basis to Members.</p> <p>Management response</p> <p>The Council has robust budgeting arrangements in place and recognises a number of financial planning risks. Management views the realisation of benefits from transformation as critical to its sustainable financial position.</p>

Key findings (Continued)

	Significant risk	Findings	Conclusion
2	<p>Transformation programme and service delivery</p> <p>We reported in our audit plan that we would undertake procedures to understand the Council's mechanisms for identifying, monitoring and reporting any operational service delivery issues arising from the transformation programme, especially when the programme reaches its peak in the last quarter of 2018-19.</p> <p>As part of our value for money risk assessment, we have considered the high level business case, and identified that given the level of redundancies and other service disruption, we will consider the detail behind the monitoring of the transformation programme, and identify whether appropriate governance policies and procedures have been followed throughout.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In line with agreed reporting arrangements for programme governance, an update report was taken to the Shadow Council's Scrutiny Committee on the 26th of November, and then to Full Council for both Councils on 11th and 12th December 2018. The report showed that cost is off target, and resource is at risk. The Councils requested an update to the budget for the transformation programme of £2.387m, of which Taunton Deane's share is £1.88m, and West Somerset's share is £507k. The updated Business Case provided a payback period, at 2.7 years, which is below the three year good practice benchmark the Council has used for this programme. The additional budget was approved by members. A second progress report on the transformation programme was taken to Shadow Scrutiny Committee on 14th January 2019. This agenda item highlighted several queries and concerns from members. Members suggested that officers needed to manage the customer's expectations and distribute communications properly and in a timely manner, and the Programme Sponsor agreed and they had already started work on communications. Concern was raised in the 'dip' in service levels during the delivery of the Transformation Project. The Programme Director confirmed that was to be expected and that Members had been advised that service levels might be reduced as a result of the recruitment process. These points, included within the public minutes show a reasonable level of scrutiny with regards to the transformation programme, and also reflects the level of engagement and discussion around salient points of the programme. We have held discussions with officers at the Council responsible for managing service delivery, and it was identified that whilst overall the main operational elements of the transformation had been delivered in accordance with the timeline, there were some lessons learnt for both Councils as part of the programme, the main lesson of which involves staggering implementation. Overall, we have identified that update reports have been taken to Scrutiny meetings providing members a chance to participate and add value to the transformation programme as a whole. Informal internal monitoring also shows that detailed logs were kept of the issues and blockers with regards to operational service delivery, and these were monitored and updated regularly. It was also identified that an external body was hired to provide experienced consultancy services to aid the transformation programme, which shows the Council's approach to the transformation programme took into account measures to ensure a smooth transition from two Councils to one. 	<p>Auditor view</p> <p>Overall we are satisfied that the Council governance procedures with regards to the transformation programme are robust. Some issues with service delivery were identified, as communicated to members, and the Council have identified lessons to be learnt from this going forward.</p> <p>Management response</p> <p>The Council has managed a lengthy period of significant and rapid change, and will learn from successes and challenges faced</p>

Independence and ethics

We confirm that there are no significant facts or matters that impact on our independence as auditors that we are required or wish to draw to your attention. We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard and confirm that we, as a firm, and each covered person, are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

Further, we have complied with the requirements of the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 01 issued in December 2017 which sets out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

Details of fees charged are detailed in Appendix D

Audit and Non-audit services

For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Council. No non-audit services were identified.

	Fees £	Threats identified	Safeguards
Audit related			
Certification of Housing Benefits claim	17,898	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is £17,898 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £38,984 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors all mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.
Audit of Pooled Housing Capital Receipts	TBC	Self-Interest (because this may be a recurring fee)	The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is low in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £38,984 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.

Action plan

We have identified 4 recommendations for the Council as a result of issues identified during the course of our audit. We have agreed our recommendations with management and we will report on progress on these recommendations during the course of the 2019/20 audit. The matters reported here are limited to those deficiencies that we have identified during the course of our audit and that we have concluded are of sufficient importance to merit being reported to you in accordance with auditing standards.

	Assessment	Issue and risk	Recommendations
1	●	The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan is dependent on savings to be realised from the transformation programme. The programme has incurred higher costs than originally anticipated. The Council should continue to monitor the transformation costs finances as any further increases could impact the medium term financial planning, and reserves.	<p>The Council should continue to monitor the transformation costs finances as any further increases could impact the medium term financial planning</p> <p>Management response</p> <p>The council will continue to monitor both costs and realisation of benefits related to transformation.</p>
2	●	During the course of the audit, it was identified that the Council did not undertake a formal bank reconciliation for the General Imprest (Creditors) bank account. The audit team undertook additional procedures in order to gain assurance over the bank balance as at 31 March 2019. The risk of not undertaking bank reconciliations could be that there might be material variances between the bank and the ledger, therefore the financial statements	<p>The Council should undertake regular bank reconciliations, which should be reviewed and approved on a timely basis</p> <p>Management response</p> <p>The Finance Business Partner will ensure this reconciliation is performed regularly and kept up to date.</p>
3	●	During the course of our audit work we encountered a number of problems obtaining supporting evidence in relation to payroll supporting documentation, transaction level reports for debtors and creditors, supporting information to prove the completeness of journals and working papers in relation to a number of areas in the financial statements. This led to difficulty undertaking audit procedures.	<p>The Council should provide timely and accurate working papers, transaction listings and other evidence to the audit team</p> <p>Management response Major organisational disruption during the financial year end period restricted resources in some areas with competing demands on officer time and staff turnover. Management will seek to avoid similar impact on the audit process in future. Management is also mindful that council officers had to spend additional time supporting more in depth audit testing than previously undertaken or expected, and that support to the audit team and addressing some queries led to additional demands on council staff (e.g. queries were received where information had previously been supplied, or where council officers had to guide the audit team in some areas).</p>
4	●	Our testing of Members disclosures of interest found that a proportion of requests had not been returned as at September 2019. Whilst each meeting will require Members to declare interests, we recommend that as there is also a formal process in place for Members to declare any interests, that this process is followed.	<p>Management response</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer has ensured information was requested on a timely basis and issued follow up reminders. The Chair of Council also issued a reminder to all Councillors at a Full Council meeting. Management considers the process to be robust and requires Members to provide declarations on a timely basis.</p>

Controls

- High – Significant effect on control system
- Medium – Effect on control system
- Low – Best practice

Follow up of prior year recommendations

We identified the following issues in the audit of Taunton Deane Borough Council's 2017/18 financial statements, which resulted in 1 recommendations being reported in our 2017/18 Audit Findings report.

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
<p>1</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>In the course of our review of the revaluation of Property, Plant and Equipment, it was found that a number of assets were not revalued in the last 5 years as required by the CIPFA Code. This affected £1.5m of Council Dwellings (which are indexed each year to ensure a current valuation) and £2.9m of other HRA Assets.</p> <p>We recommend that the Council ensure these assets are revalued at the earliest opportunity and ensure that all assets are valued in accordance with the code going forward.</p>	<p>Auditor response</p> <p>Our audit work in relation to valuation of property, plant and equipment highlighted that all assets have been valued within a five year period as at 31 March 2019.</p> <p>Management response</p> <p>Valuation of these assets has been undertaken for the 2018/19 accounts.</p>

Assessment

- ✓ Action completed
- X Not yet addressed

Audit Adjustments

We are required to report all non trivial misstatements to those charged with governance, whether or not the accounts have been adjusted by management.

Impact of adjusted misstatements

Detail	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement £'000	Statement of Financial Position £' 000	Impact on total net expenditure £'000
Auditor testing of Housing Benefits Debtors identified that the short term debtors balance is overstated by £347k. This error is below our performance materiality threshold, however the error has been adjusted for by the Council. This affects the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, Balance Sheet, Movement in Reserves Statement, Cash Flow Statement and accompanying notes.	Operations Income – Dr £347k	Short Term Debtors – Cr £347k	Increase of £347k to Cost of Services, resulting in a revised figure of £31,807k

Misclassification and disclosure changes

The table below provides details of misclassification and disclosure changes identified during the audit which have been made in the final set of financial statements.

Disclosure omission	Detail	Auditor recommendations	Adjusted?
Financial Instruments	The Council has categorised money market funds as being held at amortised cost, however our audit testing has identified that these should be categorised as fair value through profit and loss. The Council holds £3 million of money market funds which need to be reclassified.	We recommend the Council update their financial instruments note to categorise money market funds as fair value through profit and loss rather than amortised cost on the balance sheet date.	✓
Income and Expenditure Analysed by Nature	Our testing has identified that £615k of expenditure was classified within operating expenditure, but actually relates to payroll. This has no impact on the note totals or the primary statements as it is simply a re-classification.	We recommend the Council update their Income and Expenditure analysed by Nature note in order to correct this misclassification.	✓
Investment properties	Investment properties have been disclosed as Level 3 investments in the accounts, however should be disclosed as Level 2 investments as the valuations are based on rental income and yields which constitute observable inputs	We recommend the Council update Note 15 to reflect this change	✓

Audit Adjustments

Impact of unadjusted misstatements

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the 2018/19 audit which have not been made within the final set of financial statements. The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee is required to approve management's proposed treatment of all items recorded within the table below:

Detail	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement £'000	Statement of Financial Position £' 000	Impact on total net expenditure £'000	Reason for not adjusting
1 Our internal actuary has reviewed the impact of GMP equalisation judgement. For councils using Barnett Waddingham the impact is a potential overstatement of the net pension liability of 0.15% equating to £134k for Taunton Deane Borough Council. The Authority has considered that the impact of GMP equalisation is not material to the Statement of Accounts. Based on our review of this area we concur with this view.	£0	£134	£0	Not material individually or in total
2 As part of the McCloud ruling the Council have undertaken a materiality review and identified that there is an understatement in the estimated impact on total liabilities as at 31 March 2019	£0	(£61)	£0	Not material individually or in total
Overall impact	£0	£73	£0	

Appendix D

Fees

Update to our risk assessment – Additional work in respect of the audit code

The table below sets out the additional work which we anticipate necessary in order to complete the audit, along with the impact on the audit fee where possible. Please note that these proposed additional fees are estimates based on our best projection of work and will be subject to approval by PSAA in line with the Terms of Appointment

Audit Fees Area of work	Timing	Comment	£
Assessing the impact of the McCloud Ruling	June – July 2019	The Government's transitional arrangements for pensions were ruled discriminatory by the Court of Appeal last December. The Supreme Court refused the Government's application for permission to appeal this ruling. As part of our audit we considered the impact on the financial statements along with any audit reporting requirements. This included consultation with our own internal actuary in their capacity as an auditor expert.	1,500
Pensions – IAS 19	June – July 2019	The Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that the quality of work by audit firms in respect of IAS19 needs to improve across local government audits. Accordingly, we have increased the level of scope and coverage in respect of IAS19 this year.	1,500
PPE Valuations – work of experts	June – July 2019	As above, the Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that auditors need to improve the quality of work on PPE Valuations across the sector. We have increased the volume and scope of our audit work to reflect this.	1,500
Additional work on specific audit balances.	June – August 2019	During the course of our initial visit, we encountered problems obtaining sufficient working papers to support our testing of journals, debtors, creditors, the collection fund and Housing Benefit. We had to undertake additional audit procedures in relation to these areas in order to obtain sufficient audit assurance over the balances within the financial statements.	TBA

Total Audit Fees	Actual 2017/18 fee £	Planned 2018/19 fee £	Final 2018/19 fee £
Audit related services:			
Council Audit	50,629	38,984	38,984
Additional Audit Fee (see above)			4,500
Total audit fees (excl VAT)	50,629	38,984	43,484

Non Audit Fees

Fees for other services	Fees £'000
Audit related services:	
Certification of Housing Benefit (estimate)	17,898
Pooling of Capital Receipts	TBC
Total fees for other services	17,898

Audit opinion DRAFT SUBJECT TO COMPLETION OF THE AUDIT

Independent auditor's report to the members of Somerset West and Taunton Council in respect of Taunton Deane Borough Council

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Taunton Deane Borough Council (the 'Authority') for the year ended 31 March 2019 which comprise the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Movement in Reserves Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Collection Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and notes to the accounts, 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 2018/19.

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2019 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2018/19; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements' section of our report. 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. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

the Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or the Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer has not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the Authority's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Emphasis of Matter – Demise of the Authority

We draw attention to note 6 to the financial statements which discloses that Taunton Deane Borough Council demised on 1 April 2019. Taunton Deane Borough Council combined with West Somerset District Council on 1 April 2019 to form Somerset West and Taunton Council. All property, rights and liabilities held by the two former authorities transferred to the new authority on 1 April 2019. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Other information

The Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer is responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge of the Authority obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

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

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the Code of Audit Practice) we are required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)' 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.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Audit opinion SUBJECT TO COMPLETION OF THE AUDIT

We anticipate we will provide the Council with an unmodified audit report

Opinion on other matter required by the Code of Audit Practice

In our opinion, 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, the other information published together with the financial statements in the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement 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:

- 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.

Responsibilities of the Authority, the Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer and Those Charged with Governance for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts, 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 Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer. The Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer 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 2018/19, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer 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 Strategic Finance Advisor and Section 151 Officer 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, Governance and Standards Committee of Somerset West and Taunton Council, which is the successor body to Taunton Deane Borough Council, 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 objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements. A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Audit opinion SUBJECT TO COMPLETION OF THE AUDIT

We anticipate we will provide the Council with an unmodified audit report

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

Conclusion

On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, we are satisfied that the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.

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 on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, as to whether in all significant respects the Authority had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people. The Comptroller and Auditor General determined this criterion as that necessary for us to consider under the Code of Audit Practice in satisfying ourselves whether the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.

We planned our work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice. Based on our risk assessment, we undertook such work as we considered necessary to be satisfied that the Authority has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – Delay in certification of completion of the audit

We cannot formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2019 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice until we have completed our consideration of matters brought to our attention. We are satisfied that these matters do not have a material effect on the financial statements or on our conclusion on the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the members of Somerset West and Taunton Council, as a body, in respect of Taunton Deane Borough Council 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 members of Somerset West and Taunton Council, those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report in respect of Taunton Deane Borough Council and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than Somerset West and Taunton Council and the members of Somerset West and Taunton Council as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

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

Bristol
XX November 2019



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