

# Public Document Pack

**Date of meeting** Tuesday, 28th May, 2024  
**Time** 7.00 pm  
**Venue** Queen Elizabeth II & Astley Rooms - Castle House, Barracks Road, Newcastle, Staffs. ST5 1BL  
**Contact** Geoff Durham



**NEWCASTLE  
UNDER LYME**  
**BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Castle House  
Barracks Road  
Newcastle-under-Lyme  
Staffordshire  
ST5 1BL

## Audit and Standards Committee

### AGENDA

#### OPEN AGENDA

- 1 APOLOGIES**
- 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**  
To receive Declarations of Interest from Members on items included in the agenda
- 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING** (Pages 3 - 6)  
To consider the minutes of the previous meeting(s).
- 4 AUDITOR'S REPORT AND CLOSURE OF THE AUDIT FOR 2022/23** (Pages 7 - 44)
- 5 PROPOSED ACCOUNTING POLICIES, CRITICAL ACCOUNTING JUDGEMENTS AND SOURCES OF ESTIMATION UNCERTAINTY 2023/24** (Pages 45 - 64)
- 6 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24** (Pages 65 - 82)
- 7 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24** (Pages 83 - 90)  
Statement of Accounts to follow.
- 8 WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 91 - 94)
- 9 URGENT BUSINESS**  
To consider any business which is urgent within the meaning of Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

**Members:** Councillors P Waring (Chair), Burnett-Faulkner (Vice-Chair), Holland, Whieldon, Stubbs, Brockie and Lewis

**Members of the Council: If you identify any personal training/development requirements from any of the items included in this agenda or through issues raised during the meeting, please bring them to the attention of the Democratic Services Officer at the close of the meeting.**

**Meeting Quorums :- Where the total membership of a committee is 12 Members or less, the quorum will be 3 members....Where the total membership is more than 12 Members, the quorum will be one quarter of the total membership.**

**SUBSTITUTE MEMBER SCHEME (Section B5 – Rule 2 of Constitution)**

The Constitution provides for the appointment of Substitute members to attend Committees. The named Substitutes for this meeting are listed below:-

Substitute Members:	Panter	Lawley
	Parker	Northcott
	Gorton	Reece
	S Jones	

***If you are unable to attend this meeting and wish to appoint a Substitute to attend on your place you need to identify a Substitute member from the list above who is able to attend on your behalf***

Officers will be in attendance prior to the meeting for informal discussions on agenda items.

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# Agenda Item 3

*Audit and Standards Committee - 22/04/24*

## AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday, 22nd April, 2024  
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

[View the agenda here](#)

[Watch the meeting here](#)

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Paul Waring (Chair)		
Councillors:	Burnett-Faulkner Holland	Whieldon Brockie	Lewis
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Stubbs		
Officers:	Sarah Wilkes Anthony Harold Deborah Harris Alex Canon Robert Fenton Richard Lee	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer Service Director - Legal & Governance / Monitoring Officer Chief Internal Auditor Audit Manager Senior Manager, KPMG Director, KPMG	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Stephen Sweeney	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth	

1. **APOLOGIES**

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. **INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER 2024**

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth provided an introduction on the Internal Audit Charter.

The new Chief Auditor Debbie Harris introduced herself and her colleague Alex Canon, Audit Manager, who would be leading the delivery of the Audit Plan for the year ahead. The Chief Auditor subsequently presented the report on the Internal Audit Charter.

**Resolved:** That the Internal Audit Charter 2024 be approved.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**5. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25**

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the Internal Audit Plan.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) presented the report.

**Resolved:** 1. That in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference, the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 be approved.

2. That the Committee agree to receive quarterly reports on the delivery of the assignments within the plan and on the implementation of actions arising.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**6. COUNTER FRAUD ARRANGEMENTS 2024-25**

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the Counter Fraud Arrangements.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) presented the report.

**Resolved:** That the following policies which support the Counter fraud function be noted:

1. Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Framework
2. Fraud Response Plan
3. Whistleblowing Policy
4. Anti-Money Laundering Policy

[Watch the debate here](#)

**7. CORPORATE RISK POLICY STATEMENT AND STRATEGY 2024/2025**

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the Corporate Risk Policy Statement and Strategy.

The Service Director for Legal and Governance / Monitoring Officer presented the report. Members asked questions and responses were provided as follows.

Cllr Holland wished for re-assurance that the strategy had been looked at carefully since the previous year and that necessary updates had been made. – Indeed it had been reviewed by the legal team to ensure the document was robust. Specific details could be discussed outside of the meeting.

Cllr Brockie enquired about the risks associated with major developments and if there were sufficient staff and infrastructure to ensure these were monitored at all time. – Several processes were in place to keep things under control of which monthly corporate risk reviews and monthly monitoring of projects ensuring all risks were accounted for.

Cllr Whieldon highlighted the wording of paragraph 6 of the Risk Management Policy Statement stating a list of actions the Council 'would' take to meet its responsibilities as opposed to 'may' or 'could', which she found re-assuring.

**Resolved:**

1. That the reviewed Risk Management Policy and Strategy for the 2024/25 year, subject to changes, be accepted.
2. That if approved by the Committee, the Chief Executive and Leader would sign the Policy Statement, be noted.
3. That the Committee own respective responsibility in risk management be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. **EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN & STRATEGY 2023-24**

KPMG Director Richard Lee introduced himself and his colleague Robert Fenton, Senior Manager, as newly appointed external auditors. Mr Fenton then presented the report on the External Audit Plan and Strategy for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

Cllr Holland welcomed the new auditors and pointed out a typo in the report in the name of the borough. – It was confirmed this would be corrected.

**Resolved:** That the External Audit Plan and Strategy be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

9. **WORK PROGRAMME**

**Resolved:** That the work programme be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

10. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**Councillor Paul Waring  
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 7.36 pm

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Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council  
Castle House  
Barracks Road  
Newcastle-under-Lyme  
Staffordshire  
ST5 1BL

29 April 2024

Dear Sarah

## Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council: Auditor's report and closure of the audit for 2022/23

We are pleased to be able to advise you that we have completed our audit of the Council's financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2023 and our work on your arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources, together with all other work we are required to complete under the Code of Audit Practice.

We have issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements and have not reported any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources as required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice and supporting guidance.

A copy of our auditor's report is attached, which includes our certificate of completion of the audit for the year ended 31 March 2023. Please include this auditor's report in your statement of accounts before publishing it on your website. Please ensure that you do not reproduce the signature of the auditor in any electronic format for any other purpose.

Please note that Regulation 16(1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Council to publish (which must include publication on its website) a statement:

- that the audit has been concluded
- that the statement of accounts has been published
- of the rights of inspection conferred in local government electors by section 25 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the address at which, and the hours during which, those rights may be exercised.

This statement should be published as soon as reasonably practicable.

Please accept our thanks to everybody at the Council for your help and support during this year's audit. We have set out below further details regarding the finalisation and publication of the Council's statement of accounts, which includes the audited financial statements.

### Auditor's reports on the financial statements

We have noted your wish to publish and distribute the statement of accounts, which includes the financial statements, in electronic format. Please note that:

- the examination of the controls over the electronic publication of audited financial statements is beyond the scope of the audit of the financial statements and the auditor cannot be held responsible for changes made to audited information after the initial publication of the financial statements and auditor's report;

- where you wish to publish or distribute the financial statements electronically (separately or within the statement of accounts), you are responsible for ensuring that the publication accurately presents the financial statements and auditor's report on those financial statements. This responsibility also applies to the presentation of any financial information published in respect of prior periods; and
- the auditor's report on the financial statements should not be reproduced or referred to electronically without our written consent.

Please ensure that:

- you publish the financial statements and the auditor's report on those statements together in the statement of accounts;
- you only publish the financial statements accompanied by the "other information" provided to us before we issued our audit report and specifically referred to in our audit report; and
- you do not publish the financial statements accompanied by any other information not provided to us prior to issuing our auditor's report.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like clarification on any point.

Yours sincerely

**Andrew  
Smith**

Andrew J Smith

Key Audit Partner

**For Grant Thornton UK LLP**



# Audit Findings Report

## Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council

Year ended 31 March 2023

April 2024



# Contents



## Your key Grant Thornton team members are:

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## Section

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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit planning process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect the Council or all weaknesses in your internal controls. 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.

This Audit Findings 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. Its contents have been discussed with management and the Audit and Standards Committee.

Name: Andrew J Smith  
For Grant Thornton UK LLP  
Date:

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# 1. Headlines

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## Value for Money (VFM) arrangements

Under the National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), we are required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. Auditors are required to report in more detail on the Council's overall arrangements, as well as key recommendations on any significant weaknesses in arrangements identified during the audit.

Auditors are required to report their commentary on the Council's arrangements under the following specified criteria:

- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- Financial sustainability; and
- Governance

We have completed our VFM work, which is summarised on page 20, and our detailed commentary is set out in the separate Auditor's Annual Report, which was presented to Audit and Standards Committee on the 5th of February 2024.

We are satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

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## Statutory duties

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ('the Act') also requires us to:

- 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.

We have not exercised any of our additional statutory powers or duties.

We expect to certify the completion of the audit in April 2024.

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## Significant matters

We did not encounter any significant difficulties or identify any significant matters arising during our audit.

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# Page 12 1. Headlines

This table summarises the key findings and other matters arising from the statutory audit Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council ('the Council') and the preparation of the Council's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 for the attention of those charged with governance.

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## Financial Statements

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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 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.

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.

Our year-end audit took place between July and September. Our findings are summarised on pages 6 to 23.

We have not identified any adjustments to the financial statements that will result in adjustments to the Council's Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. We have identified three unadjusted audit adjustments and these are set out in Appendix D.

We have raised one recommendation for management as a result of our audit work. These are set out in Appendix B. Our follow up of recommendations from the prior year's audit are detailed in Appendix C. Of the four recommendations raised in prior year, management have addressed three of the issues.

Our work is complete and there are no matters of which we are aware that would require modification of our audit opinion, we await receiving the following;

- Receipt of the signed management representation letter ; and
- Review of the final set of financial statements.

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.

Our financial statements audit report opinion will be unmodified.

Our work on the Council's value for money (VFM) arrangements is complete. The outcome of our VFM work will be reported in our commentary on the Council's arrangements in our Auditor's Annual Report (AAR). We are satisfied this work does not have a material effect on our opinion on the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

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# 1. Headlines

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## National context – audit backlog

Nationally there have been significant delays in the completion of audit work and the issuing of audit opinions across the local government sector. Only 12% of local government bodies had received audit opinions in time to publish their 2021/22 accounts by the extended deadline of 30 November. There has not been a significant improvement over this last year, and the situation remains challenging. We at Grant Thornton have a strong desire and a firm commitment to complete as many audits as soon as possible and to address the backlog of unsigned opinions.

Over the course of the last year, Grant Thornton has been working constructively with DLUHC, the FRC and the other audit firms to identify ways of rectifying the challenges which have been faced by our sector, and we recognise the difficulties these backlogs have caused authorities across the country. We have also published a report setting out our consideration of the issues behind the delays and our thoughts on how these could be mitigated. Please see [About time? \(grantthornton.co.uk\)](https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/about-time/)

We would like to thank everyone at the Council for their support in working with us to ensure that the audit does not fall behind and to issue a timely audit opinion.

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## National context – level of borrowing

All Councils are operating in an increasingly challenging national context. With inflationary pressures placing increasing demands on Council budgets, there are concerns as Councils look to alternative ways to generate income. We have seen an increasing number of councils look to ways of utilising investment property portfolios as sources of recurrent income. Whilst there have been some successful ventures and some prudently funded by councils' existing resources, we have also seen some councils take excessive risks by borrowing sums well in excess of their revenue budgets to finance these investment schemes.

The impact of these huge debts on Councils, the risk of potential bad debt write offs and the implications of the poor governance behind some of these decisions are all issues which now have to be considered by auditors across local authority audits. The Council's short term borrowing is £55 000 (2021/22 £85 000) is not material, there is no increasing risk in the current year and this has been well managed.

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# 2. Financial Statements

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## 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 and the Audit and Standards Committee.

As auditor 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;
- 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 altered our audit plan, as communicated to you in July 2023.

## Conclusion

We have completed our audit of your financial statements and we will issue an unqualified audit opinion following the Audit and Standards Committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2024 as detailed in Appendix I. The outstanding items include:

- Receipt of the signed management representation letter ; and
- Review of the final set of financial statements.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to record our appreciation for the assistance provided by the finance team and other staff.

# 2. Financial Statements



## 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 levels remain the same as reported in our audit plan in July 2023

We set out in this table our determination of materiality for Newcastle Under Lyme Council.

	<b>Council Amount (£)</b>	<b>Qualitative factors considered</b>
Materiality for the financial statements	1,100,000	We determined materiality for the audit of the Council's financial statements as a whole to be £1.1m in our audit plan, which equated to approximately 2% of actual gross operating costs for the year 2022/23. This benchmark is considered the most appropriate because we consider users of the financial statements to be most interested in how the Council has expended its revenue and other funding.
Performance materiality	770,000	Performance materiality drives the extent of our testing and this has been set at 70% of financial statement materiality. Our consideration of performance materiality is based upon a number of factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are not aware of a history of deficiencies in the control environment.</li> <li>• Senior financial management and key reporting personnel have remained the same from prior year audit.</li> </ul>
Trivial matters	55,000	We deem matters below 5% of materiality to be sufficiently trivial not to warrant drawing to the attention of the Audit and Standards Committee.
Materiality for senior officers remuneration	17,000	In accordance with ISA 320 we have considered the need to set lower levels of materiality for sensitive balances, transactions or disclosures in the accounts. We consider the disclosures of senior officer's remuneration to be an area users of the financial statements will be interested in.

## 2. Financial Statements: Significant risks

Significant risks are defined by ISAs (UK) as risks that, in the judgement of the auditor, require special audit consideration. In identifying risks, audit teams consider the nature of the risk, the potential magnitude of misstatement, and its likelihood. Significant risks are those risks that have a higher risk of material misstatement.

This section provides commentary on the significant audit risks communicated in the Audit Plan.

Risks identified in our Audit Plan	Commentary
<p><b>Management override of controls</b></p> <p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities. The Authority faces external scrutiny of its spending and this could potentially place management under undue pressure in terms of how they report performance.</p> <p>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular journals, management estimates and transactions outside the course of business as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluated the design effectiveness of management controls over journals</li> <li>• obtained the listing of journal entries and other adjustments in the year and reconciled this back to the trial balance to ensure it was complete</li> <li>• analysed the journals listing and determined the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals</li> <li>• identified and tested 38 journals made during the year and the accounts production stage for appropriateness and corroboration</li> <li>• gained an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied by management and considered their reasonableness</li> <li>• reviewed material estimates and judgements for evidence of material bias</li> <li>• reviewed the accounting policies adopted by the Council.</li> </ul> <p>No intentional misstatements of the Council's reported financial position were identified from our testing of journals.</p> <p>We have reviewed the Council's material accounting estimates and have found these to be reasonable, with further details on pages 11 to 13.</p> <p>Our audit work has not identified any significant issues in respect of management override of controls.</p>



## 2. Financial Statements: Significant risks

Risks identified in our Audit Plan	Commentary
<p>Improper revenue recognition (rebutted)</p> <p>£75.58m</p>	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA 240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Council, we determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition could be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition.</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited</li> <li>• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.</li> </ul> <p>Therefore, we did not consider this to be a significant risk for Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council. There were no changes to our assessment as reported in the audit plan that we need to bring to your attention.</p> <p>Whilst not a significant risk, as part of our audit work we have undertaken work on material revenue items. Our work has not identified any matters that would indicate our rebuttal was incorrect.</p>
<p>Risk of fraud related to expenditure recognition PAF Practice Note (Rebutted)</p> <p>£78.24m</p>	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in Practice Note 10 and the nature of expenditure at the Council, we determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition could be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition.</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited</li> <li>• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.</li> </ul> <p>Therefore, we did not consider this to be a significant risk for Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council. There were no changes to our assessment as reported in the audit plan that we need to bring to your attention. Our work has not identified any matters that would indicate our rebuttal was incorrect.</p>

## 2. Financial Statements: Significant risks

### Risks identified in our Audit Plan

### Commentary

Valuation of land and buildings (inc Investment Properties and Surplus assets)

Land and Buildings £42.173m  
Investment Properties £12.759m  
Surplus Assets £2.099m

The Council revalues its land and buildings on a rolling five-yearly basis and investment properties on an annual basis.

This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.

Additionally, management will need to ensure the carrying value in the Authority financial statements is not materially different from the current value or the fair value (for surplus assets) at the financial statements date, where a rolling programme is used.

We therefore identified valuation of land and buildings, particularly revaluations and impairments, as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.

We have:

- evaluated the processes, controls and assumptions put in place by management to ensure that the PPE valuation is not materially misstated and evaluate the design of these and whether they are sufficient to mitigate the risk of material misstatement;
- assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of management's experts [valuers] who carried out your PPE valuations; evaluated the instructions issued by management to their management expert [a valuer] for this estimate and the scope of the valuer's work;
- communicated with the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out to ensure that the requirements of the CIPFA code are met
- challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding, particularly around obsolescence of assets, build costs, floor areas for DRC assets and yields and rents/market values for non-specialised properties.
- tested revaluations made during the year to ensure they are consistent with the valuer's report and input correctly into the Council's asset register
- evaluated the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management have satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value

Our findings include:

- For one sample selected to test the where the depreciated replacement cost method was used to determine the fair value, we found that the gross internal area per the site plans provided for the building is 4,403sqm. However, on the valuation computation, the square metres used was 4,300sqm. As a result, from our recalculation, the value of the building is understated by £232,000. The difference resulting from this error is above trivial but well below performance materiality. The error is recorded in the schedule of unadjusted errors in Appendix D.
- The results of other findings have been documented in page 31. As discussed, the cumulative difference of £210,000 is below our performance materiality and this gives the comfort that the closing balance in relation to OLB and surplus assets is not materially misstated.

Overall, we are satisfied that the valuation of land and buildings is not materially misstated.

We have also considered the key judgements and estimates in relation to the valuation of land and buildings. Our findings can be found on pages 12 and 13.

## 2. Financial Statements: Significant risks

### Risks identified in our Audit Plan

### Commentary

#### Valuation of pension fund net liability £3.010m

The Council's pension fund net liability, as reflected in its balance sheet as the net defined benefit liability, represents a significant estimate in the financial statements.

The pension fund net liability is considered a significant estimate due to the size of the numbers involved (£3.010m in the Council's balance sheet) and the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.

The methods applied in the calculation of the IAS 19 estimates are routine and commonly applied by all actuarial firms in line with the requirements set out in the Code of practice for local government accounting (the applicable financial reporting framework). We have therefore concluded that there is not a significant risk of material misstatement in the IAS 19 estimate due to the methods and models used in their calculation.

The source data used by the actuaries to produce the IAS 19 estimates is provided by administering authorities and employers. We do not consider this to be a significant risk as this is easily verifiable.

The actuarial assumptions used are the responsibility of the entity but should be set on the advice given by the actuary.

A small change in the key assumptions (discount rate, inflation rate, salary increase and life expectancy) can have a significant impact on the estimated IAS 19 liability.

In particular, the discount and inflation rates, where our consulting actuary has indicated that a 0.1% change in these two assumptions would have approximately 1% effect on the liability. We have therefore concluded that there is a significant risk of material misstatement in the IAS 19 estimate due to the assumptions used in their calculation. With regard to these assumptions we have therefore identified valuation of the Council's pension fund net liability as a significant risk.

We have performed the following procedures:

- Reviewed the disclosure in the draft financial statements to check they agree to the IAS 19 report prepared by Hymans. No issues were noted;
- Assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Council's pension fund IAS 19 disclosure and PWC (auditors expert); and
- Reviewed if the assumptions used by Hymans are within the expected ranges as provided by PWC. No issues were noted.

We have received the IAS 19 assurances from EY and the testing is completed.

We have considered the key judgements and estimates in relation to the pension fund liability. Our findings can be found on page 15.

# 2. Financial Statements: key judgements and estimates

This section provides commentary on key estimates and judgements in line with the enhanced requirements for auditors.

Significant judgement or estimate	Summary of management's approach	Audit Comments	Assessment
<b>Land and Building valuations (including Surplus Assets)– £44.272m</b>	<p>Other land and buildings comprises £36.831m of specialised assets 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.</p> <p>The remainder of other land and buildings £5.344m are not specialised in nature and are required to be valued at existing use in value (EUV) at year end. The Council has engaged their internal RICS qualified valuer to complete the valuation of properties as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 on a five yearly cyclical basis. Surplus Assets of £2.099m are measured at fair value and are required to be revalued annually. 100% of total assets were revalued during 2022/23.</p> <p>The total year end valuation of land and buildings was £44.272m, a net increase of £8.93m from 2021/22 (£35.342m)</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to the valuation expert and the scope of their work. This provided us with assurance over the completeness and accuracy of the underlying information used to determine the estimate</li> <li>evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert</li> <li>written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuations were carried out</li> <li>tested on a sample basis revaluations of the Council's land and buildings during the year to ensure they have been input correctly into the Council's asset register and financial statements</li> <li>considered the appropriateness of the source date and key assumptions including comparable rental income and yields for the properties.</li> </ul> <p>Except for the issues reported on page 10, we have satisfied ourselves in respect of the reasonableness of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Council's valuations of land and buildings;</li> <li>of the increase in the estimate; and</li> <li>the adequacy of the disclosure of estimate in the financial statements.</li> </ul>	<p>We consider management's process is appropriate and key assumptions are neither optimistic or cautious</p>

## 2. Financial Statements: key judgements and estimates

Significant judgement or estimate	Summary of management's approach	Audit Comments	Assessment
<b>Investment Property Valuation - £12.759m</b>	<p>The Council has engaged their internal RICS qualified valuer to complete the valuation of properties as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Investment Properties must be included in the balance sheet at fair value (the price that would be received in an orderly transaction between the market participant at the measurement date).</p> <p>100% of total assets were revalued during 2022/23.</p> <p>The total year end valuation of investment property was £12.759m, an increase of £1.205m from 2021/22 (£11.554m).</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to the valuation expert and the scope of their work. This provided us with assurance over the completeness and accuracy of the underlying information used to determine the estimate</li> <li>evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert</li> <li>written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuations were carried out</li> <li>tested on a sample basis revaluations of the Council's investment properties during the year to ensure they have been input correctly into the Council's asset register and financial statements . We are awaiting responses from the valuer on queries raised on the sample selected</li> <li>considered the appropriateness of the source data and key assumptions including comparable rental income and yields for the properties.</li> </ul> <p>We have identified the following from our testing:</p> <p>For the agricultural property located on Guernsey Drive Seabridge valued at £309,706 we were not provided the site plan to support the site area hectarage of 19.28h used. The reason the valuer stated was that the property was not revalued in 2022/23.</p> <p>For the industrial property located at 10 Croft Road Newcastle valued at £67,059, we noted that the valuer used an annual rental of £5,700 which differs from the rental invoice we obtained which shows an annual rental of £1,900. We have challenged the valuer who have confirmed the rental value is £1,900 per annum. On the basis we recomputed the asset value and the Capital value is £22,353 which means the asset is overstated by £44,705</p> <p>As the values are not material, we are assured that the closing balance in relation to investment properties is not materially misstated and that the client's estimates are reasonable.</p>	<p>We consider management's process is appropriate and key assumptions are neither optimistic or cautious</p>

# 2. Financial Statements: key judgements and estimates

Significant judgement or estimate	Summary of management's approach	Audit Comments	Assessment																								
<b>Net pension liability– £3.010m</b>	<p>The Council's net pension liability at 31 March 2023 is £3.010 (PY: £45.239m) The Council participates as an employer in Staffordshire Local Government Pension Scheme.</p> <p>The Council uses Hymans Robertson to provide actuarial valuations of the Council's assets and liabilities derived from this scheme. A full actuarial valuation is required every three years.</p> <p>The latest full actuarial valuation was completed in 2022. Given the significant value of the net pension fund liability, small changes in assumptions can result in significant valuation movements. There has been a £44.940m net actuarial gain during 2022/23.</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertaken an assessment of management's expert</li> <li>Reviewed and assessed the actuary's approach taken and detailed work undertaken to confirm reasonableness of approach</li> <li>Used an auditors expert (PwC) to assess the actuary and assumptions made by the actuary. This led to further detailed discussions with the Pension Fund and Actuary whereby we challenged the assumptions and calculation methods applied</li> </ul> <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>4.75%</td> <td>4.75%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pension increase rate</td> <td>3.0%</td> <td>2.95%-3%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Salary growth</td> <td>3.5%</td> <td>3.5%-5.5%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Life expectancy – Males currently aged 45/65</td> <td>20.6/ 21.3 years</td> <td>19.1-21.5/ 20.4-29.1</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Life expectancy – Females currently aged 45/65</td> <td>23.9 / 25.7 years</td> <td>19.1-21.5/ 20.4-29.1</td> <td>●</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From our review of the IAS 19 report received from EY we note that the assets were understated by £16.75 million for the whole pension fund; when considering the asset share of 2.35% which NULBC has in Staffordshire Pension Fund the difference is £393,464 an amount not material to the financial statements. The cumulative differences arising from our IAS19 testing is £254,310 and have been documented in the unadjusted misstatements on page 31.</li> </ul>	Assumption	Actuary Value	PwC range	Assessment	Discount rate	4.75%	4.75%	●	Pension increase rate	3.0%	2.95%-3%	●	Salary growth	3.5%	3.5%-5.5%	●	Life expectancy – Males currently aged 45/65	20.6/ 21.3 years	19.1-21.5/ 20.4-29.1	●	Life expectancy – Females currently aged 45/65	23.9 / 25.7 years	19.1-21.5/ 20.4-29.1	●	<p>We consider management's process is appropriate and key assumptions are neither optimistic or cautious</p>
Assumption	Actuary Value	PwC range	Assessment																								
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Life expectancy – Males currently aged 45/65	20.6/ 21.3 years	19.1-21.5/ 20.4-29.1	●																								
Life expectancy – Females currently aged 45/65	23.9 / 25.7 years	19.1-21.5/ 20.4-29.1	●																								

## Assessment

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

## 2. Financial Statements: 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
Matters in relation to fraud	We have previously discussed the risk of fraud with the Audit and Standards 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.
Matters in relation to related parties	<p>We are not aware of any related parties or related party transactions which have not been disclosed. In our 2021/22 audit, we identified directorships that were not disclosed by members via a search of Companies House. A control recommendation was made that the Council should undertake a completeness review to ensure all disclosure returns are received from Councillors and Senior officers. The Council also undertakes searches on Companies House to identify any undeclared directorships.</p> <p>In our testing this year, we have identified 12 members with directorships that were not disclosed or identified by the Council from their searches. Although we accept that there were no such transactions with the Council that would require them to be disclosed as Related Parties, the Council's processes should be stronger to identify undisclosed declarations. This has been reported in Appendix B.</p>
Matters in relation to laws and regulations	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.
Written representations	A letter of representation has been requested from the Council

## 2. Financial Statements: other communication requirements



Issue	Commentary
Confirmation requests from third parties	We requested from management permission to send a confirmation request to the bank. This permission was granted and the requests were sent. We have received the confirmation back.
Accounting practices	We have evaluated the appropriateness of the Council's accounting policies, accounting estimates and financial statement disclosures. Our review found no material omissions in the financial statements
Audit evidence and explanations/ significant difficulties	All information and explanations requested from management was provided.



## 2. Financial Statements: other communication requirements



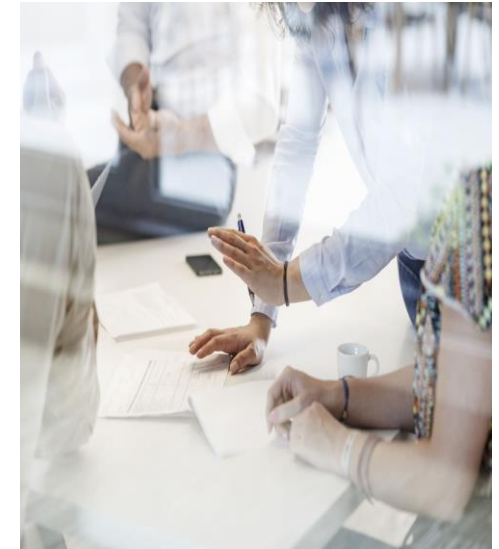
### Our responsibility

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).

Issue	Commentary
Going concern	<p>In performing our work on going concern, we have had reference to Statement of Recommended Practice – Practice Note 10: Audit of financial statements of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom (Revised 2020). The Financial Reporting Council recognises that for particular sectors, it may be necessary to clarify how auditing standards are applied to an entity in a manner that is relevant and provides useful information to the users of financial statements in that sector. Practice Note 10 provides that clarification for audits of public sector bodies.</p> <p>Practice Note 10 sets out the following key principles for the consideration of going concern for public sector entities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the use of the going concern basis of accounting is not a matter of significant focus of the auditor's time and resources because the applicable financial reporting frameworks envisage that the going concern basis for accounting will apply where the entity's services will continue to be delivered by the public sector. In such cases, a material uncertainty related to going concern is unlikely to exist, and so a straightforward and standardised approach for the consideration of going concern will often be appropriate for public sector entities</li> <li>for many public sector entities, the financial sustainability of the reporting entity and the services it provides is more likely to be of significant public interest than the application of the going concern basis of accounting. Our consideration of the Council's financial sustainability is addressed by our value for money work, which is covered elsewhere in this report.</li> </ul> <p>Practice Note 10 states that if the financial reporting framework provides for the adoption of the going concern basis of accounting on the basis of the anticipated continuation of the provision of a service in the future, the auditor applies the continued provision of service approach set out in Practice Note 10. The financial reporting framework adopted by the Council meets this criteria, and so we have applied the continued provision of service approach. In doing so, we have considered and evaluated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the nature of the Council and the environment in which it operates</li> <li>the Council's financial reporting framework</li> <li>the Council's system of internal control for identifying events or conditions relevant to going concern</li> <li>management's going concern assessment.</li> </ul> <p>On the basis of this work, we have obtained sufficient appropriate audit evidence to enable us to conclude that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a material uncertainty related to going concern has not been identified</li> <li>management's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.</li> </ul>

## 2. Financial Statements: other responsibilities under the Code

Issue	Commentary
Other information	<p>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> <p>No inconsistencies have been identified</p>
Matters on which we report by exception	<p>We are required to report on a number of matters by exception in a number of areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with disclosure requirements set out in CIPFA/SOLACE guidance or is misleading or inconsistent with the information of which we are aware from our audit,</li> <li>• if we have applied any of our statutory powers or duties.</li> <li>• where we are not satisfied in respect of arrangements to secure value for money and have reported [a] significant weakness/es.</li> </ul> <p>We have nothing to report on these matters</p>



## 2. Financial Statements: other responsibilities under the Code

Issue	Commentary
Specified procedures for Whole of Government Accounts	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. Note that work is not required as the Council does not exceed the threshold.
Certification of the closure of the audit	We intend to certify the closure of the 2022/23 audit of Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council in the audit report, as our work on VFM is completed.

# 3. Value for Money arrangements (VFM)

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## Approach to Value for Money work for 2022/23

The National Audit Office issued its guidance for auditors in April 2020. The Code requires auditors to consider whether the body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

When reporting on these arrangements, the Code requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under the three specified reporting criteria.



### Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Arrangements for improving the way the body delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users.



### Financial Sustainability

Arrangements for ensuring the body can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (3–5 years)



### Governance

Arrangements for ensuring that the body makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and management, risk management, and ensuring the body makes decisions based on appropriate information

## Potential types of recommendations

A range of different recommendations could be made following the completion of work on the body's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, which are as follows:



### Statutory recommendation

Written recommendations to the body under Section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. A recommendation under schedule 7 requires the body to discuss and respond publicly to the report.



### Key recommendation

The Code of Audit Practice requires that where auditors identify significant weaknesses in arrangements to secure value for money they should make recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the body. We have defined these recommendations as 'key recommendations'.



### Improvement recommendation

These recommendations, if implemented should improve the arrangements in place at the body, but are not made as a result of identifying significant weaknesses in the body's arrangements

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# 3. VFM: our procedures and conclusions

We have completed our VFM work and our detailed commentary is set out in the separate Auditor's Annual report which was presented to Audit and Standards Committee on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2024.

As part of our work, we considered whether there were any risks of significant weakness in the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We did not identify any risks of significant weakness. We are satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

# 5. Independence and ethics

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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 and consider that an objective reasonable and informed third party would take the same view. 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 May 2020 which sets out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

Details of fees charged are detailed in Appendix E.

## Transparency

Grant Thornton publishes an annual Transparency Report, which sets out details of the action we have taken over the past year to improve audit quality as well as the results of internal and external quality inspections. For more details see [Grant Thornton International Transparency report 2023](#).

# 5. Independence and ethics

## 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. The following non-audit services were identified as well as the threats to our independence and safeguards that have been applied to mitigate these threats.

Service	Fees £	Threats identified	Safeguards
<b>Audit related</b>			
Certification of Housing benefit	30 000	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	The level of this likely recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as we expect it to be lower in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £68,952 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.
		Self review (because GT provides audit services)	To mitigate against the self review threat, the timing of certification work is done after the audit has completed, materiality of the amounts involved to our opinion and unlikelihood of material errors arising and the Council has informed management who will decide whether to amend returns for our findings and agree the accuracy of our reports on grants.

# Appendices

- A. Communication of audit matters to those charged with governance
- B. Action plan – Audit of Financial Statements
- C. Follow up of prior year recommendations
- D. Audit Adjustments
- E. Fees and non-audit services
- F. Auditing developments



# A. Communication of audit matters to those charged with governance

<b>Our communication plan</b>	<b>Audit Plan</b>	<b>Audit Findings</b>
Respective responsibilities of auditor and management/those charged with governance	•	
Overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit, form, timing and expected general content of communications including significant risks	•	
Confirmation of independence and objectivity	•	•
A statement that we have complied with relevant ethical requirements regarding independence. Relationships and other matters which might be thought to bear on independence. Details of non-audit work performed by Grant Thornton UK LLP and network firms, together with fees charged. Details of safeguards applied to threats to independence	•	•
Significant findings from the audit		•
Significant matters and issue arising during the audit and written representations that have been sought		•
Significant difficulties encountered during the audit		•
Significant deficiencies in internal control identified during the audit		•
Significant matters arising in connection with related parties		•
Identification or suspicion of fraud involving management and/or which results in material misstatement of the financial statements		•
Non-compliance with laws and regulations		•
Unadjusted misstatements and material disclosure omissions		•
Expected modifications to the auditor's report, or emphasis of matter		•

ISA (UK) 260, as well as other ISAs (UK), prescribe matters which we are required to communicate with those charged with governance, and which we set out in the table here.

This document, the Audit Findings, outlines those key issues, findings and other matters arising from the audit, which we consider should be communicated in writing rather than orally, together with an explanation as to how these have been resolved.

## **Respective responsibilities**

As auditor we are responsible for performing the audit in accordance with ISAs (UK), 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.

## **Distribution of this Audit Findings report**

Whilst we seek to ensure our audit findings are distributed to those individuals charged with governance, we are also required to distribute our findings to those members of senior management with significant operational and strategic responsibilities. We are grateful for your specific consideration and onward distribution of our report to all those charged with governance.

# B. Action Plan – Audit of Financial Statements

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We have identified one recommendation 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 2023/24 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
Medium	<p><b>Inability to obtain detailed breakdown for Collection fund debtors and creditors</b></p> <p>The Council was unable to provide a detailed individual transactions listing for council tax and NNDR payers debtors and creditors amounting to £2.42m and £1.58m. We have performed alternative audit procedures on these balances and no issues were noted.</p>	<p>We recommend that individual transactions listing for Council Tax and NNDR debtors and creditors as at 31 March are run and retained for the purposes of year end audit testing. Due to the change in auditor for 2023/24, it is recommended that the Council understand the audit approach that the new auditor will undertake and whether these working papers will be required.</p> <p><b>Management response</b></p> <p>Council Tax and NNDR debtors and prepayments are fully reconciled as part of the Council's monthly and year end reconciliation procedures. This includes the production and retention of reports from the Revenues and Benefits system. The running of reports by individual debtor or prepayments does not add value to this process, they will however be ran for the purposes of audit testing for 2023/24 Statement of Accounts should the auditors require them.</p>

# C. Follow up of prior year recommendations

We identified the following issues in the audit of Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council's 2021/22 financial statements, which resulted in 4 recommendations being reported in our 2021/22 Audit Findings report.

We report that management has addressed 3 out of the 4 recommendations raised in the prior year.

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
✓	<p><b>Journal user access rights</b></p> <p>During our review of journal user access rights in March 2022, we identified an individual who was due to start work at the Council and had access to the General ledger. This individual appointed never actually commenced work at the Council, however from our review of the users, their access was not removed until July 2022. From our review of the journals posted in 2021/22, we noted that this individual had not posted any journals, however we believe their access should have been removed in a more timely manner</p>	<p>In our testing this year we have not identified any issues regards access user rights</p>
X	<p><b>Completeness of register of interests</b></p> <p>Our testing on related parties identified directorships that were not disclosed by members via a search of Companies House. From a review of these identified financial interests, we identified one transaction with a community centre, where a member is a related party, that was not disclosed in the financial statements.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p>At least once per year, the Council should undertake a completeness review of related parties including: Ensuring all disclosure returns are received from Councillors and Senior Officers including nil declarations. . Undertaking searches on Companies House to identify any undeclared directorships.</p>	<p>The Council undertakes a completeness review of related parties including ensuring all disclosure returns are received from Councillors and Senior Officers including nil declarations. The Council also undertakes searches on companies house to identify any undeclared directorships.</p> <p>From our testing, we have identified 12 members with directorships that were not disclosed or identified by the Council from their searches of Companies House. Although we accept that there were no such transactions with the Council that would require them to be disclosed as Related Parties, the Council's processes should be stronger to identify undisclosed declarations.</p>

Assessment

Action completed

Not yet addressed

# C. Follow up of prior year recommendations

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
✓	<p><b>Journals authorisation and lack of segregation of duties</b></p> <p>From our review of authorisation of journals, we identified 8 journals that had been posted and authorised by the same individual, who does not have self-authorisation access. We also identified 2 journals authorised by another individual, who does not have authorisation access. Management has confirmed that the system has controls in place to limit the authorisation function and prevent inappropriate instances of journal authorisation, which we have corroborated to supporting evidence, and has therefore contacted service provider Civica for further details</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p>The Council need to investigate how journals were authorised by those without sufficient authority.</p>	<p>In our testing of journals, we noted that no journals that had been authorised by people who did not have the user access rights.</p> <p>In our testing, we further observed that were journals created by and authorised by the same individuals. However, further investigation determined that these self-approved journals are automatic interface transactions, which automatically update the general ledger with no manual intervention.</p>
✓	<p><b>Capital accounting cut-off procedures</b></p> <p>From our testing of PPE disposals, we identified 15 assets that were included within the 2021/22 account, which were disposed of in the previous financial year. These assets did not have a material net book value that would warrant a Prior Period Adjustment, however the Council should review processes and controls in place to ensure the completeness of their accounts.</p> <p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>The Council should improve their processes for identifying asset disposals for accounts purposes. This will promote improved communication processes between the relevant departments and the finance team.</p>	<p>In our testing of disposals, no disposal cut-off issues were noted. Management have improved controls in that every quarter disposal forms are reviewed and the fixed asset register is updated in a timely manner.</p>

## Assessment

- ✓ Action completed
- X Not yet addressed

# D. 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

Our testing has not identified any audit differences that are material, which require adjustment to the reported financial position in the draft statement of accounts (SOA).

## 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/issue/Omission	Auditor recommendations	Adjusted?
Audit fees	Audit fees disclosed in the SOA were disclosed as £64 000 when the proposed fees is £68 952. Management has agreed to amend the accounts.	✓
Community assets	From our review of the useful economic lives (UEL) we note that the Councils accounting policy for community assets specifies that the average UEL disclosed in the statement of accounts is estimated to be 20 years. Our review of the FAR shows that the average estimated UEL is 28 years.	✓
Revaluations	Note 19 suggests that all assets were revalued at 31.2.23. From our review we note <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assets formally revalued           £ 32 605 000</li> <li>• Castle House desktop review   £ 5 728 000</li> <li>• Assets not formally revalued   £ 3 840 000</li> </ul> Management have agreed to correct the disclosure	✓

# D. Audit Adjustments

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

## 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/issue/Omission	Auditor recommendations	Adjusted?
Pensions	We have identified a number of differences between the Pensions note and updated Hymans report. These differences have arisen due Hymans updating the report using actual contributions, payroll and full-year returns to 31 March 2023. As the differences identified are trivial, management will not be updating the amounts.	X

# D. Audit Adjustments (continued)

## Impact of unadjusted misstatements

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the 2022/23 audit which have not been made within the final set of financial statements. The Audit 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	Impact on equity £'000	Reason for not adjusting
Potential differences as a result of PPE revaluation work where GT estimate differs to client estimate- Castle House overstated	-£598	Credit-NCA -£598	Decrease surplus £598	Debit -Revaluation reserve £598	Impact is considered immaterial.
Potential differences as a result of Investment properties work where GT estimate differs to client estimate- 10 Croft Newcastle	-£45	Credit-NCA -£45	Decrease surplus £45	Debit -Revaluation reserve £45	Impact is considered immaterial
PPE error noted in relation to understatement of GIA in relation to Jubilee 2 Leisure centre	£232	Debit-NCA £232	Increase surplus £232	Credit-Revaluation reserve £232	Impact is considered immaterial.
Assets not valued at 31.3.23 therefore resulting in carrying values being potentially understated.	£155	Debit-NCA £155	Increase surplus £155	Credit-Revaluation reserve -£155	Impact is considered immaterial.



# D. Audit Adjustments (continued)

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## Impact of unadjusted misstatements

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the 2022/23 audit which have not been made within the final set of financial statements. The Audit 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	Impact on equity £'000	Reason for not adjusting
Potential differences as a result of IAS 19 –defined benefit pensions testing where the amounts disclosed in the actuary report differs with the ledger	£254	Debit-CL £254	Increase surplus £254	No impact	Impact is considered immaterial
<b>Overall impact</b>	<b>-£2</b>	<b>-£2</b>	<b>-£2</b>	<b>-£256</b>	





## D. Audit Adjustments (continued)



### Impact of prior year unadjusted misstatements

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the prior year audit which had not been made within the final set of 2021/22 financial statements

Detail	Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement £'000	Statement of Financial Position £' 000	Impact on Net costs of services £'000	Reason for not adjusting
<b>Completeness of Expenditure</b> Our invoice received testing identified two invoices that related to 2021/22 and no accrual was made. The value of this is an understatement of expenditure of £185k.	Debit - Expenditure £185	Credit - Payables £185	Decrease Surplus £185	These transactions are not material to warrant an adjustment.
<b>Net Pension Liability</b> As on page 10, we believe the managements estimation process contains assumptions we consider optimistic.	Credit - Remeasurement of the defined benefit liability/asset £394	Debit - Pension Liability £394		The impact is considered to be immaterial.
<b>Overall impact</b>	<b>(£209)</b>	<b>£209</b>	<b>£185</b>	

# E. Fees and non-audit services

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We confirm below our proposed fees charged for the audit and provision of non-audit services.

<b>Audit fees</b>	<b>Planned fee</b>
Scale fee	55,702
Value for Money audit – new NAO requirements	9,000
Enhanced audit procedures for Payroll – Change of circumstances	500
Enhanced audit procedures for Collection Fund- reliefs testing	750
Increased audit requirements of revised ISAs 315/ 240	3,000
<b>Total audit fees (excluding VAT)</b>	<b>£68,952</b>

We incurred some overruns in the selection of samples for debtors and creditors and collection fund testing. The estimated cost for the fee variation based on PSAA rates is £1,800. Please note this proposed fee variation is subject to discussion with management.

<b>Non-audit fees for other services</b>	<b>Planned fee</b>
Certification of Housing benefit core fees	32,400
*Additional work attracts variable fees of £1,500 a day	
<b>Total non-audit fees (excluding VAT)</b>	<b>£32,400</b>

# F. Auditing developments

## Revised ISAs

There are changes to the following ISA (UK):

ISA (UK) 315 (Revised July 2020) 'Identifying and Assessing the Risks of Material Misstatement'

**This impacts audits of financial statement for periods commencing on or after 15 December 2021.**

ISA (UK) 220 (Revised July 2021) 'Quality Management for an Audit of Financial Statements'

ISA (UK) 240 (Revised May 2021) 'The Auditor's Responsibilities Relating to Fraud in an Audit of Financial Statements'

A summary of the impact of the key changes on various aspects of the audit is included below:

These changes will impact audit for audits of financial statement for periods commencing on or after 15 December 2022.

Area of change	Impact of changes
Risk assessment	The nature, timing and extent of audit procedures performed in support of the audit opinion may change due to clarification of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the risk assessment process, which provides the basis for the assessment of the risks of material misstatement and the design of audit procedures</li> <li>the identification and extent of work effort needed for indirect and direct controls in the system of internal control</li> <li>the controls for which design and implementation needs to be assess and how that impacts sampling</li> <li>the considerations for using automated tools and techniques.</li> </ul>
Direction, supervision and review of the engagement	Greater responsibilities, audit procedures and actions are assigned directly to the engagement partner, resulting in increased involvement in the performance and review of audit procedures.
Professional scepticism	The design, nature, timing and extent of audit procedures performed in support of the audit opinion may change due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased emphasis on the exercise of professional judgement and professional scepticism</li> <li>an equal focus on both corroborative and contradictory information obtained and used in generating audit evidence</li> <li>increased guidance on management and auditor bias</li> <li>additional focus on the authenticity of information used as audit evidence</li> <li>a focus on response to inquiries that appear implausible</li> </ul>
Definition of engagement team	The definition of engagement team when applied in a group audit, will include both the group auditors and the component auditors. The implications of this will become clearer when the auditing standard governing special considerations for group audits is finalised. In the interim, the expectation is that this will extend a number of requirements in the standard directed at the 'engagement team' to component auditors in addition to the group auditor. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consideration is also being given to the potential impacts on confidentiality and independence.</li> </ul>
Fraud	The design, nature timing and extent of audit procedures performed in support of the audit opinion may change due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarification of the requirements relating to understanding fraud risk factors</li> <li>additional communications with management or those charged with governance</li> </ul>
Documentation	The amendments to these auditing standards will also result in additional documentation requirements to demonstrate how these requirements have been addressed.





**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S**  
**REPORT TO**

**Audit & Standards Committee**  
**28 May 2024**

**Report Title:**           **Proposed Accounting Policies, Critical Accounting Judgements and Sources of Estimation Uncertainty for the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts**

**Submitted by:**       **Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer)**

**Portfolios:**           **Finance, Town Centres and Growth**

**Ward(s) affected:**   **All**

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>To report upon the proposed Accounting Policies and the Council's critical judgements in applying Accounting Policies and its assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty that will form part of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.</p>	
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. The proposed Accounting Policies that will form part of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts be approved.</b></li> <li><b>2. The Council's assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty that will form part of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts be approved.</b></li> <li><b>3. To delegate to the Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer) the ability to make further changes to the proposed Accounting Policies to reflect the release of new or updated guidance if applicable.</b></li> </ol>	
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>	
<p>Best practice recommends that the proposed Accounting Policies used in the preparation of the Statement of Accounts be approved by the Audit and Standards Committee.</p> <p>The International Standard on Auditing, ISA 540, details the External Auditor's responsibilities relating to accounting estimates and related disclosures when auditing the Statement of Accounts.</p>	

**1.     Background**

**Accounting Policies**

1.1 The preparation of the Statement of Accounts is governed by the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The format of the Statement of Accounts reflects the requirements of the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). This is supported by the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS – a set of evolving accounting rules used internationally to guide the formation of financial statements in the public and private sector.

The evolving state means that new accounting standards are often formed along with reinterpretations of existing standards, these are therefore reviewed annually to ensure that they remain current and relevant.

- 1.2 Under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the appointed Section 151 Officer is charged with the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs and as such must select suitable Accounting Policies and make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent. However, it is considered good practice for the Audit and Standards Committee to consider the Accounting Policies that are going to be applied to the Statement of Accounts.
- 1.3 The Council's Accounting Policies are the specific principles, conventions, rules and practices that are applied in the production and presentation of the Statement of Accounts. These policies are required to be disclosed by way of a note to the Statement of Accounts. Only those policies that are directly relevant and material to the Council have been included.

### **Critical judgements in applying Accounting Policies**

- 1.4 The Code of Practice requires that critical judgements that the Section 151 Officer has made in applying the Council's Accounting Policies be disclosed as a note to the Statement of Accounts. The relevant judgements are those that have the most significant effect on the Statement of Accounts, judgements that are made in arriving at estimates are not included here, these are included under 'Assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty', discussed later in this report.
- 1.5 The disclosure of critical judgements enables users of the Statement of Accounts to better understand how Accounting Policies are applied and enable comparisons between authorities regarding the basis on which these judgements are made. It is important that these disclosures include the judgements made to exclude material items which could impact on providing a 'true and fair' view.
- 1.6 For the financial year 2023/24, none of the judgements made in applying the Council's Accounting Policies are deemed to be critical judgements.

### **Assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty**

- 1.7 The Code of Practice requires the Section 151 Officer to disclose the assumptions that have been made in the Statement of Accounts about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty as a note to the Statement of Accounts.
- 1.8 Disclosures required are restricted to assets and liabilities whereby the carrying amount is dependent on estimates that are in turn dependent on difficult, subjective or complex judgements for which there is a risk that correction or re-estimation with material effect in the next financial year may occur.
- 1.9 Estimation uncertainty disclosures deal with situations where the Council has incomplete or imperfect information which will only be enhanced as a result of future events. The minimum disclosure requirements are the nature of the assets and liabilities affected and their carrying amount at the end of the financial year.
- 1.10 International Accounting Standard (IAS) 1 'Presentation of Financial Statements' adds further information that might be needed depending on materiality of the assets/liabilities and the degree of uncertainty attaching to them, and this is supported by the Code of Practice:
  - The nature of the assumption or other Estimation Uncertainty relating to the assets or liabilities

- The sensitivity of the carrying amounts to the methods, assumptions and estimates underlying their calculation, including the reasons for the sensitivity
- The expected resolution of an uncertainty and the range of possible outcomes for the carrying amounts of the assets/liabilities within the next financial year
- An explanation of changes made to past assumptions concerning the assets/liabilities if the uncertainty existing at the start of the financial year remains unresolved at the end of the year.

## 2. **Issues**

### **Accounting Policies**

- 2.1 The full list of Accounting Policies as produced in the Code of Practice for 2023/24 is shown in a table at Appendix A. For those Policies that are not adopted by the Council, a reason is provided within that table.
- 2.2 The Council's proposed Accounting Policies list for the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts is shown at Appendix B. The Council has reviewed these Accounting Policies in line with the 2023/24 Code of Practice and no fundamental changes have been made.

### **Assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty**

- 2.3 The Council's assumptions that have been made in the Statement of Accounts about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty can be seen at Appendix D.

## 3. **Proposal**

- 3.1 The proposed Accounting Policies that will form part of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts be approved.
- 3.2 To delegate to the Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer) the ability to make further changes to the proposed Accounting Policies to reflect the release of new or updated guidance if applicable.

## 4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

- 4.1 Regular reporting of the Council's financial position is a key discipline supporting sound financial management and corporate governance.

## 5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 No further options, the Council would not be practicing best practice if this report was not brought to the Audit and Standards Committee.

## 6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 The draft and audited Statement of Accounts are required to be considered by the Audit and Standards Committee in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The Accounting Policies and the Council's critical judgements in applying Accounting Policies and its assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty form part of the Statement of Accounts.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no differential equality issues arising.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 The Accounting Policies and the Council's assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty form part of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 The adoption of relevant Accounting Policies, and assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty ensure that the Statement of Accounts are fit for purpose and is underpinned by sound financial management that helps us to spend wisely, attract financial funding and become more efficient.

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

10.1 Not applicable for this report.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This is not a key decision.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 Not applicable for this report.

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 Appendix A – Accounting Policies in the Code of Practices for Local Authorities 2023/24

13.2 Appendix B – Accounting Policies

13.3 Appendix D – Assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 CIPFA Code of Practice 2023/24.

14.2 Draft 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.



**Accounting Policies in the Code of Practice for Local Authorities 2023/24**

<b>Accounting Policy</b>	<b>Adopted by the Council</b>	<b>Explanation if not Adopted</b>
General Principles	Yes	
Accruals of Income and Expenditure	Yes	
Acquisitions and Discontinued Operations	No	No such transactions
Cash and Cash Equivalents	Yes	
Prior Period Adjustments, Changes in Accounting Policies, and Estimates and Errors	Yes	
Charges to Revenue for Non-current Assets	Yes	
Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates	Yes	
Employee Benefits	Yes	
Events After the Balance Sheet Date	Yes	
Financial Instruments	Yes	
Foreign Currency Translation	Yes	
Government Grants and Contributions	Yes	
Heritage Assets	Yes	
Intangible Assets	Yes	
Interests in Companies and Other Entities	No	No such interests
Inventories and Long-term Contracts	Yes	Inventories only
Investment Property	Yes	
Joint Operations	No	No such operations
Leases	Yes	
Overheads and Support Services	Yes	
Property, Plant and Equipment	Yes	
Highways Network Asset	No	No such operations
Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and Similar Contracts	No	No such contracts
Provisions, Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets	Yes	
Reserves	Yes	
Revenue Expenditure Funded from Capital Under Statute	Yes	
VAT	Yes	
Fair Value Measurement	Yes	

## **Accounting Policies**

### **i. General Principles**

The Statement of Accounts summarises the Council's transactions for the 2023/24 financial year and its position at the year-end of 31 March 2024. The Council is required to prepare an annual Statement of Accounts by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which is required to be prepared in accordance with accounting practices. These practices primarily comprise the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom, published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and supported by International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

The accounting convention adopted in the Statement of Accounts is principally historical cost, modified by the revaluation of certain categories of non-current assets and financial instruments.

Materiality levels throughout the accounts are based upon the relevance to the users of the accounts and notes and the amounts advised to the Council by its external auditors.

### **ii. Accruals of Income and Expenditure**

Activity is accounted for in the year that it takes place, not simply when cash payments are made or received. In particular:

- Revenue from contracts with service recipients, whether for services or the provision of goods, is recognised when (or as) the goods or services are transferred to the service recipient in accordance with the performance obligations in the contract,
- Supplies are recorded as expenditure when they are consumed – where there is a gap between the date supplies are received and used, they are carried as inventories on the Balance Sheet,
- Expenses in relation to services received (including services provided by employees) are recorded as expenditure when the services are received rather than when payments are made,
- Interest receivable on investments and payable on borrowings is accounted for respectively as income and expenditure on the basis of the effective interest rate rather than the cash flows fixed or determined by the contract,
- Where revenue and expenditure have been recognised but cash has not been received or paid, a debtor or creditor for the relevant amount is recorded in the Balance Sheet. Where debts may not be settled, the balance of debtors is written down and a charge made to revenue for the income that might not be collected.

### **iii. Cash and Cash Equivalents**

Cash is represented by cash in hand and deposits with the financial institutions repayable without penalty on notice of not more than 24 hours. In the Cash Flow Statement, cash and cash equivalents are shown net of bank overdrafts that are repayable on demand.

### **iv. Prior Period Adjustments, Changes in Accounting Policies and Estimates and Errors**

Prior period adjustments may arise from changes in accounting policies or to correct a material error. Changes in accounting estimates are accounted for prospectively, i.e. in the current and future years affected by the change and do not give rise to a prior period adjustment.

Changes in accounting policies are made when required by accounting practices or the change provides more reliable or relevant information about the effect of transactions, other events and conditions on the Council's financial position

or financial performance. Where a change is made, it is applied retrospectively (unless stated otherwise) by adjusting opening balances and comparative amounts for the prior period as if the new policy had always been applied.

Material errors discovered in prior period figures are corrected retrospectively by amending opening balances and comparative amounts for the prior period.

#### **v. Charges to Revenue for Non-Current Assets**

Services, support services and trading accounts are debited with the following amounts to record the cost of holding fixed assets during the year:

- Depreciation attributable to the assets used by the relevant service,
- Revaluation and impairment losses on assets used by the service where there are no accumulated gains in the Revaluation Reserve against which the losses can be written off,
- Amortisation of intangible fixed assets attributable to the service.

The Council is not required to raise Council tax to fund depreciation, revaluation and impairment losses or amortisation. These are therefore reversed out by way of an adjusting transaction with the Capital Adjustment Account in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

#### **vi. Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates**

Billing authorities act as agents, collecting Council tax and non domestic rates (NDR) on behalf of the major preceptors (including government for NDR) and, as principal for themselves. Billing authorities are required by statute to maintain a separate fund (i.e. the Collection Fund) for the collection and distribution of amounts due in respect of Council tax and NDR. Under the legislative framework for the Collection Fund, billing authorities, major preceptors and central government share proportionately the risks and rewards that the amount of Council tax and NDR collected could be less or more than predicted.

#### **Accounting for Council Tax and NDR**

The Council tax and NDR income included in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) is the Council's share of accrued income for the year. However, regulations determine the amount of Council tax and NDR that must be included in the Council's General Fund. Therefore, the difference between the income included in the CIES and the amount required by regulation to be credited to the General Fund is taken to the Collection Fund Adjustment Account and included as a reconciling item in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

The Balance Sheet includes the Council's share of the end of year balances in respect of Council tax and NDR relating to arrears, impairment allowances for doubtful debts, overpayments and prepayments and appeals.

Where debtor balances for the above are identified as impaired because of a likelihood arising from a past event that payments due under the statutory arrangements will not be made (fixed or determinable payments), the asset is written down and a charge made to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the CIES. The impairment loss is measured as the difference between the carrying amount and the revised future cash flows.

#### **vii. Employee Benefits**

##### **Benefits Payable during Employment**

Short-term employee benefits are those due to be settled within 12 months of the year-end. They include benefits such as wages and salaries, annual leave and sick leave and non-monetary benefits for current employees that are recognised as an expense for services in the year in which employees render service to the Council. An accrual is made for the cost of holiday entitlements or other form of leave, e.g. time off in lieu earned by employees but not taken before

the year-end which employees can carry forward into the next financial year. The accrual is made at the wage and salary rates applicable in the following year, being the period in which the employee takes the benefit. The accrual is charged to Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services, but then reversed out through the Movement in Reserves Statement so that holiday benefits are charged to revenue in the financial year in which the holiday absence occurs.

### **Termination Benefits**

Termination benefits are amounts payable as a result of a decision by the Council to terminate an Officer's employment before the normal retirement date or an Officer's decision to accept voluntary redundancy and are charged on an accruals basis to the appropriate service at the earlier of when the Council can no longer withdraw the offer of those benefits or costs for a restructuring are recognised.

Where termination benefits involve the enhancement of pensions, statutory provisions require the General Fund balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Council to the pension fund or pensioner in the year, not the amount calculated according to relevant accounting standards. In the Movement in Reserves Statement, appropriations are required to and from the Pensions Reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for pension enhancement termination benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension fund and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid at the year-end.

### **Post-Employment Benefits**

Employees of the Council (unless they chose to opt out) are members of the Local Government Pensions Scheme, administered by Staffordshire County Council. The scheme provides defined benefits to members (retirement lump sums and pensions), earned as employees working for the Council.

The Local Government Scheme is accounted for as a defined benefits scheme:

- The liabilities of the Staffordshire Pension Fund attributable to the Council are included in the Balance Sheet on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method – i.e. an assessment of the future payments that will be made in relation to retirement benefits earned to date by employees, based on assumptions about mortality rates, employee turnover rates and forecasts of projected earnings for current employees,
- Liabilities are discounted to their value at current prices, using a discount rate of 4.8%,
- The assets of Staffordshire Pension Fund attributable to the Council are included in the Balance Sheet at their fair value:
  - Quoted securities – current bid price,
  - Unquoted securities – professional estimate,
  - Unitised securities – current bid price,
  - Property – market value.

The change in the net pension's liability is analysed into the following components:

- Service Cost comprising:
  - Current service cost – the increase in liabilities as a result of years of service earned this year - allocated in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement to the services for which the employees worked,
  - Past service cost - the increase in liabilities arising from current year decisions whose effect relates to years of service earned in earlier years – debited to the Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as part of Non Distributed Costs,

- Net interest on the net defined benefit liability/asset, i.e. net interest expense for the Council - the change during the period in the net defined benefit liability/asset that arises from the passage of time charged to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line of the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. This is calculated by applying the discount rate used to measure the defined benefit obligation at the beginning of the period to the net defined benefit liability/asset at the beginning of the period, taking into account any changes in the net defined benefit liability/asset during the period as a result of contribution and benefit payments,
- Remeasurements comprising:
  - The return on plan assets, excluding amounts included in net interest on the net defined benefit liability/asset, charged to the Pensions Reserve as Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure,
  - Actuarial gains and losses - changes in the net pensions liability that arise because events have not coincided with assumptions made at the last actuarial valuation or because the actuaries have updated their assumptions - charged to the Pensions Reserve as Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure;
- Contributions paid to the Staffordshire Pension Fund - cash paid as employer's contributions to the pension fund in settlement of liabilities; not accounted for as an expense.

In relation to retirement benefits, statutory provisions require the General Fund balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Council to the pension fund or directly to pensioners in the year, not the amount calculated according to the relevant accounting standards. In the Movement in Reserves Statement, this means that there are appropriations to and from the Pensions Reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for retirement benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension fund and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid at the year-end. The negative balance that arises on the Pensions Reserve thereby measures the beneficial impact to the General Fund of being required to account for retirement benefits on the basis of cash flows rather than as benefits are earned by employees.

### **Discretionary Benefits**

The Council also has restricted powers to make discretionary awards of retirement benefits in the event of early retirements. Any liabilities estimated to arise as a result of an award to any member of staff are accrued in the year of the decision to make the award and accounted for using the same policies as are applied to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

### **viii. Events After the Balance Sheet Date**

Events after the Balance Sheet date are those events, both favourable and unfavourable, that occur between the end of the reporting period and the date when the Statement of Accounts is authorised for issue. Two types of events can be identified:

- Those that provide evidence of conditions that existed at the end of the reporting period – the Statement of Accounts is adjusted to reflect such events,
- Those that are indicative of conditions that arose after the reporting period – the Statement of Accounts are not adjusted to reflect such events, but where a category of events would have a material effect, disclosure is made in the notes of the nature of the events and their estimated financial effect.

Events taking place after the date of authorisation for issue are not reflected in the Statement of Accounts.

## ix. Financial Instruments

### Financial Liabilities

Financial liabilities are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value and are carried at their amortised cost. Annual charges to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) for interest payable are based on the carrying amount of the liability, multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument. The effective interest rate is the rate that exactly discounts estimated future cash payments over the life of the instrument to the amount at which it was originally recognised.

For the borrowings that the Council has, this means that the amount presented in the Balance Sheet is the outstanding principal repayable (plus accrued interest); and interest charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement is the amount payable for the year according to the loan agreement.

### Financial Assets

Financial assets are classified based on a classification and measurement approach that reflects the business model for holding the financial assets and their cash flow characteristics. The financial assets that the Council holds are measured at amortised cost.

#### Financial Assets Measured at Amortised Cost

Loans and debtors are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value. They are subsequently measured at their amortised cost. Annual credits to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement for interest receivable are based on the carrying amount of the asset multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument. For most of the loans that the Council has made, this means that the amount presented in the Balance Sheet is the outstanding principal receivable (plus accrued interest) and interest credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement is the amount receivable for the year in the loan agreement.

Financial assets measured at amortised cost are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Council becomes a party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value. They are subsequently measured at their amortised cost. Annual credits to the Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) for interest receivable are based on the carrying amount of the asset multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument. For the financial assets held by the authority, this means that the amount presented in the Balance Sheet is the outstanding principal receivable (plus accrued interest) and interest credited to the CIES is the amount receivable for the year in the loan agreement.

### Short-Term Investments

The Council recognises expected credit losses on all of its financial assets held at amortised cost, either on a 12 month or lifetime basis. Lifetime losses are recognised for trade debtors held by the Council.

Impairment losses are calculated to reflect the expectation that the future cash flows might not take place because the borrower could default on their obligations. Credit risk plays a crucial part in assessing losses. Where risk has increased significantly since an instrument was initially recognised, losses are assessed on a lifetime basis. Where risk has not increased significantly or remains low, losses are assessed on the basis of a 12 month expected loss.

#### Instruments Entered into Before 1 April 2006

The Council has entered into a financial guarantee that is not required to be accounted for as a financial instrument. This guarantee is reflected in the Statement of Accounts to the extent that a contingent liability note is needed under the policies set out in the section on provisions, contingent liabilities and contingent assets.

## x. Foreign Currency Translation

Where the Council has entered into a transaction denominated in a foreign currency, the transaction is converted into sterling at the exchange rate applicable on the date the transaction was effective. Where amounts in foreign currency are outstanding at the year-end, they are reconverted at the spot exchange rate at 31 March. Resulting gains or losses are recognised in the financing and investment income and expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

## xi. Government Grants and Contributions

Whether paid on account, by instalments or in arrears, government grants and third party contributions and donations are recognised as due to the Council when there is reasonable assurance that:

- The Council will comply with the conditions attached to the payments,
- The grants or contributions will be received.

Amounts recognised as due to the Council are not credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) until conditions attached to the grant or contribution have been satisfied. Conditions are stipulations that specify that the future economic benefits or service potential embodied in the asset acquired using the grant or contribution are required to be consumed by the recipient as specified, or future economic benefits or service potential must be returned to the transferor.

Monies advanced as grants and contributions for which conditions have not been satisfied are carried in the Balance Sheet as creditors. When conditions are satisfied, the grant or contribution is credited to the relevant service line (attributable revenue grants and contributions) or taxation and non-specific grant income (non-ring fenced revenue grants and all capital grants) in the CIES.

Where capital grants are credited to the CIES, they are reversed out of the General Fund Balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement. Where the grant has yet to be used to finance capital expenditure, it is posted to the capital grants unapplied reserve. Where it has been applied, it is posted to the capital adjustment account. Amounts in the capital grants unapplied reserve are transferred to the capital adjustment account once they have been applied to fund capital expenditure.

## xii. Heritage Assets

The Council's heritage assets are either held in its Museum or consist of outdoor structures of various kinds. All of these assets are tangible. Heritage assets are recognised and measured (including the treatment of revaluation gains and losses) in accordance with the Council's accounting policies on property, plant and equipment. However, some of the measurement rules are relaxed in relation to heritage assets as detailed below:

### **Museum Collection**

These items are reported in the Balance Sheet at insurance valuation, which is based on market values as assessed by an external valuer. These valuations are updated where necessary by the museum curator in respect of significant items and changes. New items are added at cost, if purchased and at valuation, if donated, where they are significant. No depreciation is charged since the items in the collection are deemed to have indeterminate lives.

### **Outdoor Structures**

There is no reliable cost or valuation information available to enable these items to be valued. Consequently, they are not recognised on the Balance Sheet.

## General

The carrying amounts of heritage assets are reviewed where there is evidence of impairment for heritage assets, e.g. where an item has suffered physical deterioration or breakage or where doubts arise as to its authenticity. Any impairment is recognised and measured in accordance with the Council's general policies on impairment. Heritage assets may occasionally be disposed of which have a doubtful provenance or are unsuitable for public display. The proceeds of such items are accounted for in accordance with the Council's general provisions relating to the disposal of property, plant and equipment. Disposal proceeds are disclosed separately in the notes to the financial statements and are accounted for in accordance with statutory accounting requirements relating to capital expenditure and capital receipts (see note 'xviii').

### xiii. Intangible Assets

Expenditure on non-monetary assets that do not have physical substance but are controlled by the Council as a result of past events (e.g. software licences) is capitalised when it is expected that future economic benefits or service potential will flow from the intangible asset to the Council.

Intangible assets are measured initially at cost. Amounts are only revalued where the fair value of the assets held by the Council can be determined by reference to an active market. In practice, no intangible asset held by the Council meets this criterion, and they are therefore carried at amortised cost. The depreciable amount of an intangible asset is amortised over its useful life to the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES). An asset is tested for impairment whenever there is an indication that the asset might be impaired – any losses recognised are posted to the relevant service line(s) in the CIES. Any gain or loss arising on the disposal or abandonment of an intangible asset is posted to the Other Operating Expenditure line in the CIES.

Where expenditure on intangible assets qualifies as capital expenditure for statutory purposes, amortisation, impairment losses and disposal gains and losses are not permitted to have an impact on the General Fund Balance. The gains and losses are therefore reversed out of the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement and posted to the capital adjustment account and (for any sale proceeds greater than £10,000) the capital receipts reserve.

### xiv. Inventories

Inventories are included in the Balance Sheet at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

### xv. Investment Property

Investment properties are those that are used solely to earn rentals and/or for capital appreciation. The definition is not met if the property is used in any way to facilitate the delivery of services or production of goods or is held for sale.

Investment properties are measured initially at cost and subsequently at fair value, being the price that would be received to sell such an asset in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date. As a non-financial asset, investment properties are measured at highest and best use. Properties are not depreciated, however their values are considered each year according to market conditions at the year-end (i.e. if any properties or classes of properties, following consideration are thought likely to be subject to a valuation change, they are revalued). In any case every property is revalued once every five years according to a rolling programme of revaluations. Gains and losses on revaluation are posted to the financing and investment income and expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. The same treatment is applied to gains and losses on disposal.

Rentals received in relation to investment properties are credited to the Financing and Investment Income line and result in a gain for the General Fund balance. However, revaluation and disposal gains and losses are not permitted by statutory arrangements to have an impact on the General Fund balance. The gains and losses are therefore reversed out of the General Fund Balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement and posted to the capital adjustment account and (for any sale proceeds greater than £10,000) the capital receipts reserve.



## xvi. Leases

Leases are classified as finance leases where the terms of the lease transfer substantially all the risks and rewards incidental to ownership of the property, plant or equipment from the lessor to the lessee. All other leases are classified as operating leases. Where a lease covers both land and buildings, the land and buildings elements are considered separately for classification.

Arrangements that do not have the legal status of a lease but convey a right to use an asset in return for payment are accounted for under this policy where fulfilment of the arrangement is dependent on the use of specific assets.

### **The Council as Lessee**

#### **Finance Leases**

Property, plant and equipment held under finance leases is recognised on the Balance Sheet at the commencement of the lease at its fair value measured at the lease's inception (or the present value of the minimum lease payments, if lower). The asset recognised is matched by a liability for the obligation to pay the lessor. Initial direct costs of the Council are added to the carrying amount of the asset.

Lease payments are apportioned between a charge for the acquisition of the interest in the property, plant or equipment – applied to write down the lease liability; and a finance charge (debited to the financing and investment income and expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement).

Property, plant and equipment recognised under finance leases is accounted for using the policies applied generally to such assets, subject to depreciation being charged over the lease term if this is shorter than the asset's estimated useful life (where ownership of the asset does not transfer to the Council at the end of the lease period).

The Council is not required to raise Council tax to cover depreciation or revaluation and impairment losses arising on leased assets. Instead, a prudent annual contribution is made from revenue funds towards the deemed capital investment. Depreciation and revaluation and impairment losses are therefore substituted by a revenue contribution in the General Fund balance, by way of an adjusting transaction with the capital adjustment account in the Movement in Reserves Statement for the difference between the two.

#### **Operating Leases**

Rentals paid under operating leases are charged to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as an expense of the services benefitting from use of the leased property, plant or equipment. Charges are made on a straight-line basis over the life of the lease even if this does not match the pattern of payments (e.g. there is a rent-free period at the commencement of the lease).

### **The Council as Lessor**

#### **Finance Leases**

Where the Council grants a finance lease over a property or an item of plant or equipment, the relevant asset is written out of the Balance Sheet as a disposal. At the commencement of the lease, the carrying amount of the asset in the Balance Sheet (whether property, plant and equipment or assets held for sale) is written off to the other operating expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as part of the gain or loss on disposal. A gain, representing the Council's net investment in the lease, is credited to the same line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement also as part of the gain or loss on disposal (i.e. netted off against the carrying value of the asset at the time of disposal), matched by a lease (long-term debtor) asset in the Balance Sheet.

Lease rentals receivable are apportioned between a charge for the acquisition of the interest in the property – applied to write down the lease debtor (together with any premiums received) and finance income (credited to the financing and investment income and expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement).

The gain credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement on disposal is not permitted by statute to increase the General Fund balance and is required to be treated as a capital receipt. Where a premium has been received, this is posted out of the General Fund balance to the capital receipts reserve in the Movement in Reserves Statement. Where the amount due in relation to the lease asset is to be settled by the payment of rentals in future financial years, this is posted out of the General Fund balance to the deferred capital receipts reserve in the Movement in Reserves Statement. When the future rentals are received, the element for the capital receipt for the disposal of the asset is used to write down the lease debtor. At this point, the deferred capital receipts are transferred to the capital receipts reserve.

The written-off value of disposals is not a charge against Council tax, as the cost of fixed assets is fully provided for under separate arrangements for capital financing. Amounts are therefore appropriated to the capital adjustment account from the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

### **Operating Leases**

Where the Council grants an operating lease over a property or an item of plant or equipment, the asset is retained in the Balance Sheet. Rental income is credited to the other operating expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. Credits are made on a straight-line basis over the life of the lease, even if this does not match the pattern of payments (e.g. there is a premium paid at the commencement of the lease). Initial direct costs incurred in negotiating and arranging the lease are added to the carrying amount of the relevant asset and charged as an expense over the lease term on the same basis as rental income.

### **xvii. Overheads and Support Services**

The costs of overheads and support services are charged to service segments in accordance with the Council's arrangements for accountability and financial performance.

### **xviii. Property, Plant and Equipment**

Assets that have physical substance and are held for use in the production or supply of goods or services, for rental to others, or for administrative purposes and that are expected to be used during more than one financial year are classified as property, plant and equipment.

### **Recognition**

Expenditure on the acquisition, creation or enhancement of property, plant and equipment is capitalised on an accruals basis, provided that it is probable that the future economic benefits or service potential associated with the item will flow to the Council and the cost of the item can be measured reliably. No de-minimis level, below which expenditure is not capitalised, applies. Expenditure that maintains but does not add to an asset's potential to deliver future economic benefits or service potential (i.e. repairs and maintenance) is charged as an expense when it is incurred.

### **Measurement**

Assets are initially measured at cost, comprising:

- The purchase price.
- Any costs attributable to bringing the asset to the location and condition necessary for it to be capable of operating in the manner intended by management;

The cost of assets acquired other than by purchase is deemed to be its fair value, unless the acquisition does not have commercial substance (i.e. it will not lead to a variation in the cash flows of the Council). In the latter case, where an asset is acquired via an exchange, the cost of the acquisition is the carrying amount of the asset given up by the Council.

Donated assets are measured initially at fair value. The difference between fair value and any consideration paid is credited to the taxation and non-specific grant income line of the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement,

unless the donation has been made conditionally. Until conditions are satisfied, the gain is held in a donated assets account. Where gains are credited to the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, they are reversed out of the General Fund balance to the capital adjustment account in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

Assets are then carried in the Balance Sheet using the following measurement bases:

- Infrastructure and assets under construction – depreciated historical cost. Where the historical cost is unknown, a nominal value of £1 is attributed to the asset concerned.
- Community assets - depreciated historical cost, or the valuation option as per section 4.10 of the Code of Practice on Local Government Accounting (this permits valuations by any method that is appropriate and relevant),
- All other assets – current value, determined as the amount that would be paid for the asset in its existing use (existing use value – EUV).

Where there is no market-based evidence of current value because of the specialist nature of an asset, depreciated replacement cost (DRC) is used as an estimate of current value. Where non-property assets have short useful lives or low values (or both), depreciated historical cost basis is used as a proxy for current value.

Assets included in the Balance Sheet at current value are revalued sufficiently regularly to ensure that their carrying amount is not materially different from their current value at the year-end, but as a minimum every five years. Assets within each asset class are revalued together to ensure consistency of valuation within class. Increases in valuations are matched by credits to the revaluation reserve to recognise unrealised gains.

Where decreases in value are identified, they are accounted for by:

- Where there is a balance of revaluation gains for the asset in the revaluation reserve, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against that balance (up to the amount of the accumulated gains),
- Where there is no balance in the revaluation reserve or an insufficient balance, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

The revaluation reserve contains revaluation gains recognised since 1 April 2007 only, the date of its formal implementation. Gains arising before that date have been consolidated into the capital adjustment account.

## **Impairment**

Assets are assessed at each year-end as to whether there is any indication that an asset may be impaired. Where indications exist and any possible differences are estimated to be material, the recoverable amount of the asset is estimated and where this is less than the carrying amount of the asset, an impairment loss is recognised for the shortfall.

Where impairment losses are identified, they are accounted for by:

- Where there is a balance of revaluation gains for the asset in the revaluation reserve, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against that balance (up to the amount of the accumulated gains),
- Where there is no balance in the revaluation reserve or an insufficient balance, the carrying amount of the asset is written down against the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement.

Where an impairment loss is reversed subsequently, the reversal is credited to the relevant service line(s) in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, up to the amount of the original loss, adjusted for depreciation that would have been charged if the loss had not been recognised.

## Depreciation

Depreciation is provided for on all property, plant and equipment assets by the systematic allocation of their depreciable amounts over their useful lives, including the year of acquisition. An exception is made for assets without a determinable finite useful life (i.e. freehold land and certain Community Assets) and assets that are not yet available for use (i.e. assets under construction).

Depreciation is calculated on the following bases:

- Dwellings and other buildings - straight-line allocation over the useful life of the property as estimated by the valuer,
- Vehicles, plant, furniture and equipment – a percentage of the value of each class of assets in the Balance Sheet, as advised by a suitably qualified Officer,
- Infrastructure - straight-line allocation over estimated life of asset.

Where an item of property, plant and equipment asset has major components whose cost is significant in relation to the total cost of the item, the components are depreciated separately. Revaluation gains are also depreciated, with an amount equal to the difference between current value depreciation charged on assets and the depreciation that would have been chargeable based on their historical cost being transferred each year from the revaluation reserve to the capital adjustment account.

## Disposals and Assets Held for Sale

When it becomes probable that the carrying amount of an asset will be recovered principally through a sale transaction rather than through its continuing use, it is reclassified as an asset held for sale. The asset is revalued immediately before reclassification and then carried at the lower of this amount and fair value less costs to sell. Where there is a subsequent decrease to fair value less costs to sell, the loss is posted to the other operating expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. Gains in fair value are recognised only up to the amount of any previous losses recognised in the surplus or deficit on provision of services. Depreciation is not charged on assets held for sale.

If assets no longer meet the criteria to be classified as assets held for sale, they are reclassified back to non-current assets and valued at the lower of their carrying amount before they were classified as held for sale; adjusted for depreciation, amortisation or revaluations that would have been recognised had they not been classified as held for sale and their recoverable amount at the date of the decision not to sell. Assets that are to be abandoned or scrapped are not reclassified as assets held for sale.

When an asset is disposed of or decommissioned, the carrying amount of the asset in the Balance Sheet (whether property, plant and equipment or assets held for sale) is written off to the other operating expenditure line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement as part of the gain or loss on disposal. Receipts from disposals (if any) are credited to the same line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement also as part of the gain or loss on disposal (i.e. netted off against the carrying value of the asset at the time of disposal). Any revaluation gains accumulated for the asset in the revaluation reserve are transferred to the capital adjustment account.

Amounts received for a disposal in excess of £10,000 are categorised as capital receipts. These are required to be credited to the capital receipts reserve and can then only be used for new capital investment or set aside to reduce the Council's underlying need to borrow (the capital financing requirement). Receipts are appropriated to the reserve from the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

The written-off value of disposals is not a charge against Council tax, as the cost of fixed assets is fully provided for under separate arrangements for capital financing. Amounts are appropriated to the capital adjustment account from the General Fund balance in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

## **xix. Provisions, Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets**

### **Provisions**

Provisions are made where an event has taken place that gives the Council a legal or constructive obligation that probably requires settlement by a transfer of economic benefits or service potential and a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. For instance, the Council may be involved in a court case that could eventually result in the making of a settlement or the payment of compensation.

Provisions are charged as an expense to the appropriate service line in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement in the year that the Council becomes aware of the obligation and are measured at the best estimate at the balance sheet date of the expenditure required to settle the obligation, taking into account relevant risks and uncertainties.

When payments are eventually made, they are charged to the provision carried in the Balance Sheet. Estimated settlements are reviewed at the end of each financial year – where it becomes less than probable that a transfer of economic benefits will now be required (or a lower settlement than anticipated is made), the provision is reversed and credited back to the relevant service. Where some or all of the payment required to settle a provision is expected to be recovered from another party (e.g. from an insurance claim), this is only recognised as income for the relevant service if it is virtually certain that reimbursement will be received if the Council settles the obligation.

### **Contingent Liabilities**

A contingent liability arises where an event has taken place that gives the Council a possible obligation whose existence will only be confirmed by the occurrence or otherwise of uncertain future events not wholly within the control of the Council. Contingent liabilities also arise in circumstances where a provision would otherwise be made but either it is not probable that an outflow of resources will be required or the amount of the obligation cannot be measured reliably. Contingent liabilities are not recognised in the Balance Sheet.

A contingent asset arises where an event has taken place that gives the Council a possible asset whose existence will only be confirmed by the occurrence or otherwise of uncertain future events not wholly within the control of the Council. Contingent assets are not recognised in the Balance Sheet.

## **xx. Reserves**

The Council sets aside specific amounts as reserves for future policy purposes or to cover contingencies. Reserves are created by appropriating amounts out of the General Fund Balance. When expenditure to be financed from a reserve is incurred, it is charged to the appropriate service in that year to score against the surplus or deficit on the provision of services in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement. The reserve is then transferred back into the General Fund balance so that there is no net charge against Council tax for the expenditure.

Certain reserves are kept to manage the accounting processes for non-current assets, local taxation and retirement and employee benefits and do not represent usable resources for the Council – these reserves are explained in the relevant policies.

## **xxi. Revenue Expenditure Funded from Capital under Statute**

Expenditure incurred during the year that may be capitalised under statutory provisions but that does not result in the creation of a non-current asset has been charged as expenditure to the relevant service in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement in the year. Where the Council has determined to meet the cost of this expenditure (less any grant or contribution received towards it) from existing capital resources or by borrowing, a transfer in the Movement in Reserves Statement from the General Fund balance to the capital adjustment account then reverses out the amounts charged so that there is no impact on the level of Council tax.

## xxii. VAT

VAT payable is included as an expense only to the extent that it is not recoverable from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. VAT receivable is excluded from income.

## xxiii. Fair Value Measurement

Some non-financial assets such as surplus assets and investment properties are measured at fair value at each reporting date. Fair value is the price that would be received to sell an asset or paid to transfer a liability in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date. The fair value measurement assumes that the transaction takes place either in the principal market for the asset or liability or in the absence of a principal market, in the most advantageous market. Measurement uses the assumptions that market participants would use when pricing an asset or liability, assuming they are acting in their best economic interest and takes account of their ability to generate economic benefits by using the asset in its highest and best use or by selling it to another market participant that would use the asset in its highest and best use.

Valuation techniques appropriate in the circumstances are used and for which sufficient data is available, maximising the use of relevant observable inputs and minimising the use of unobservable inputs. Inputs to the valuation techniques in respect of assets and liabilities for which fair value is measured or disclosed in the financial statements are categorised within the fair value hierarchy as follows:

Level 1 - quoted prices in active markets for identical assets or liabilities that can be accessed at the measurement date,

Level 2 - inputs other than quoted prices that are observable for the asset, either directly or indirectly,

Level 3 - unobservable inputs for the asset or liability.

### **Assumptions made about the future and other major sources of estimation uncertainty**

The Statement of Accounts contains estimated figures that are based on assumptions made by the Council about the future or that are otherwise uncertain. Estimates are made taking into account historical experience, current trends and other relevant factors. However, because balances cannot be determined with certainty, actual results could be materially different from the assumptions and estimates.

The significant items in the Council's Balance Sheet at 31 March 2024 for which there is a risk of material adjustment in the forthcoming financial year are as follows:

- Principal actuarial assumptions used at the balance sheet date in respect of the defined benefit pension scheme. The effects on the net pension liability of changes in the real discount rate, salary increase rate and pension increase rate are shown below:
  - 0.1% decrease in real discount rate gives an increase in liability of £2.430m,
  - 0.1% increase in the salary increase rate gives an increase in liability of £0.273m,
  - 0.1% increase in the pension increase rate gives an increase in liability of £2.198m.
- As at 31 March 2024 the Council had £43.242m of operational land and buildings and £13.505m of investment property on its Balance Sheet that has been valued by the Council's qualified valuer. The Council's Property, Plant and Equipment have been valued on one of the following three bases under IFRS:
  - Fair Value (Existing Use Value (EUUV)) – method used to value operational property assets other than specialised property assets,
  - Depreciated Replacement Cost (DRC) - method used to value operational property assets of a specialised nature,
  - Fair Value (Market Value) – method used to value property assets held as investments, surplus or for sale.

Note 20 (page 55) details the valuation techniques utilised for investment property assets.

A 1% movement in values since the last valuation date would change the reported value of operational land and buildings assets by £0.432m (£0.422m in 2022/23) and investment property assets by £0.135m (£0.128m in 2022/23). Buildings are depreciated over useful lives that are dependent on assumptions about the level of repairs and maintenance of those buildings.

It should be noted that neither movements in valuations or depreciation would have an impact on the funds held by the Council.

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**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S  
REPORT TO**

**28 May 2024**

**Report Title:** Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

**Submitted by:** Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer)

**Portfolios:** Finance, Town Centres and Growth

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To recommend that the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 be approved for inclusion in the financial statements.			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
<b>That Committee</b>			
1. Approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24.			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
To seek members approval of the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 based upon their satisfaction that the information contained in the Statement is relevant and reliable.			

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Members and senior officers are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the Council's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal.
- 1.2 The Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance. A copy of the Code is on our website.
- 1.3 Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 the Council is required to publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) with the financial statements and emphasise the importance of embedding internal control, including the process of risk management throughout the Council. In response the Council produced an AGS for 2023/24 covering corporate governance, financial and other key control issues (the statement is provided as Appendix A).
- 1.4 The AGS is published with the financial statements. In considering the approval of the AGS Members should satisfy themselves that the statement is based upon

relevant and reliable evidence. Details of the evidence relied upon when collating the AGS can be made available by contacting the Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer).

1.5 The AGS includes the following headings:

- Scope of responsibility,
- The governance statement,
- The governance framework,
- The principles of good governance,
- Annual review of the effectiveness of the governance framework
- Looking ahead

## 2. **Issues**

2.1 In preparing the AGS officers have considered the Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA) 'Delivering Good Governance Framework' guidance document.

2.2 The AGS has been produced combining findings from Assurance statements from the Chief Executive, Service Directors and Business Managers, the work of Internal Audit and various corporate working parties and comments from external auditors and other review agencies.

2.3 The 'Looking Ahead' Section of the AGS identifies those areas, following the review of internal controls for the financial year 2023/24 that needs addressing. Action plans where not already in place will be drawn up by officers to address the issues highlighted.

2.4 Not to complete an AGS would be in breach of the legislation already outlined in the background. Completion of the statement is best practice and demonstrates the transparency of the Council's Governance arrangements for 2023/24.

## 3. **Recommendation**

3.1 That the Committee approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24.

## 4. **Reasons**

4.1 Regular reporting of the Council's financial position is a key discipline supporting sound financial management and corporate governance.

## 5. **Options Considered**

5.1 Completion of the statement is best practice and demonstrates the transparency of the Council's Governance arrangements for 2023/24.

## 6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The Council must comply with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, in particular the requirement to publish an AGS with the financial statements.

## 7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

Page 71  
66 There are no differential equality issues arising directly from this report.

## **8. Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from the AGS, resource requirement linked to action plans will be brought to members as separate projects if required.

## **9. Major Risks & Mitigation**

- 9.1 If internal controls are not managed effectively and within the law, public resources will not be safeguarded from waste or property accounted for.
- 9.2 If internal controls are not reviewed regularly, continuous improvement may not be exercised.

## **10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

- 10.1 Not applicable for this report.

## **11. Key Decision Information**

- 11.1 This is not a key decision, the report is for informational purposes and is considered best practice.

## **12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 12.1 Not applicable for this report.

## **13. List of Appendices**

- 13.1 Annual Governance Statement 2023/24.

## **14. Background Papers**

- 14.1 Managers Assurance Statements
- 14.2 CIPFA guidance – Delivering good governance in Local Government

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# Annual Governance Statement

**2023-24**

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# Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

## Introduction and Scope of Responsibility

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that;

- business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards,
- public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively,
- risk is properly managed as part of the governance arrangements.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. A copy of the Code is available on the Council's website or can be obtained from:

Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer), Castle House, Barracks Road, Newcastle, Staffordshire, ST5 1BL

## The Governance Statement

The Governance Statement explains how Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council complies with the Code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Regulation 6(1), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

In this document the Council:

- acknowledges its responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of governance;
- summaries the key elements of the governance framework and the roles of those responsibilities for the development and maintenance of the governance environment;
- describes how the Council has monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period;
- provides details of how the Council has responded to any issue(s) identified in last year's governance statement; and
- reports on any key governance matters identified from this review and provides a commitment to addressing them.

The Annual Governance Statement reports on the governance framework that has been in place for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval on the Statement of Accounts.

## The Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services. To demonstrate compliance with the principles of good corporate governance, the Council must ensure that it does the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

Good governance is crucial as it leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and ultimately good outcomes for residents and service users. Further, good governance enables an authority to pursue its aims effectively whilst controlling and managing risk.

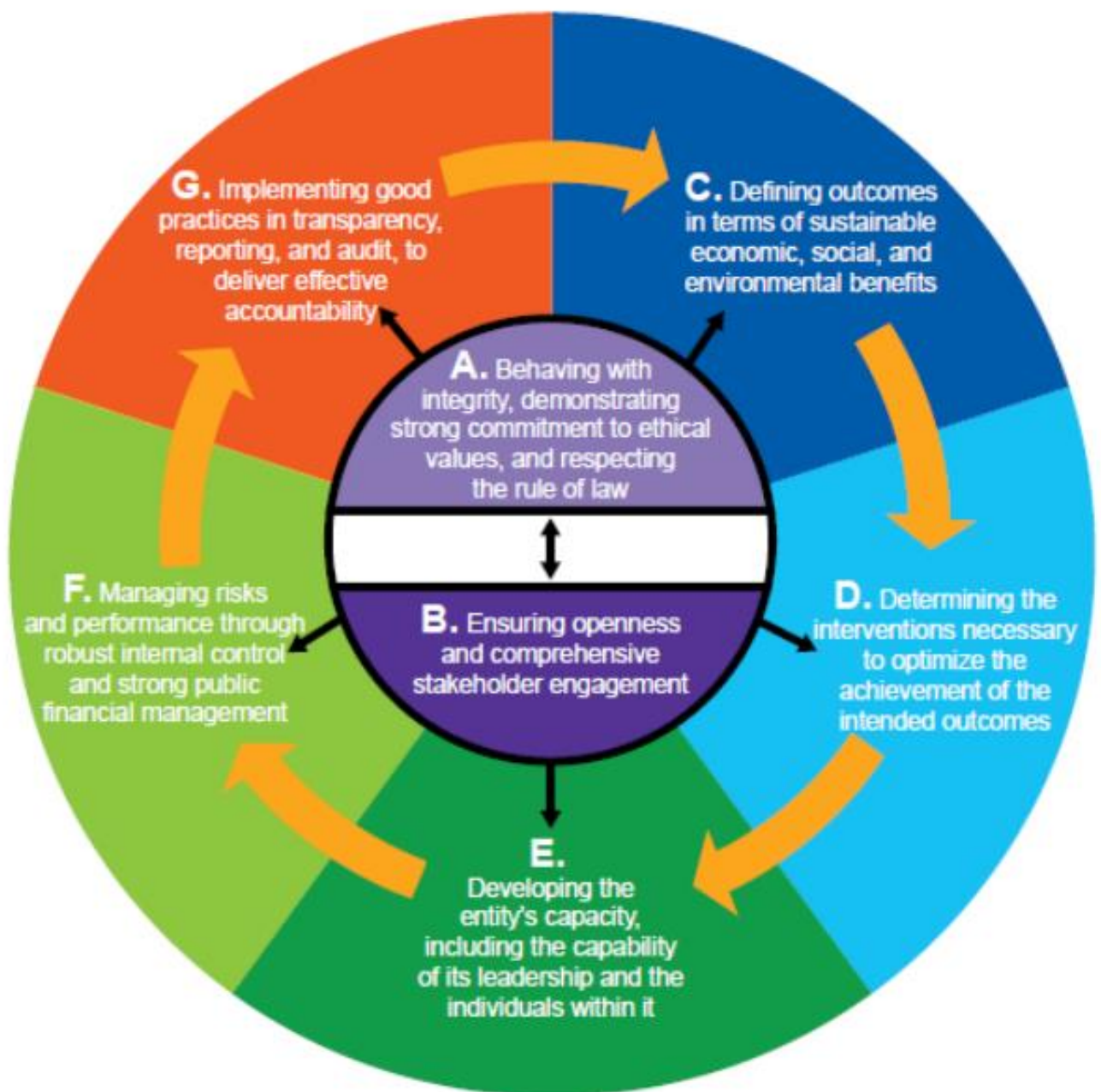
The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

The system of internal control is based on an ongoing and embedded process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

### The Principles of Good Governance

The Council aims to achieve good standards of governance by adhering to the seven core principles in the diagram below, which form the basis of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance:





The fundamental function of good governance is to ensure that the Council achieves its intended outcomes while acting in the public interest at all times.

The following core, high level, principles in Sections A to G reflect the 7 core principles of good governance in the public sector which are derived from the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (CIPFA/Solace, 2016)'.

The Council operates a number of systems, policies and procedures that constitute or contribute to the operation of the internal control environment and support the principles set out in the Code of Corporate Governance as detailed in the tables below:

<b>Core Principle A</b>	<b>Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Behaving with integrity:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council has in place Codes of Conduct for both Members and Officers which set out requirements that support the need to behave with integrity,</li> <li>- The Council has a set of values which are underpinned by a set of expected behaviours,</li> <li>- All new Members and Officers are made aware of the Code of Conduct when they join the Council,</li> <li>- The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.</li> <li>- The Constitution is divided into 6 sections which set out the basic rules governing the Council's business. The Constitution is published on the Council's website.</li> <li>- The Monitoring Officer provides advice and can refer complaints to the relevant Committee (Audit and Standards Hearing Panel, Employment Committee).</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council has a framework of policies that incorporate Anti-Fraud &amp; Corruption, Anti-Money Laundering and a Whistleblowing Policy all of which are designed to in the first instance discourage inappropriate behaviour and then secondly encourage both Members and Officers to voice any concerns they have and report any instances found,</li> <li>- Members are required to renew their declaration of interests annually and also declare any relevant interests at meetings. There is also a register of gifts and hospitality,</li> <li>- Employees are required to notify their Service Director about any potential conflict of interest,</li> <li>- A register of gifts and hospitality is maintained by the Corporate Leadership Secretarial Team.</li> <li>- A Corporate complaints procedure exists to receive and respond to any complaints received.</li> <li>- The Council is committed to equality of opportunity for all citizens, in line with the Public Sector Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Respecting the rule of law:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council has in place a Monitoring Officer who works with Members and Officers to ensure that the law is adhered to,</li> <li>- The constitution sets out; the responsibilities of the Council, the Cabinet, and Scrutiny Committees; the roles, duties and delegated powers of key officers.</li> <li>- The Council has a duty to appoint staff to three specific roles; The Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) who has overall accountability for the governance arrangements operating within the Council; The Chief Finance Officer who is responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs and internal controls; The Monitoring Officer who has a role in ensuring decisions are taken lawfully and that the Council complies with the Constitution.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle B</b>	<b>Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Openness:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All meetings of the Council are held in public unless the Part II requirements of the local authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) Regulations 2000, are met in terms of confidentiality,</li> <li>- Copies of all minutes and agendas are available on the Councils website. All reports contain details of options considered and the advice provided by Officers regarding legal and financial implications. The minutes include the reasons behind the decisions made,</li> <li>- The Council has a Freedom of Information Scheme in place and seeks to publish information openly on its website wherever possible and practicable to do so.</li> <li>- The Council complies with the code of recommended practice for local authorities on data transparency which acts as a starting point for the information made available.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle B</b>	<b>Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council has in place a Communications Strategy which sets out how we will communicate with our residents, service users and stakeholders,</li> <li>- Since 2019/20 The Council has been part of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Business Rate Pool,</li> <li>- The Council is committed to working collaboratively with a range of other partners including the County Council, education, health, housing, business, police, fire and the voluntary and community sector to achieve what is needed for the Borough.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Engaging with stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elected Members are democratically accountable to their local area and provide a clear leadership role in building sustainable communities.</li> <li>- The Council has a consultation framework and toolkit in place and provides details of all on-going consultation exercises/surveys on its website,</li> <li>- Whenever we seek the views from the community we provide feedback on the information received and let our residents know how it has or will be used to help shape Council decisions,</li> <li>- Where appropriate, public consultation is used to seek the views of residents and stakeholders. For example, a public engagement exercise was undertaken with residents and stakeholders on the draft budget proposals. The aim of this engagement exercise was to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communicate clearly to residents and stakeholders the budget proposals for 2024/25,</li> <li>▪ Ensure any resident, business or stakeholder who wished to comment on the proposals had the opportunity to do so, enabling them to raise any impacts the proposals may have,</li> <li>▪ Allow participants to propose alternative suggestions for consideration which they feel could achieve the objectives in a different way.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- The Council carried out a consultation with its Officers via its Wellbeing survey. This survey focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce and their families. This gave a good insight as to how some of the staff were feeling and the sort of support needed going forward. A response plan was then developed with the support of the Human Resources department and this was communicated to all staff.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle C</b>	<b>Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Defining outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve, which is set out in its Council Plan 2022-2026 and supported by the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The vision and priorities have been informed by an analysis of needs for the Borough and also via consultation with key stakeholders and the public,</li> <li>- Each service has a Priority Delivery Plan that outlines outcomes to be achieved and how they link to the Council Plan.</li> <li>- The Council priorities are; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One Council Delivering for Local People,</li> <li>▪ A Successful and Sustainable Growing Borough,</li> <li>▪ Healthy, Active and Safe Communities,</li> <li>▪ Town Centres for All.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Performance Monitoring takes place monthly and is reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny on a quarterly basis.</li> <li>- The Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee has an important role in helping to define and monitor outcomes.</li> <li>- The Local Government Association Peer Review was used in 2023/24 to provide a 'health check' on core components including financial planning and partnership working.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Sustainable Community Strategy is in place which aims to create an environment where local people can articulate their priorities, needs and aspirations,</li> <li>- In addition the Capital Strategy sets out the principles and objectives which the Council has identified for its capital investment and how its capital plans link to other strategies and areas of activity of the Council and its partners and covers a 10 year period,</li> <li>- The Council's day to day services support the delivery of the Council Plan, performance in delivering the objectives are monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team (Officers), the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees (Members). The Council Plan can be viewed on the Council website at <a href="https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/policies-1/Council-plan-2022-2026/6">https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/policies-1/Council-plan-2022-2026/6</a></li> <li>- The Council is currently working on the Local Plan which is being designed to encourage sustainable development, including sustainable communities, economic development and homes for the future.</li> <li>- The Council's Procurement Strategy includes social value principles (social, economic and environmental) in procurement and contract management.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle D</b>	<b>Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Determining and Planning Interventions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The principles of decision making are detailed in the Council;s Constitution, however the Council has in place a robust decision-making process with all Cabinet reports being considered by the Corporate Leadership Team to give a view on the strategic implications. Additionally, report authors should seek clearance from all corporate services, including legal and finance, for reports prior to publication. All reports follow a standard template which identifies the decision maker, the decision or action required, why the report is recommended and alternative options considered.</li> <li>- A calendar of meetings is approved and agreed by Full Council covering the period of the Council Plan 2022-2026.</li> <li>- The Council’s Forward Plan details all the reports relating to key decisions and the timescales within which they will be presented,</li> <li>- Priority Delivery Plans are produced annually which set out the planned activities for each service area for that year.</li> <li>- Performance monitoring is undertaken to understand if and how the priorities identified within the Council Plan are being achieved. This is undertaken through service planning and identification of key performance indicators to show how services help to achieve the priorities of the Council. A number of corporate Indicators have been identified and are reported quarterly to the Corporate Leadership Team, Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Committee.</li> <li>- Additionally, an update on all major projects is reported to the Corporate Leadership Team on a monthly basis to review project progress and identify any key issues and risks, with actions identified and monitored as relevant. This is then reported in summary to Cabinet Members.</li> </ul> </li>   <li>• <b>Optimising the achievement of intended outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Medium Term Financial Strategy considers any changes that are required to be made to the base budget to ensure that service priorities are affordable and achievable,</li> <li>- The budget process takes account of the full cost of service delivery over the medium and longer terms,</li> <li>- The budget setting process ensures that a robust and balanced budget is approved,</li> <li>- The budget setting process allows for investment which is intended to bring future efficiencies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle E</b>	<b>Developing capacity, including the capability of leadership and the individuals within it.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Developing the Councils capacity:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council regularly reviews its activities to ensure continuous improvement of service delivery,</li> <li>- The Council works closely with its partners to ensure the delivery of agreed outcomes to the community.</li> <li>- The Council has a Workforce Development Plan which is currently being updated in order to capture the Council’s capacity needs.</li> </ul> </li>   <li>• <b>Developing the capability of the entity’s leadership and other individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The roles of Members, Committees, Officers and Statutory Officers are set out in the Council’s Constitution, which is available on the Council’s website,</li> <li>- The Council has a scheme of delegation in place which forms part of the Constitution, this sets out the types of decision made by the Council and who can make these,</li> <li>- The Constitution also contains Financial Regulations and Contract Procedural Rules which provide a framework for Officers to follow when running their services and making decisions,</li> <li>- An induction programme is in place to provide training and support for all new Members and Officers,</li> <li>- All Officers have an annual appraisal to review performance and identify any training and development needs,</li> <li>- A Member development programme is in place in respect of Members to identify all their training needs,</li> <li>- The Council is committed to supporting the health and well-being of the workforce through appropriate Human Resource policies, working practices and access to an occupational health service.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle F</b>	<b>Managing risks, performance and data through robust internal control and strong public financial management.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Managing Risk:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council has a risk management policy and strategy in place, which is reviewed and approved annually,</li> <li>- A strategic risk register is maintained by the Corporate Leadership Team, progress is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Audit and Standards Committee,</li> <li>- Operational risks are identified and managed by Service Directors; these are reviewed and monitored quarterly.</li> <li>- The Council’s Audit and Standards Committee has responsibility to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control and reporting environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance statement process. This committee receives</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle F</b>	<b>Managing risks, performance and data through robust internal control and strong public financial management.</b>
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periodic reports regarding risk management and approves the risk management policy. This committee undertakes the core functions of an audit committee and operates in accordance with CIPFA guidance.

The Financial Procedure Rules form part of the Constitution and set out the financial management framework for ensuring the best use of resources. It outlines the financial roles and responsibilities for staff and Members and provides a framework for financial decision making. The procedure rules ensure statutory powers and duties are complied with and reflect best practice.

- The Council has reviewed and revised its Contract Procedure Rules.
- The Chief Finance Officer provides effective financial management in accordance with the financial procedures and rules set out in the Constitution.

• **Managing Performance:**

- Service Directors and Business Managers are responsible operationally for the performance in delivering day to day services. This in turn is monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team,
- The performance of delivering the Council's priorities is monitored by Cabinet,
- The Council Plan 2022-2026 is monitored by the Council's Scrutiny Committee which reviews performance and financial monitoring information to support the delivery of the Council Plan and budget strategy. The Annual Statement of Accounts contains a review of key achievements and performance made against the Council Plan.

• **Robust internal control:**

- The internal control framework comprises a range of policies and procedures to ensure sound management of the Council's operation and delivery of services,
- Internal Audit undertakes reviews of systems that comprise the internal control and governance framework, it provides assurance and where necessary makes recommendations for improvement,
- The Audit and Standards Committee receives reports with regards to the internal control framework. In addition quarterly reports are presented in respect of the progress and completion of the audit plan and the implementation of outstanding recommendations.
- Fraud is taken very seriously, and the Council has an anti-fraud and corruption policy, money laundering and a whistleblowing policy which is reviewed annually and approved by the Audit and Standards Committee.

• **Managing Data:**

- The Council has a suite of Information Security Policies to ensure and maintain the integrity of the data that it holds,
- The Council is committed to complying with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which introduced a requirement for accountability and governance in discharging the Council's obligations as data controller. The Council has established an Information Governance Group. The role of this group is to oversee the effectiveness, compliance and governance of information practice across the Council. The group is led by the Service Director for IT, as the senior responsible Officer, with Officers from all service areas across the Council. The group usually meets bi-monthly and reports once a month to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team to monitor compliance,
- Data protection training is mandatory for all employees of the Council and temporary members of staff and an online training module is available for elected Council Members,
- The Council recognises that Cyber Security is a persistent and growing threat to the systems and data that the Council holds and uses. It therefore recognised that reviews of Cyber Security and the associated awareness for Officers and Members is not a one-off exercise. The Council will keep technology, threats and education under constant review to ensure it is meeting with its obligations for all systems regardless of setting.

• **Strong public financial management:**

- The Service Director for Finance as the Councils Section 151 Officer is appropriately qualified and complies with the CIPFA statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer. In April 2016, CIPFA/SOLACE issued an updated application note on the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government. The Council complies with these requirements. The Chief Financial Officer is:
  - A key member of the Corporate Leadership Team,
  - Actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure alignment with the Council's financial strategy,
  - The lead for the promotion and delivery, by the whole Council, of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively,
  - Professionally qualified and suitably experienced,
  - Able to lead and direct a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose.
- The Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer) prepares and advises the Council on its Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Budget,

Regular budget monitoring reports are provided to Members and Officers,

<b>Core Principle F</b>	<b>Managing risks, performance and data through robust internal control and strong public financial management.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial Regulations and Contract Procedural Rules provide a framework for the day-to-day management of the Council's financial transactions,</li> <li>- The CIPFA Financial Management Code has been adopted and is complied with.</li> <li>- The Council maintains an internal audit function which operates to the standards set out in the 'Public Sector Internal Audit Standards'. An assessment against the standard is carried out each year with the outcome being reported to the Audit and Standards Committee as part of the chief internal auditor's annual report. A chief internal auditor protocol, to ensure that arrangements operated by the Council meet the requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Sector Organisations, has been included in the constitution.</li> </ul>	

<b>Core Principle G</b>	<b>Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and assurance (including audit) to deliver effective accountability.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Implementing good practice in transparency and reporting:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council is committed to openness and transparency and publishing as much Council data as it can in order to increase accountability.</li> <li>- The following information is reported annually to Members and is available on the Council's website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Performance in delivering the Council's priorities,</li> <li>▪ Statement of Accounts,</li> <li>▪ Annual Governance Statement,</li> <li>▪ Annual Internal Audit Report,</li> <li>▪ Annual External Audit Letter,</li> </ul> </li> <li>- In addition to the above, the Council has a transparency page on the website which provides public access to information in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code.</li> <li>- The Council's Constitution sets out how decisions are made and specific reference to decision making by Council, Cabinet, committees and subcommittees established by the Council and scrutinised by the Scrutiny Committees. The Constitution includes the Officer Scheme of Delegation which sets out the powers and functions that are delegated to named Council Officers. The compilation of a Register of Delegated powers is a statutory requirement and is maintained by the Service Director for Legal and Governance.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Assurance and effective accountability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal Audit provides assurance throughout the year on the key systems of internal control,</li> <li>- The External Auditor provides assurance on the Council's financial statement,</li> <li>- The Council's governance arrangements are reviewed on an annual basis,</li> <li>- There is a Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy in place,</li> <li>- Independent reviews of Council services are undertaken from time to time, any feedback in respect of such reviews are noted and acted upon accordingly,</li> <li>- The Statutory Officers Group and Corporate Assurance Group review all corporate complaints, compliments and comments.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

A key element of the Council's governance arrangements concerns safeguarding. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure a duty of care for children and vulnerable adults across all its services. As a Council we are committed to ensuring that all children and vulnerable adults are protected and kept safe from harm whilst engaged in services organised and provided by us. We ensure this by;

- Having a Safeguarding Policy in place,
- Mandatory training in place for all Members and Officers,
- Carrying out the appropriate level of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for employees,
- Working closely with the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board & Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership.

### **Annual Review of the Effectiveness of the Governance Framework**

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Corporate Leadership Team within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance and internal control environment and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The Code of Corporate Governance adopted by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council demonstrates the Council is committed to ensuring that the principles of good governance flow from a shared ethos or culture, as well as from sound management systems, structures, and processes that are transparent to all its stakeholders. By making explicit the high standards of self-governance the Council aims to provide a lead to potential partners, to the public, private or voluntary sectors and to all residents.

The Audit and Standards Committee monitors effectively the system of internal control, this has been demonstrated through the completion of a self-assessment against CIPFA's checklist on 'Measuring the effectiveness of the Audit Committee'. The Committee receives regular reports on both the Audit and Risk issues and has demonstrated effective challenge to senior Officers in instances of non-compliance; it can therefore be relied upon when considering the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24.

The Scrutiny function continues to ensure effective monitoring and challenge. There are Scrutiny Committees that reflect each of the Council's Corporate Priorities. The terms of reference for each of these committees ensure that performance is effectively monitored and challenged.

Internal Audit is responsible for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the systems of internal control. A risk model is used to formulate a twelve month plan which is approved by the Audit and Standards Committee, and from which the annual workload is identified. The reporting process for Internal Audit requires a report of each audit to be submitted to the relevant Service Director. The report includes recommendations for improvements that are included within an action plan and require agreement, or challenge, by Service Directors. The process includes follow ups on a monthly basis, the results of which are reported quarterly to the Audit and Standards Committee in terms of fundamental recommendations and the level of assurance that can be given for that directorate based on the implementation of their recommendations. Internal Audit has continued to receive positive feedback from External Audit with regards to the coverage of their work and high professional standards.

Internal Audit can provide a level of assurance that the Council's systems of internal control are operating adequately, from their work in 2023/24.

An assessment of the role of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) has been completed by the External Auditors in accordance with the 'CIPFA Statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in public service organisations'. The statement produced by CIPFA seeks to strengthen governance and financial management throughout the public sector, in addition it sets out the core responsibilities, personal skills and professional standards that are crucial to the role. It requires that the CFO is professionally qualified, reports directly to the Chief Executive and is a member of the Leadership Team. Having undertaken the assessment of the role of the CFO within the Council it can be confirmed that the Authority complies with this statement.

The role of the Head of Internal Audit has been reviewed in accordance with 'CIPFA Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit'. The role of the Head of Internal Audit occupies a critical position within any organisation helping it to achieve its objectives by giving assurance on its internal control arrangements and playing a key role on promoting good corporate governance. The main aim of the CIPFA statement is to promote and raise the profile of the Head of Internal Audit within public service organisations. The Council's arrangements during 2023/24 for the provision of Internal Audit were in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and ensured that the objectives of this role were achieved.

The Monitoring Officer has a duty to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure its aims and principles are given full effect. The Council keeps the Constitution under review throughout the year, with a report setting out changes to be consolidated to Council on an annual basis.

Managers Assurance Statements are produced annually by Service Directors. These statements provide a level of assurance with regards to the adequacy of internal controls within their own Service Areas.

There are various specialist working groups, i.e. Statutory Officers' Group, Capital, Assets and Commercial Investment Review Group, Corporate Governance, Information Governance, Procurement, and Corporate Health and Safety, that agree, oversee and review the various disciplines giving assurance that the Council complies with statute, identifies and manages its risks.

The External Auditors, Grant Thornton gave an unqualified opinion on the 2022/23 Accounts, in their Annual Report. In addition their review of the Council's governance arrangements advised that no evidence or indication of significant risks were found.

The Council has a zero tolerance to Fraud and Corruption, the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Framework, Fraud Response Plan and Whistleblowing Policy are in place to help deliver our commitment to protecting public funds and ensuring that all Council activities are carried out in accordance with the principles of openness, honesty and integrity. The commitment to deterring fraud and corruption is actively promoted throughout the organisation. Anyone who has any concerns about any aspect of the Council's work is actively encouraged to come forward and voice those concerns.

#### How has the Council addressed the Governance Improvement Actions from 2022/23?

The following matters were identified as improvement areas that need to be addressed in order to further improve the Council's overall governance arrangements;

- To continue to raise the profile and status of information security and governance throughout the Council. Work to ensure that information security and data protection requirements and legislation are complied with, is to be continued. A review will be completed on data retention/storage/disposal to ensure continued compliance.

A review has been undertaken on data retention/storage/disposal and continues to be updated.

- To ensure that the Council continues to deliver services that meet the needs of our customers and respond to any issues our customers may have with the current level of service provision. Working with our partners we will ensure that we can deliver effectively and efficiently against residents/customer requirements.

Service provision is continuously monitored in order to ensure that the needs of our residents and customers are met.

- Consideration will be given on how to keep partners better informed on the progress of regeneration projects.

Monthly news letters are produced and sent to partners in order to update them on progress regarding the regeneration projects.

- To ensure that our services demonstrate value for money we will continue to review all service areas against best practice and implement actions outlined in Priority Delivery Plans, in addition we will seek to improve efficiencies across all Council services through the One Council Programme and ensure that the savings identified from this process can be realised.

Following the One Council Programme, regular monitoring of processes takes place with the efficient working behaviour now embedded within service areas.

- To develop the commercial skill sets of Officers and the Council's investment capacity in order to support the Council's long term financial sustainability. Whilst it is recognised that the Council has strong financial management, it is important to continue to promote joint responsibility and accountability for the financial health of the organisation.

Joint responsibility and accountability for the Council's financial health has been promoted within the Council and this has been acknowledged by the Corporate Peer Review follow up visit in January 2024.

- To continue to improve practical guidance to governance in order to provide clearer understanding of processes to be followed throughout the organisation, starting with a review and update of the Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules.

The Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules have been reviewed, updated and approved by Full Council.

- A new Digital Strategy is being drafted to highlight areas for future service delivery improvements.

A new Digital Strategy has now been approved and implemented in order to improve the future of service delivery.

- A Project Register will be produced detailing all projects the Council is working on (capital and revenue). The Project Register will detail the nature of the project the project delivery service, responsible Officer, details of cost and details of any partners involved.

A Corporate Project Register has been produced and details all projects currently in operation within the Council.

### Looking ahead

In 2023/24 no significant weaknesses in Governance/Internal Control were highlighted in the feedback received from senior officers.

We propose over the coming year to further enhance our governance arrangements in order to continually improve our processes and policies in place.

### Conclusion

We consider the Governance Framework and Internal Control environment operating during 2023/24 to provide reasonable and objective assurance that any significant risks impacting on the achievement of the Councils objectives will be identified and actions taken to avoid or mitigate their impact.

The system of Governance (including the system of Internal Control) can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, that transactions are authorised and properly recorded, that value for money is being secured and that significant risks impacting on the achievement of our objectives have been mitigated.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Simon McEneny**

**Interim Chief Executive**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cllr Simon Tagg**

**Leader of the Council**





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**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S  
REPORT TO**

**Audit & Standards Committee  
28 May 2024**

**Report Title:** Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24

**Submitted by:** Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer)

**Portfolios:** Finance, Town Centres and Growth

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To report upon the financial outturn for 2023/24. The report highlights key issues, including a commentary on the General Fund outturn, the Balance Sheet the Collection Fund, the Capital Programme and the Council's reserves.	
<b><u>Recommendations</u></b>	
1. The General Fund outturn and key issues in respect of the Council's financial position as at 31 March 2024 be noted.	
2. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 be approved for publication and audit.	
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>	
Regular reporting of the Council's financial position is a key discipline supporting sound financial management and corporate governance.	

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations include a deadline for the Council to prepare the draft Statement of Accounts, publish and submit these to their external auditors for review. Currently, this deadline is 31 May. It is intended that they will be made available for public inspection between 1 June 2024 and 28 June 2024.
- 1.2 The regulations require the audited Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 to be published by 30 September 2024.
- 1.3 The external audit will commence during July, primarily for the selection of samples and should be completed prior to 30 September 2024.
- 1.4 The final Statement of Accounts should be presented to the Audit and Standards Committee for approval on 30 September 2024.
- 1.5 This report focuses on reporting the provisional outturn position and the key elements of the Council's provisional financial position as at 31 March 2024.

## 2. Issues

### **The General Fund Outturn**

- 2.1 The General Fund is the main revenue account of the Council and relates to all of those services which are funded by the Council Tax, Retained Business Rates and Government Grant.
- 2.2 The Council's revenue budget relies on service income from fees and charges of around £0.750m per month across a wide range of services, with a significant proportion coming from Jubilee 2 and car parking. Income losses from fees and charges for the financial year amount to £0.611m.
- 2.3 The Council approved a General Fund Revenue Budget of £16.857m on 15 February 2023. The outturn for 2023/24 shows a favourable variance of £0.007m against this budget.
- 2.4 The adverse variances that occurred during 2023/24 include:
- a. Income shortfalls from sales, fees and charges which amount to £0.611m for the financial year,
  - b. A shortfall of £0.505m in Housing Benefits subsidy grant regarding accommodation for and payments for which full subsidy is not claimable,
  - c. A pay award of £1,925 per employee has been that is in excess of the amount provided for in the budget (4%). Including national insurance and pension the additional amount totals £0.400m at the close of the financial year,
  - d. Additional audit fees of £0.100m for the audit of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts will be incurred following the re-tender completed by the Public Sector Audit Appointments board,
  - e. Backdated rent payable on a commercial property rented by the Council amounting to £0.082m and business rates payable on empty properties owned by the Council which amounted to £0.031m,
  - f. Additional overtime and temporary staff costs within the Waste and Recycling service have amounted to £0.240m.
- 2.5 These adverse variances have been offset in full by the following favourable variances:
- a. Utilisation of the Cost of Living Reserve that was established during the budget setting for 2023/24 in order to respond to any above inflationary increases in costs. The £0.400m paid into this reserve has been fully used to offset the pay award,
  - b. Interest receivable on cash that the Council holds in terms of Town Deal and Future High Street funding, together with Section 31 grant and remaining Coronavirus grant funding (that are repayable to Central Government) totals £1.400m. This has also eliminated the need for any in year borrowing to be undertaken saving £0.255m in interest payments.

### **Flexible Use of Capital Receipts**

- 2.9 The Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer) informed the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by letter of the Council's intention to

make flexible use of capital receipts in the financial year 2023/24. The flexible use of capital receipts has been utilised in 2023/24 to part fund expenditure in relation the One Council programme (£0.124m) during this period.

## Balance Sheet

2.10 The main features of the balance sheet in the draft Statement of Accounts) are as follows:

- a. There are fixed assets of £70.612m (£69.321m at 31 March 2023) which consist of Plant, Property and Equipment, Surplus Assets, Investment Properties and Heritage Assets, the increased net book value relates primarily to the upwards revaluations of the depot and York Place.
- b. Assets held for sale total nil (£1.925m at 31 March 2023), this relates to the sale of assets held within this category (Lowlands Road).
- c. Short-term investments of £17.5m and cash of £0.593m (£17m and £4.381m respectively at 31 March 2023), this relates to monies temporarily held due to cash flows. These include Town Deals Fund and Future High Streets Fund grants received in advance of spend.
- d. Revenue Grants received in advance of £1.422m, an increase from £0.760m at 31 March 2023. This relates to Town Deals Fund, Future High Streets Fund and Health Inequalities revenue grants that have been received in advance of spend.
- e. Capital Grants received in advance have decreased to £19.474m from £20.474m at 31 March 2023. This relates to spend of part of the Future High Streets Fund capital grant that had previously been received in advance of spend.
- f. The amount the Council owes to its creditors is £9.949m. Creditors have decreased from £11.681m at 31 March 2023. This is primarily due to the repayment of Section 31 grant (Business Rates) relating to the Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund.
- g. The amount that the Council is due from its debtors is £14.080m. Debtors have increased from £12.287m at 31 March 2023. This is primarily due to the amount repayable by preceptors to the collection fund in respect of the collection fund balance and the associated arrears and provisions.
- h. The liability (and the corresponding reserve) relating to defined benefit pension schemes of £3.010m at 31 March 2023 has transferred to a net asset at 31 March 2024 of £15.573m due to strong investment returns that have increased assets held and positive assumption changes which lower the value placed on the obligations of the scheme. These amounts are required to be included in the Council's accounts as a result of the application of International Accounting Standard 19 (IAS19). They relate to transactions of the Staffordshire County Council Pension Fund of which the Council is a member and represent the Council's share of net scheme assets or liabilities.

## The Collection Fund

2.11 Local tax income is collected by billing authorities and paid into local 'collection funds' (the Council is a billing authority). Where there is a difference in tax receipts (compared to expected levels), this leads to a surplus or deficit on the collection fund. Billing and major precepting authorities are usually required to meet their share of any deficit during the following financial year or in the instance of a surplus a repayment to the precepting authorities will be made.

2.12 In response to forecast shortfalls in tax receipts relating to Government policy business rates reliefs, Section 31 grant is paid to contribute towards the costs of these reliefs. This amount is estimated via the NNDR1 return and the actual relief is reported and reconciled at the close of the financial year.

2.13 The cumulative variances in tax receipts (i.e. including the impact of balances held in respect of previous years) and the impact of Section 31 grant received as at 31 March 2024 are:

<b>Tax</b>	<b>Total (Surplus)/Deficit</b>	<b>Council's Share</b>
Council Tax	£0.056m	£0.006m
Business Rates	£1.207m	£0.483m
<b>Total re. Tax Receipts</b>	<b>£1.263m</b>	<b>£0.489m</b>
Section 31 Grant	(£0.288m)	(£0.115m)
<b>Total</b>	<b>£0.975m</b>	<b>£0.374m</b>

2.14 The deficit shown is repayable by the Council in future years and will subsequently be transferred from the Business Rates reserve, which is used to provide for any collection fund shortfalls. The deficit incurred on the Business Rates collection fund is a result of decreased rateable values and unoccupied property.

## Reserves

2.15 The Council has usable revenue reserves totalling £5.210m. The main items, with their balances at 31 March 2024, and a comparison to the balances forecast for the close of 2023/24 as per the 2024/25 budget setting, are:

<b>Reserve/Fund</b>	<b>Balance 31.03.24 (£'000's)</b>	<b>Balance Forecast Budget Setting (£'000's)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000's)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
General Fund	2,157	1,910	247	Unforeseen adverse events, increase from VAT refund re. Leisure
Walley's Quarry Reserve	200	100	100	To assist with the Council's actions regarding air quality issues at Walley's Quarry, increase from VAT refund re. Leisure
Equipment Replacement	54	30	24	Replacement of Environmental Heath equipment
Budget and Borrowing Support Fund	490	465	25	Committed expenditure to be utilised in 2024/25
Budget Support – Local Plan	211	248	(37)	To provide funding for the Borough Local Plan
Budget Support – Homelessness	183	200	(17)	Homelessness funding to be utilised in 2024/25
Borough Growth	80	-	80	To fund investment in corporate priorities

Conservation & Heritage	30	30	-	To provide repair grants to owners of historic buildings
Mayor's Charity	31	-	31	To hold funds on behalf of the Mayor's charity
Museum Purchases	46	38	8	Balance held to be utilised on Museum projects
Business Rates	1,654	1,654	-	£0.201m held as business rates contingency. Remainder held as contingency re. fair funding review and to offset any collection fund deficit
Elections	50	50	-	To provide budget on a 4 year cycle for Borough Elections
Clayton Community Centre	24	24	-	Sinking fund held on behalf of Committee (contributions made by Committee)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5,210</b>	<b>4,749</b>	<b>461</b>	

2.16 The General Fund Balance is £2.157m as at 31 March 2024. The amount required to be held in this reserve is assessed each year when the revenue budget is compiled, by identifying and quantifying the risks applicable to the revenue budget and using this information as the basis to calculate a prudent sum to keep in reserve to meet those risks should they arise.

2.17 The levels of reserves will be considered as part of the budget preparation process for 2025/26. Some may require contributing to, either from the revenue budget or a transfer from another reserve.

### Capital Expenditure

2.18 A Capital Programme totalling £30.360m was approved for 2023/24. Of this total £17.863m relates to the total cost of new schemes for 2023/24 together with £12.497m for schemes funded by external sources (Town Deals Fund, Future High Streets Fund and Disabled Facilities Grants) and £1.000m contingency. In addition £24.013m was brought forward from the 2022/23 Capital Programme (including £22.771m from the Town Deals Fund and the Future High Streets Fund), resulting in a total Capital Programme of £54.373m for 2023/24.

2.19 A mid-year review of the capital programme for 2023/24 has been undertaken as part of the Efficiency Board and budget setting process. The revised capital programme (Annex A) for 2023/24 totalling £55.433m (including a £1m contingency and agreed carry forwards from 2022/23) was approved by Cabinet on 5 December.

2.19 In addition to the revised 2023/24 Capital Programme additional capital expenditure of £0.124m regarding the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts was incurred as well as expenditure that was fully funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund (£0.344m).

2.20 Planned expenditure financed via capital for 2023/24 therefore totalled £55.901m. Actual expenditure has totalled £11.630m, £44.271m below that planned. This relates to expenditure that has been rolled forward into 2024/25 (£42.174m) including projects planned under the Town Deals and Future High Streets funds that will be progressed during 2024/25 (£25.641m), the Council's contribution towards the construction of a new multi storey car park (£8.100m) and fleet replacement (£4.751m). There is an unused amount of capital contingency (£0.922m) and a number of projects whereby costs have been value

engineered or whereby a decision has been made not to progress with the project until a future period (£1.173m).

2.22 The expenditure of £11.630m was financed as shown below:

<b>Financed by:</b>	<b>£ (000)</b>
Capital Receipts	2.293
Government Grants and Other Contributions	9.337
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.630</b>

### 3. **Proposal**

3.1 The General Fund outturn and key issues in respect of the Council's financial position as at 31 March 2024 be noted.

3.2 The draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 be approved for publication and audit.

### 4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 Regular reporting of the Council's financial position is a key discipline supporting sound financial management and corporate governance.

### 5. **Options Considered**

5.1 No further options, the Council would breach the Accounts and Audit Regulations is it did not report the draft Statement of Accounts to the Audit and Standards Committee.

### 6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The draft and audited Statement of Accounts are required to be considered by the Audit and Standards Committee in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

### 7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no differential equality issues arising.

### 8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 The General Fund outturn for the financial year 2023/24 shows a favourable variance against the budget of £0.007m. This amount has been paid into the Budget Support Fund.

8.2 £42.174m of the 2023/24 capital programme will be carried forward to the financial year 2024/25.

8.3 The General Fund Reserve of £2.157m is in accordance with the risk assessed minimum value as approved as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process.

8.4 The Council's share of the Collection Fund deficit amounts to £0.489m which is repayable by the Council in future years, this will be transferred from the Business Rates Reserve.

### 9. **Major Risks**

9.1 The ongoing cost of living crisis and changing market conditions represents the greatest risk to the revenue budget, particularly with regard to the impact it may have upon both utility prices and income receivable in relation to services where customers may choose whether



or not to use Council facilities or in the case of the waste/recycling service where the volume of recycled materials is liable to fluctuate. The impact of cost of living crisis is apparent in the reporting of this provisional outturn, impacting primarily on utility costs and the situation will continue to be monitored through the normal budget monitoring procedures during the financial year 2024/25.

8.2 The capital programme requires regular monitoring to identify any projects which are falling behind their planned completion dates. This will be carried out by the Capital, Assets and Commercial Investments Review Group, which meets on a bi-monthly basis together with quarterly and annual reports to Cabinet.

8.3 The above represents a high level view of risk. There are detailed risk registers available if members wish to see them.

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**



11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This is not a key decision.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 Quarterly Finance and Performance Review Reports to Cabinet.

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 Quarterly Finance and Performance Review Reports to Cabinet.

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## AUDIT & STANDARDS COMMITTEE



### Work Programme 2024/25

**Chair**

Cllr P. Waring

**Vice-Chair**

Cllr B. Panter

**Members**

Cllrs M. Holland, J. Whieldon, W. Brockie, M. Stubbs

**Officer Champions**

Sarah Wilkes / Anthony Harold

The Audit & Standards Committee is responsible for overseeing the Council's audit and assurance arrangements. Its role is to provide independent assurance to members of the adequacy of the Council's corporate governance arrangements including risk management and its systems of internal control. More information is available in Section B2 of the Council's constitution.

For more information on the Committee or its work Programme please contact the Democratic Services:

- ✚ Geoff Durham at [geoff.durham@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.durham@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk) or on (01782) 742222
- ✚ Alexandra Bond at [alexandra.bond@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk](mailto:alexandra.bond@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk) or on (01782) 742211

**Planned Items**

<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
28/05/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External Audit Report 2022-23</li> <li>• Accounting Policies 2023-24</li> <li>• Annual Governance Statement 2023-24</li> <li>• Statements of Accounts 2023-24</li> </ul>	
15/07/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Q4 Corporate Risk Management Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion 2023/24</li> <li>• Committee Work Plan 2024/25</li> </ul>	
30/09/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1 Corporate Risk Management Report 2024/25</li> <li>• Q1 Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25</li> <li>• Audited Statement of Accounts 2023/24</li> <li>• Committee Work Plan 2024/25</li> </ul>	
04/11/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treasury Management Half Yearly Report 2024/25</li> <li>• Q2 Corporate Risk Management Report 2024/25</li> <li>• Q2 Internal Audit progress Report 2024/25</li> <li>• Committee Work Plan 2024/25</li> </ul>	

**Previous Items**

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	NOTES
17/04/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Audit Charter 2023/24</li> <li>• Internal Audit Plan 2023/24</li> <li>• Corporate Fraud Arrangements 2023/24</li> <li>• Committee Work Plan 2023/24</li> <li>• Risk Management Policy &amp; Strategy 2023/24</li> <li>• External Audit</li> </ul>	
30/05/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed Accounting Policies</li> <li>• Annual Governance Statement</li> <li>• Draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23</li> <li>• Revised Finance and Contract Procedure Rules</li> </ul>	
17/07/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety Report 2022/23</li> <li>• Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23</li> <li>• Q4 Corporate Risk Management Report 2022/23</li> <li>• Annual Internal Audit Report and Annual Opinion</li> </ul>	
28/09/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1 Corporate Risk Management Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Q1 Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Audited Statement of Accounts 2022/23</li> </ul>	
13/11/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treasury Management Half Yearly Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Q2 Corporate Risk Management Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Q2 Internal Audit progress Report 2023/24</li> </ul>	
05/02/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q3 Corporate Risk Management Report 2023/24</li> <li>• Q3 Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Procurement of Internal Audit Service 2024/25</li><li>• Grant Thornton – Value for Money Audit Report 2022/23</li></ul>	
22/04/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Internal Audit Charter 2024/25</li><li>• Internal Audit Plan 2024/25</li><li>• Corporate Fraud Arrangements 2024/25</li><li>• Risk Management Policy &amp; Strategy 2024/25</li><li>• External Audit Plan 2023-24</li><li>• Committee Work Plan 2024/25</li></ul>	

Last updated on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2024