

Audit Completion Report

Ashfield District Council– Year ended 31
March 2023

February 2024



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February 2024

Dear Committee Members

Audit Completion Report – Year ended 31 March 2023

We are pleased to present our Audit Completion Report for the year ended 31 March 2023. The purpose of this document is to summarise our audit conclusions.

The scope of our work, including identified significant audit risks and other areas of management judgement, was outlined in our Audit Strategy Memorandum. We have reviewed our Audit Strategy Memorandum and concluded that the original significant audit risks and other areas of management judgement remain appropriate.

If you would like to discuss any matters in more detail, then please do not hesitate to contact me on Mark.Surridge@mazars.co.uk.

Yours faithfully

Mark Surridge

Mazars LLP

01

Section 01:

Executive summary

1. Executive summary

Principal conclusions and significant findings

The detailed scope of our work as your appointed auditor for 2022/23 is set out in the National Audit Office's (NAO) Code of Audit Practice. Our responsibilities and powers are derived from the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and as outlined in our Audit Strategy Memorandum, our audit has been conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) and means we focus on audit risks that we have assessed as resulting in a higher risk of material misstatement.

In section 4, we set out our conclusions and significant findings from our audit. This section includes our conclusions on the audit risks and areas of management judgement in our Audit Strategy Memorandum, which include:

- Management override of controls;
- Net defined benefit liability valuation; and
- Valuation of land and buildings.

Misstatements and internal control recommendations

Section 5 sets out internal control recommendations and section 6 sets out audit misstatements, including unadjusted misstatements. Section 7 outlines our work on the Council's arrangements to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Status and audit opinion

We have substantially completed our audit in respect of the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

At the time of preparing this report, there are matters remaining outstanding as outlined in section 2. We will provide an update to you in relation to the significant matters outstanding through issuance of a follow up letter.

Subject to the satisfactory conclusion of the remaining audit work, we have the following conclusions:



Audit opinion

We anticipate issuing an unqualified opinion, without modification, on the financial statements. Our proposed audit opinion is included in the draft auditor's report in Appendix B. This is subject to the work outstanding, identified in section 2 of this report.



Value for Money

We anticipate having no significant weaknesses in arrangements to report in relation to the arrangements that the Council has in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. Further detail on our Value for Money work is provided in section 7 of this report.



Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)

We have not yet received instructions from the National Audit Office over sampled components in respect of our work on the Council's WGA submission. We are unable to commence our work in this area until such instructions have been received.



Wider powers

The 2014 Act requires us to give an elector, or any representative of the elector, the opportunity to question us about the accounting records of the Council and to consider any objection made to the accounts. No such correspondence from electors has been received.





02




Section 02:

Status of the audit

2. Status of the audit

Our work is substantially complete and there are currently no matters of which we are aware that would require modification of our audit opinion, subject to the outstanding matters detailed below.

Audit area	Status	Description of the outstanding matters
Quality checks and review		Quality checks and review work are ongoing and will remain ongoing until the date of completion.
Completion		Completion work is underway and will be concluded on receipt of the final signed accounts and letter of representation.
Signed accounts and letter of representation		Our work on the final stages remains open until the point of signing the auditor's report and includes aspects such as final casting of the accounts, monitoring for any post balance sheet events and obtaining management representations.
Whole of Government Accounts		When we sign the audit opinion on the financial statements, we will submit the required assurance statement to the National Audit Office. The NAO may still require us to carry out audit procedures on the Council's Whole of Government Accounts submission, and until the NAO confirms no further work is required, we will not be able to issue our audit certificate formally closing the audit.

-  Likely to result in material adjustment or significant change to disclosures within the financial statements.
-  Potential to result in material adjustment or significant change to disclosures within the financial statements.
-  Not considered likely to result in material adjustment or change to disclosures within the financial statements.

03

Section 03:

Audit approach

3. Audit approach

Changes to our audit approach

We provided details of our intended audit approach in our Audit Strategy Memorandum and have not needed to change our approach.

Materiality

Our provisional materiality at the planning stage of the audit was set at £1.5m for the Council using a benchmark of 2% of gross expenditure at the cost of services level. Our final assessment of materiality used the same benchmarks and, based on the final financial statements and qualitative factors is:

Materiality Threshold	£'000
Overall Materiality	2,063
Performance Materiality	1,547
Trivial Threshold	62

Reliance on internal audit

No reliance has been placed on internal audit for the 2022/23 financial audit. Enquiries have been undertaken to aid our understanding of the overarching control environment at the Council.

Use of experts

Information below was disclosed within our Audit Strategy Memorandum and there have been no changes from our plan.

Item of account	Management's expert	Our expert
Property Plant and Equipment and Investment properties valuations	Internal Valuer - Property, plant and equipment External valuers - Investment properties	None. We did not engage our internal valuation team to review Management's expert's valuation of specific assets.
Pensions	Barnett Waddingham(LGPS)	PWC (Consulting actuary appointed by the NAO).
Financial instrument disclosures	Link Asset Management (LAM) Treasury management advisors	None

04

Section 04: **Significant findings**

4. Significant findings

In this section we outline the significant findings from our audit. These findings include:

- our audit conclusions regarding other significant risks and key areas of management judgement outlined in the Audit Strategy Memorandum;
- our comments in respect of the accounting policies and disclosures that you have adopted in the financial statements. On page 14 we have concluded whether the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the financial reporting framework and commented on any significant accounting policy changes that have been made during the year;
- any further significant matters discussed with management;
- any significant difficulties we experienced during the audit; and

Significant risks

Management override of controls	<p>Description of the risk</p> <p>In all entities, management at various levels within an organisation are in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of their ability to manipulate accounting records and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, we consider there to be a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk on all audits.</p>
	<p>How we addressed this risk</p> <p>We addressed this risk through performing audit work over:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting estimates impacting amounts included in the financial statements; • Consideration of identified significant transactions outside the normal course of business; and • Journals recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments made in preparation of the financial statements.
	<p>Audit conclusion</p> <p>Based on the work completed, no issues have been identified that need to be brought to the attention of Members.</p>

4. Significant findings

<p>Pension schemes: Net defined benefit liability/asset valuation</p> <p>Relevant Account Balances (2022/23 draft financial statements):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Net Pension Liability – LGPS: £26.8m	<p>Description of the risk</p> <p>The defined benefit liability/asset relating to the Local Government pension scheme represents a significant balance on the Council's balance sheet. The Council uses actuaries to provide an annual valuation in line with the requirements of IAS 19 Employee Benefits.</p> <p>Due to the high degree of estimation uncertainty associated with this valuation, we have determined there is a significant risk in this area.</p> <hr/> <p>How we addressed this risk</p> <p>We addressed this risk by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• critically assessing the competency, objectivity and independence of the actuary;• liaising with the auditors of the Nottinghamshire Pension Fund to gain assurance that the controls in place at the Pension Fund are designed and implemented correctly. This included the processes and controls in place to ensure data provided to the Actuary by the Pension Fund for the purposes of the IAS 19 valuation is complete and accurate;• reviewing the appropriateness of the Pension Asset and Liability valuation methodologies applied by the Pension Fund Actuary, and the key assumptions included within the valuations. This included comparing them to expected ranges, utilising information by the consulting actuary engaged by the National Audit Office; and• agreeing the data in the IAS 19 valuation report provided by the Fund Actuary for accounting purposes to the pension accounting entries and disclosures in the Council's financial statements. <hr/> <p>Audit conclusion</p> <p>Based on the work completed, we identified an immaterial misstatement (See Section 6 for details) arising from information provided by the Pension Fund auditor that management have chosen not to adjust due to the immaterial value of this misstatement. (Less than 1%).</p> <p>Aside from this, our work obtained the assurances we sought with no other significant matters to raise.</p>
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4. Significant findings

Valuation of land and buildings	Description of the risk
<p>This risk covers (figures have been taken from the draft 2022/23 financial statements):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land & Buildings (£368.7m)• Investment Properties (£45.4m)• Assets held for sale (£2.4m)	<p>Land, Building and Property assets and investment properties are significant balances on the council's balance sheet. The valuation of these properties is complex and is subject to a number of management assumptions and judgements. Due to the high degree of estimation uncertainty associated, we have determined there is a significant risk in this area.</p>
	How we addressed this risk
	<p>We addressed this risk by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• critically assessing the Council's valuation expert's scope of work, qualifications, objectivity and independence to carry out the required programme of revaluations;• considering whether the overall revaluation methodologies used by the Council's valuers are in line with industry practice, the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's accounting policies;• assessing whether valuation movements are in line with market expectations by using third party information to provide information on regional valuation trends;• critically assessing the approach that the Council adopts to ensure assets that are not subject to revaluation in 2022/23 are materially correct, including considering the robustness of that approach in light of the valuation information reported by the Council's valuers; and• testing a sample of individual valuations, back to source records to ensure appropriateness and to gain assurance over whether the correct accounting treatment has been applied.
	Audit conclusion
	<p>Our work in this area is complete, but not without facing considerable difficulty, including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significant difficulties in obtaining information on asset valuations, where both timeliness and quality of information was poor.• Numerous errors in asset valuations, large and small, which by chance happened to net to a trivial variance. These have not been adjusted for, but the Council are correcting these for 2023/24.• A classification error, where an asset which was transferred to held for sale during 2022/23 but since it was not actively marketed for sale, the asset did not meet the accounting requirement for being classified as held for sale. The management subsequently agreed to reclassify the asset to surplus assets.• Historical errors in failing to account for capital expenditure correctly, leading to a £1.05m adjustment in the financial statements <p>We have raised control recommendations on these matters in Section 5.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, following adjustments as required, our work provided the assurances we required.</p>

4. Significant findings

Qualitative aspects of the Council's accounting practices

We have reviewed the Council's accounting policies and disclosures and concluded they comply with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23, as amended by the Update to the Code and Specifications for Future Codes for Infrastructure Assets, published in November 2022, appropriately tailored to the Council's circumstances.

Audit observations on policies and accounting practice: Housing Benefit Overpayments

As part of our testing of debtors, we identified £27,116.52 due to housing benefit overpayments dating back to February 2018. As at 31 March 2023, the individual had paid off £447.50 over 5 years and at this rate the debt will be cleared in approximately **302** years. We discussed this with the management who have reviewed the payment plan to £50/month resulting in the payback in 45 years. Members may wish to understand the Council's policy regarding benefit overpayments

Audit observations on policies and accounting practice: Minimum Revenue Provision

In performing our work, we make the following observation on the Council's policy for setting its Minimum Revenue Provision:

The duty to make Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) is an important component of the Prudential Framework to ensure capital expenditure and borrowing can be repaid. It is an area, where local authorities have actively sought methods to reduce MRP to minimise the impact on revenue budgets. The Council's MRP policy is approved annually. We reviewed the policy for 2022/23 and the supporting calculations for the £2.3m MRP charge in the financial statements. Overall, our work showed the Council's approach is not materially inconsistent with the guidance, but with the following observations:

- The Council's MRP is 1.4% of the Capital Financing Requirement (the amount to repay), typically we would expect this to be 2% (c£3.3m), which is equivalent to writing down costs over a 50-year period.
- In 2019, the Council changed its approach to calculate MRP for expenditure incurred before 2008. The Treasury Management Policy states that its approach is more prudent. The Council's calculations show that changing to this method has led to significantly lower charges by using an annuity method over a 50-year period from 2019. This means that payments will continue until the year 2068 (had 40 years been used, this would have cost the Council an additional £286k to date) which start low and then increase over time.

As set out above, the Council's approach is not inconsistent with the current guidance. However, given the above, we would suggest the change in approach does not meet the definition of 'more prudent'. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is implementing changes to MRP and we would expect

the Council's Audit Committee to receive a suitable briefing on what these changes are and on how and why it's MRP policy complies with the guidance. We also suggest the reference to the method being applied being more prudent is removed from its Policy

Significant matters discussed with management

Throughout the year, we have met with management, where matters discussed include:

- The Council's financial position, including development of the medium-term financial plan: During the year, we have met with officers to discuss the Council's financial position and budget setting process and pressures to enable us to reflect on the Council's financial resilience and sustainability, and to conclude whether the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.
- IAS19 Pension Surpluses: Each year employers within the Local Government Pension Scheme receive an actuarial accounting report prepared in accordance with *IAS19 Employee Benefits*. The report sets out the movement in the employers' interest in the LGPS assets and liabilities during the year, and their share of assets and liabilities at the year end. At 31 March 2023 some employers have, for the first time in many years, a net IAS19 pension asset (surplus). When an employer has a net pension liability, the liability is included in the financial statements in full. Where there is a surplus, there are circumstances under which the surplus is not recognised in full in the financial statements. Where bodies can access the economic benefit arising from the asset in terms of reduced contributions or a refund, they should recognise the net defined benefit as an asset. The net defined benefit asset recognised should be the surplus, adjusted for the effect of any asset ceiling. We have discussed and considered the Council's accounting treatment for its share of the Local Government Pension Scheme and are satisfied the position is reasonable.
- ISA (UK) 315 (Revised 2019) introduces major changes to the auditor's risk identification and assessment approach, which are intended to drive a more focused response from auditors undertaking work to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to address the risks of material misstatement. This has involved enhanced risk identification and assessment; greater emphasis on understanding IT; and increased focus on controls. We have needed to make additional enquires in these areas to enable us to meet these audit requirements.
- Towns Deal Fund. During our audit testing we challenged the basis of accounting for Towns Deal Fund monies, ultimately being satisfied that the Council's judgement that this should be included in the financial statements as principal was not unreasonable.

4. Significant findings

Significant difficulties during the audit

During the course of audit, we encountered a number of significant difficulties with respect to asset valuations and supporting records in the fixed asset register, including:

- Incomplete valuation calculations,
- Unsupported judgements
- Inaccurate supporting records
- Failure to provide the valuation information in a timely manner.

Some of these issues date back to recommendations we raised in 2020/21 and remain unresolved. The consequence of these is additional audit costs to be borne by the Council of c£8,703.

Wider responsibilities

Our powers and responsibilities under the 2014 Act are broad and include the ability to:

- issue a report in the public interest;
- make statutory recommendations that must be considered and responded to publicly;
- apply to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law; and
- issue an advisory notice under schedule 8 of the 2014 Act.

We have not exercised any of these powers as part of our 2022/23 audit. The 2014 Act also gives rights to local electors and other parties, such as the right to ask questions of the auditor and the right to make an objection to an item of account. No such objections have been raised.

05

Section 05:

Internal control recommendations

5. Internal control recommendations

As part of our audit of the financial statements, we obtained an understanding of internal controls sufficient to plan our audit and determine the nature, timing and extent of testing performed. Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control, we are required to communicate to Those Charged With Governance any significant deficiencies identified during the course of our work.

The purpose of our audit was to express an opinion on the financial statements. As part of our audit we have considered the internal controls in place relevant to the preparation of the financial statements in order to design audit procedures to allow us to express an opinion on the financial statements but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control or to identify any significant deficiencies in their design or operation.

The matters reported are limited to those deficiencies and other control recommendations that we have identified during our normal audit procedures and that we consider to be of sufficient importance to merit being reported. If we had performed more extensive procedures on internal control we might have identified more deficiencies to be reported or concluded that some of the reported deficiencies need not in fact have been reported. Our comments should not be regarded as a comprehensive record of all deficiencies that may exist or improvements that could be made.

No significant findings or recommendations in relation to internal controls have been noted as at the date of this memorandum.

Priority ranking	Description	Number of issues
1 (high)	In our view, there is potential for financial loss, damage to reputation or loss of information. This may have implications for the achievement of business strategic objectives. The recommendation should be taken into consideration by management immediately.	2
2 (medium)	In our view, there is a need to strengthen internal control or enhance business efficiency. The recommendations should be actioned in the near future.	3
3 (low)	In our view, internal control should be strengthened in these additional areas when practicable.	1

5. Internal control recommendations

Significant deficiencies in internal control – Level 1

Description of deficiency

Valuation of property, plant and Equipment and supporting records

Reported in 2020/21: The Audit Team identified differences in the source records maintained by the Council relating to floor areas that has led to a misstatement (unadjusted) in the carrying value of land and buildings. Although the misstatement is below our trivial threshold, there were some large individual variances; representing both upward and downward movements.

Similar errors were identified in our 2022/23 audit.

The deficiency is ongoing since 2020/21 and presents a significant concern over the preparedness of materially accurate financial statements in 2023/24

Potential effects

Inaccurate property records being maintained leading to incorrect valuation of assets.

Recommendation

The Council needs to ensure that accurate records are maintained for all assets and undertake an annual reconciliation between base data and information provided/ used by the valuer.

Management response

Agreed

Significant deficiencies in internal control – Level 1

Description of deficiency

Financial reporting and accounting presentation

Our work identified a significant number of errors in accounting presentation and disclosure, including:

- Non-compliance with the Code of Practice on notes Presentation of Adjustment between accounting basis and funding basis under statute not in compliance with code.
 - Double disclosure of rental income from investment properties included in the disclosure for leases
 - Incorrectly classification of assets as held for sale despite note meeting the requirements of IFRS5, which ultimately was shown to require correction.
 - Incorrect classification of £10m land and buildings held at historic cost. These were required to be corrected.
 - Poor information on contingent liability disclosures leading to amendments
 - Over disclosure by including unnecessary accounting policies and notes with nil values (contrary to IAS1 which implies this approach obscures relevant information)
 - Several classification errors within the disclosures notes which required rectification. See section 6 for more details
-

Potential effects

Financial statements become materially misstated due to failure to comply with statutory guidance.

Recommendation

The Council needs to ensure its financial reporting timetable and supporting evidence is developed in line with the most recent accounting standards and ensure appropriate judgements are supported with sufficient and appropriate evidence to produce a good quality set of financial statements.

Management response

Agreed

5. Internal control recommendations

Significant deficiencies in internal control – Level 2

Description of deficiency
Year-end Cut off During our testing of capital expenditure testing, we identified errors with items of expenditure for 2021/22 incorrectly recognised in 2022/23: with capital expenditure of £1.05m in that was incurred in 2021/22 but not recognised until 2022/23
Potential effects Expenditure recorded in the financial statements is incorrect.
Recommendation The Council ensure appropriate measures are taken at year end to capture expenditure in the correct period.
Management response <i>Agreed</i>

Significant deficiencies in internal control – Level 2

Description of deficiency
Reclassification of assets under construction We identified 2 assets which were completed in 2021/22 but were not transferred from “asset under construction” to operational “land and buildings” until 2022/23.
Potential effects The notes to the financial statements are misleading to readers of the accounts and the Council is not keeping its fixed asset register up to date.
Recommendation The Council needs to ensure appropriate measures are taken at year end to correctly classify, value and account for its fixed assets.
Management response <i>Agreed</i>

5. Internal control recommendations

Significant deficiencies in internal control – Level 2

Description of deficiency

Contingent Liabilities

During our testing we identified that a contingent liability related to disrepair claims was settled post year end, however the amount of settlement was not estimated in the disclosure note, on audit enquiry the extent of engagement with other departments so as to provide an adequate level of disclosure of the potential liability was found to be less than effective. Information to provide the disclosure was available at the point of authorising the financial statements for issue.

Potential effects

Possibility of unrecorded or undisclosed liabilities in the financial statements.

Recommendation

The Council needs to ensure it engages effectively with other departments to present disclosure notes that are compliant with accounting standards.

Management response

Agreed

Significant deficiencies in internal control – Level 3

Description of deficiency

Recoverability of expected credit losses

During our testing, we identified that the Council does not review its policy of allowing for the expected credit losses against the actual recovered debts.

Potential effects

Non compliance with accounting standards and inaccurate financial reporting for recording debt losses.

Recommendation

The Council should review its accounting policy to comply with IFRS9, including an assessment of overdue debts and whether they should be provided for.

Management response

Agreed

5. Internal control recommendations

Follow up on previous internal control points

Matters arising

As part of our Related Parties testing and consistency check, we identified two instances where declarations made by Councillors were not consistent with the information held at Companies House.

Potential effects

Disclosures within the financial statements could be incomplete and not correctly reflect said interests because there is a risk that the Council are not aware of transactions between the two parties.

Recommendation

The Council need to ensure that all declarations are consistent and cross checked back to Companies House and where an undisclosed interest arises, the forms are updated alongside the financial statements.

2022/23 Update

We have not encountered any similar issues in 2022/23. **CLOSED**

Description of deficiency

As part of our Capital Additions testing, we identified two assets that gave rise to a subsequent disposal and should have been accounted for as such. The assets in question, related to the Vehicle asset category included on the Council's balance sheet. No such adjustment was made to the Council's fixed asset register. No additional concerns were identified through our testing that would suggest the financial statements are materially misstated.

Potential effects

The Council's fixed asset register is not being monitored and updated to accurately reflect disposals. There is a risk that Property, Plant and Equipment, in particular vehicle related assets is overstated in the financial statements as the Council no longer has legal ownership of the asset.

Recommendation

The Council need to ensure that their processes are reviewed and updated to ensure that such disposals are being identified and deleted from the fixed asset register.

2022/23 Update

Further issues were identified in 2022/23 year. During our testing we identified 1 asset that gave rise to a subsequent disposal but was not accounted for in the Council's Fixed asset register. **ONGOING**

06

Section 06:

Summary of misstatements

6. Summary of misstatements

This section outlines the misstatements identified during the course of the audit, above the trivial threshold for adjustment of £62k for the Council. The first table outlines the misstatements that were identified during the course of our audit which management has assessed as not being material either individually or in aggregate to the financial statements and does not currently plan to adjust.

The second table outlines the misstatements that have been adjusted by management during the audit.

Unadjusted misstatements

		Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement		Balance Sheet	
		Dr (£'000)	Cr (£'000)	Dr (£'000)	Cr (£'000)
1	DR Net Pension Liability			258	
	CR Pension Reserve				258
There were fund level misstatements of £12,512k identified, the council's share of this is 2.06% which equates to the £258k adjustment note above.					
2	Allowance of credit loss- Teversal debtor				
	DR CIES	180			
	CR Allowance of Credit losses				180
The council has provided for an operating centre that makes a deficit and is not a debtor. And therefore, this balance of £180k should be a cumulative deficit on the centre.					
Total unadjusted misstatements		180	0	258	438

6. Summary of misstatements

Adjustments to the main financial statements:

Accounts area	Draft accounts £000	Final accounts £000	Movement £000	Reason for the movement
Cost of services	36,121	37,794	1,673	This was due reclassification of assets held at historic cost
Capital adjustment account	(126,677)	(125,004)	1,673	See above explanation for "Cost of Services"
Property, plant and equipment	368,746	368,388	(358)	This was due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reclassification of assets held at historic costs • Reclassification of asset held for sale to surplus asset
Asset held for sale	2,499	1,179	(1,320)	This was due to reclassification of asset from held for sale to surplus asset
Surplus or deficit on revaluation of fixed assets	(32,714)	(32,709)	5	See above explanation for "Cost of Services"
Revaluation reserve	(124,678)	(124,673)	5	See above explanation for "Cost of Services"

6. Summary of misstatements

Disclosure amendments

We identified a large number of disclosure amendments during our audit, all of which have been corrected. These include:

- Amendment of the debtors and creditors values in the Financial Instruments disclosure
- Amendment of financial liabilities and interest in the Financial Instruments disclosure.
- Amendment in loans and borrowings and Nature and Extent of Risks Arising from Financial Instruments note to ensure internal consistency
- Amendment to pensions disclosure to ensure consistent with actuary report
- Amendment of impairments disclosure in housing revenue account
- Amendment in Adjustment between accounting basis and funding basis under statute disclosure to ensure consistency with capital adjustment account
- Reclassification of asset transferred to asset held for sale back to surplus assets
- Reclassification of assets held at historic cost.
- Removal of audit fees payable to auditors other than the Council's appointed auditor, to ensure compliance with the Code requirements
- Reclassification of leisure centre element from equipment to land and buildings in note 11
- Amendment of surplus assets valuation date in note 13 Tangible Non-Current Asset Valuations
- Amendment of a casting error on prior year balance of collection fund statement
- Amendment of cash and cash equivalents note to ensure consistency with ledger
- Reclassification of Accumulated absences from provisions to Creditors
- Reclassification of NNDR provision from long term to short term provisions.
- Amendment of depreciation, amortisation and impairments amount in expenditure and income analysed by nature note to ensure internal consistency

In addition, there were some disclosures where we asked the Council to revise the narrative, in order to include valuer's information. This included the narrative in note 11 tangible non current assets, note 14 investment properties and note 36 Contingent assets and Liabilities

07

Section 07:

Value for Money

7. Value for Money

Approach to Value for Money

We are required to consider whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The NAO issues guidance to auditors that underpins the work we are required to carry out and sets out the reporting criteria that we are required to consider. The reporting criteria are:

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

At the planning stage of the audit, we undertake work to understand the arrangements that the Council has in place under each of the reporting criteria and we identify risks of significant weaknesses in those arrangements. Although we describe this work as planning work, we keep our understanding of arrangements under review and update our risk assessment throughout the audit to reflect emerging issues that may suggest significant weaknesses in arrangements exist.

Where our risk-based procedures identify actual significant weaknesses in arrangements we are required to report these and make recommendations for improvement. Where such significant weaknesses are identified, we report these in the audit report.

The primary output of our work on the Council's arrangements is the commentary on those arrangements that forms part of the Auditor's Annual Report. We intend to issue the Auditor's Annual Report by March 2024.

Status of our work

Our work is substantially complete and, at the time of preparing this report, we have not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements that require us to make a recommendation, however we will continue to undertake work on the Council's arrangements up to the point of completion.

Our draft audit report at Appendix B outlines that we have not completed our work in relation to the Council's arrangements.

As noted above, our commentary on the Council's arrangements will be provided in the Auditor's Annual Report.

Appendices

A: Draft management representation letter

B: Draft audit report

C: Independence

D: Other communications

Appendix A: Draft management representation letter

Mazars LLP

First floor, Two Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3AX

Dear Mark

Ashfield District Council- audit for year ended 31 March 2023

This representation letter is provided in connection with your audit of the financial statements of Ashfield District Council (the Council) for the year ended 31 March 2023 for the purpose of expressing an opinion as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23 (the Code) and applicable law.

I confirm that the following representations are made on the basis of enquiries of management and staff with relevant knowledge and experience (and, where appropriate, inspection of supporting documentation) sufficient to satisfy ourselves that I can properly make each of the following representations to you.

My responsibility for the financial statements and accounting information

I believe that I have fulfilled my responsibilities for the true and fair presentation and preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the Code and applicable law.

My responsibility to provide and disclose relevant information

I have provided you with:

- Access to all information of which we are aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as records, documentation, and other material;
- Additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of the audit; and

Unrestricted access to individuals within the Council you determined it was necessary to contact in order to obtain audit evidence.

I confirm as s151 Officer that I have taken all the necessary steps to make me aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that you, as auditors, are aware of this information.

As far as I am aware there is no relevant audit information of which you, as auditors, are unaware.

Accounting records

I confirm that all transactions that have a material effect on the financial statements have been recorded in the

accounting records and are reflected in the financial statements. All other records and related information, including minutes of all Council and committee meetings, have been made available to you.

Accounting policies

I confirm that I have reviewed the accounting policies applied during the year in accordance with the Code and International Accounting Standard 8 and consider these policies to faithfully represent the effects of transactions, other events or conditions on the Council's financial position, financial performance and cash flows.

Accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value

I confirm that any significant assumptions used by the Council in making accounting estimates, including those measured at current or fair value, are reasonable.

I confirm that I am satisfied that the actuarial assumptions underlying the valuation of pension scheme liabilities for IAS19 disclosures are consistent with my knowledge. I confirm that all settlements and curtailments have been identified and properly accounted for. I confirm that all significant retirement benefits have been identified and properly accounted for (including any arrangements that are statutory, contractual or implicit in the employer's actions, that arise in the UK or overseas, that are funded or unfunded).

Contingencies

There are no material contingent losses including pending or potential litigation that should be accrued where:

- information presently available indicates that it is probable that an asset has been impaired or a liability had been incurred at the balance sheet date; and
- the amount of the loss can be reasonably estimated.

There are no material contingent losses that should be disclosed where, although either or both the conditions specified above are not met, there is a reasonable possibility that a loss, or a loss greater than that accrued, may have been incurred at the balance sheet date.

There are no contingent gains which should be disclosed.

All material matters, including unasserted claims, that may result in litigation against the Council have been brought to your attention. All known actual or possible litigation and claims whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements have been disclosed to you and accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the Code and applicable law.

Appendix A: Draft management representation letter

Laws and regulations

I confirm that I have disclosed to you all those events of which I am aware which involve known or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations, together with the actual or contingent consequences which may arise therefrom.

The Council has complied with all aspects of contractual agreements that would have a material effect on the accounts in the event of non-compliance.

Fraud and error

I acknowledge my responsibility as s151 Officer for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud and error.

I have disclosed to you:

- All the results of my assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud;
 - All knowledge of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the Council involving:
 - management and those charged with governance;
 - employees who have significant roles in internal control; and
- others where fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.

I have disclosed to you all information in relation to any allegations of fraud, or suspected fraud, affecting the Council's financial statements communicated by employees, former employees, analysts, regulators or others.

Related party transactions

I confirm that all related party relationships, transactions and balances, have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed to you in accordance with the requirements of the Code and applicable law.

I have disclosed the identity of the Council's related parties and all related party relationships and transactions of which I am aware.

Impairment review

To the best of my knowledge, there is nothing to indicate that there is a permanent reduction in the recoverable amount of the property, plant and equipment and intangible assets below their carrying value at the balance sheet date. I have considered the potential risk of RAAC on the Council's building assets. An impairment review

is therefore not considered necessary.

Charges on assets

All the Council's assets are free from any charges exercisable by third parties except as disclosed within the financial statements.

Future commitments

I am not aware of any plans, intentions or commitments that may materially affect the carrying value or classification of assets and liabilities or give rise to additional liabilities.

Subsequent events

I confirm all events subsequent to the date of the financial statements, and for which the Code and applicable law require adjustment or disclosure, have been adjusted or disclosed.

Should further material events occur after the date of this letter which may necessitate revision of the figures included in the financial statements or inclusion of a note thereto, I will advise you accordingly.

Brexit

We confirm that we have carried out an assessment of the potential impact of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, including the potential outcomes at the end of the Implementation Period, and that the disclosure in the Statement of Accounts fairly reflects that assessment.

Ukraine

We confirm that we have carried out an assessment of the potential impact of Russian Forces entering Ukraine on the business, including the impact of mitigation measures and uncertainties, and that the disclosure in the Narrative Report fairly reflects that assessment.

Current banking crisis

We confirm that we have assessed the impact on Ashfield District Council of the on-going Global Banking challenges, in particular whether there is any impact on the council's ability to continue as a going concern, and on the post balance sheet events disclosures.

We confirm that our exposure where applicable (either direct cash exposure or direct / indirect through investments) with Silicon Valley Bank, Credit Suisse, Signature Bank or any other bank in a distress situation, is not material.

Appendix A: Draft management representation letter

Going concern

To the best of my knowledge there is nothing to indicate that the Council will not continue as a going concern in the foreseeable future. The period to which I have paid particular attention in assessing the appropriateness of the going concern basis is not less than twelve months from the date of approval of the accounts.

Annual Governance Statement

I am satisfied that the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) fairly reflects the Council's risk assurance and governance framework and I confirm that I am not aware of any significant risks that are not disclosed within the AGS.

Narrative report

The disclosures within the Narrative Report fairly reflect my understanding of the Council's financial and operating performance over the period covered by the financial statements.

Unadjusted misstatements and internal control recommendations

I confirm that the effects of the uncorrected misstatements and internal control recommendations set out at Appendix A are immaterial, both individually and in aggregate, to the financial statements as a whole.

Yours faithfully

Section 151 Officer

Appendix B: Draft audit report (subject to finalization)

Independent auditor's report to the members of Ashfield District Council

Report on the audit of the financial statements

Opinion on the financial statements

We have audited the financial statements of Ashfield District Council ("the Council") for the year ended 31 March 2023, which comprise the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Movement in Reserves Statement, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23, as amended by the Update to the Code and Specifications for Future Codes for Infrastructure Assets ("the Code Update"), published in November 2022.

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31st March 2023 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23 as amended by the Code Update.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities section of our report. We are independent of the Council in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the Director of Finance & Section 151 officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, and taking into account the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23 as amended by the Code Update, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Council's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Director of Finance & Section 151 officer with respect to going

concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

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

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

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Responsibilities of the Director of Finance Section 151 Officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of the Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer's Responsibilities, the Director of Finance & Section 151 officer is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which includes the financial statements, in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23 as amended by the Code Update, and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view. The Director of Finance & Section 151 officer is also responsible for such internal control as the Director of Finance & Section 151 officer determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

The Director of Finance & Section 151 officer is required to comply with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23 as amended by the Code Update and prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis on the assumption that the functions of the Council will continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The Director of Finance & section 151 officer is responsible for assessing each year whether or not it is appropriate for the Council to prepare its accounts on the going concern basis and disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern.

Appendix B: Draft audit report (subject to finalization)

Independent auditor's report to the members of Ashfield District Council

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. Based on our understanding of the Council, we identified that the principal risks of non-compliance with laws and regulations related to the Local Government Act 2003 (and associated regulations made under section 21), the Local Government Finance Acts of 1988, 1992 and 2012, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, and we considered the extent to which non-compliance might have a material effect on the financial statements.

To help us identify instances of non-compliance with these laws and regulations, and in identifying and assessing the risks of material misstatement in respect to non-compliance, our procedures included, but were not limited to:

- inquiring with management and the Audit Committee, as to whether the Council is in compliance with laws and regulations, and discussing their policies and procedures regarding compliance with laws and regulations;
- communicating identified laws and regulations throughout our engagement team and remaining alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout our audit; and
- considering the risk of acts by the Council which were contrary to applicable laws and regulations, including fraud.

We evaluated the Director of Finance & Section 151 officer's incentives and opportunities for fraudulent manipulation of the financial statements (including the risk of override of controls) and determined that the principal risks were related to posting manual journal entries to manipulate financial performance, management bias through judgements and assumptions in significant accounting estimates, and significant one-off or unusual transactions.

Our audit procedures in relation to fraud included but were not limited to:

- making enquiries of management and the Audit Committee on whether they had knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud;
- gaining an understanding of the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud;
- discussing amongst the engagement team the risks of fraud; and
- addressing the risks of fraud through management override of controls by performing journal entry testing.

There are inherent limitations in the audit procedures described above and the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of irregularities including fraud rests with management and the Audit Committee. As with any audit, there remained a risk of non-detection of irregularities, as these may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal controls.

We are also required to conclude on whether the Director of Finance & Section 151 officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate. We performed our work in accordance with Practice Note 10: Audit of financial statement and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom, and Supplementary Guidance Note 01, issued by the National Audit Office in February 2023.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Appendix B: Draft audit report (subject to finalization)

Independent auditor's report to the members of Ashfield District Council

Report on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources

Report on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources

Matter on which we are required to report by exception

We are required to report to you if, in our opinion, we are not satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2023.

We have not completed our work on the Council's arrangements. On the basis of our work to date, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in January 2023, we have not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

We will report the outcome of our work on the Council's arrangements in our commentary on those arrangements within the Auditor's Annual Report. Our audit completion certificate will set out any matters which we are required to report by exception.

Responsibilities of the Accounting Officer

The Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the Council's use of resources, to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and to review regularly the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.

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

We are required under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to satisfy ourselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, and to report where we have not been able to satisfy ourselves that it has done so. We are not required to consider, nor have we considered, whether all aspects of the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

We have undertaken our work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in January 2023.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception under the Code of Audit Practice

We are required by the Code of Audit Practice to report to you if:

- we issue a report in the public interest under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014;
- we make a recommendation under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we exercise any other special powers of the auditor under sections 28, 29 or 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have nothing to report in these respects.

Use of the audit report

This report is made solely to the members of Ashfield District Council, as a body, in accordance with part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and as set out in paragraph 44 of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies published by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the members of the Council those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the members of the Council, as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Delay in certification of completion of the audit

We cannot formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate until we have completed:

- the work necessary to issue our assurance statement in respect of the Council's Whole of Government Accounts consolidation pack for 2021/22 and 2022/23;
- the work necessary to satisfy ourselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources for 2022/23.

[Name] Key Audit Partner
For and on behalf of Mazars LLP

Address

[Insert date]

Appendix C: Independence

As part of our ongoing risk assessment we monitor our relationships with you to identify any new actual or perceived threats to our independence within the regulatory or professional requirements governing us as your auditors.

We have been separately engaged by the Council to carry out additional work Assurance services as set out in the table opposite. Before agreeing to undertake any additional work, we consider whether there are any actual, potential or perceived threats to our independence.

We can confirm that no new threats to independence have been identified since issuing the Audit Strategy Memorandum and therefore we remain independent.

Issue	Perceived threats	Safeguards
Assurance services –Pooling of Housing Capital Receipts	Self-interest	The assurance engagement follows pre-determined procedures and the proposed fees for this work are significantly below the fee for the external audit.

Appendix D: Other communications

Other communication	Response
Compliance with Laws and Regulations	We have not identified any significant matters involving actual or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations. We will obtain written representations from management that all known instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations whose effects should be considered when preparing financial statements have been disclosed.
External confirmations	We did not experience any issues with respect to obtaining external confirmations.
Related parties	<p>We did not identify any significant matters relating to the audit of related parties.</p> <p>We will obtain written representations from management confirming that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. they have disclosed to us the identity of related parties and all the related party relationships and transactions of which they are aware; and b. they have appropriately accounted for and disclosed such relationships and transactions in accordance with the requirements of the applicable financial reporting framework.
Going concern	<p>We have not identified any evidence to cause us to disagree with the s151 Officer that Ashfield District Council will be a going concern, and therefore we consider that the use of the going concern assumption is appropriate in the preparation of the financial statements.</p> <p>We will obtain written representations from management, confirming that all relevant information covering a period of at least 12 months from the date of approval of the financial statements has been taken into account in assessing the appropriateness of the going concern basis of preparation of the financial statements.</p>
Subsequent events	<p>We are required to obtain evidence about whether events occurring between the date of the financial statements and the date of the auditor's report that require adjustment of, or disclosure in, the financial statements are appropriately reflected in those financial statements in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework.</p> <p>We will obtain written representations from management that all events occurring subsequent to the date of the financial statements and for which the applicable financial reporting framework requires adjustment or disclosure have been adjusted or disclosed.</p>
Matters related to fraud	<p>We have designed our audit approach to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement due to fraud. In addition to the work performed by us, we will obtain written representations from management, and Those Charged With Governance, confirming that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. they acknowledge their responsibility for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud; b. they have disclosed to the auditor the results of management's assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud; c. they have disclosed to the auditor their knowledge of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the entity involving: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Management; ii. Employees who have significant roles in internal control; or iii. Others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements; and d. they have disclosed to the auditor their knowledge of any allegations of fraud, or suspected fraud, affecting the entity's financial statements communicated by employees, former employees, analysts, regulators or others.

Mark Surridge

Mazars

2 Chamberlain Square

Birmingham

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Mazars is an internationally integrated partnership, specialising in audit, accountancy, advisory, tax and legal services*. Operating in over 90 countries and territories around the world, we draw on the expertise of 40,400 professionals – 24,400 in Mazars' integrated partnership and 16,000 via the Mazars North America Alliance – to assist clients of all sizes at every stage in their development.

*where permitted under applicable country laws.

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