

The Audit Findings for Cotswold District Council

Year ended 31 March 2022

Cotswold District Council

26 September 2023



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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.

**Name : Peter Barber
For Grant Thornton UK LLP
26 September 2023**

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1. Headlines

This table summarises the key findings and other matters arising from the statutory audit of Cotswold District Council ('the Council') and the preparation of the Council's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 for those charged with governance.

Financial Statements

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 the Council's 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, are materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

We commenced our post-statements audit in October 2022, followed by an additional visit in February 2023. Our initial findings were presented to the Audit & Governance Committee in March 2023. We have now concluded all outstanding work and this report provides an update to our initial findings.

Our work has not identified any material errors or adjustments to the financial statements. We've noted an adjustment of £649K to the Revaluation Reserve and Balance Sheet (please see Appendix C Audit Adjustments). However, we have not noted any adjustments to the reported outturn position for 2021-22.

We have recommended a small number of audit adjustments to improve the presentation of the financial statements as detailed in Appendix C. We have also raised recommendations for management as a result of our audit work in Appendix A. Our follow up of recommendations from the prior year's audit are detailed in Appendix B.

The draft financial statements were submitted for audit in line with the agreed timetable, along with supporting working papers.

The time taken to complete this opinion audit work for 2021/22 reflects the decision taken in December 2022 to halt the audit to allow finance officers to prioritise internal financial reporting tasks including preparation for the 2023/24 budget. It was agreed to recommence work in February 2023 after the budget had been agreed by Council. The resulting queries as well as audit and finance staff pressures have delayed completion and involved further input on both sides. In the intervening period an updated pension fund triennial valuation was undertaken as at 31 March 2022. In response to this, the Council commissioned an updated pension fund liability calculation that has now been reflected in the final version of the financial statements. More detail is provided on page 9.

The Council recognises that capacity within the finance team remains a significant issue. Specifically, there is not sufficient skilled finance expertise below the S151 officer and Chief Accountant to support the multiple responsibilities of a LG finance team. Specifically, the reliance on the Chief Accountant, who has taken on almost sole responsibility for supporting the external audit process, means that timely audit completion is compromised. We recommend that the Council strengthen its finance capacity to enable it to commit sufficient time to all aspects of internal and external financial reporting.

A recent topic on the news concerning aerated concrete has also been brought to our attention. This is a historic issue despite recent news attention. We have inquired of officers at the Council who've indicated a full review is being performed of relevant properties, with the current indication being Council owned properties are at low risk. We will continue to monitor the results of the review as this is completed.

There are no matters arising to date that would require modification of our audit opinion [Appendix E] or material changes to the financial statements. Subject to completing our remaining audit procedures set out on page 5 we anticipate issuing an unqualified audit opinion on 28 September 2023. 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 anticipated audit report opinion will be unmodified.

1. Headlines

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 now 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 for 2021/22, which is summarised on page 19 -20, and our detailed commentary is set out in the separate Auditor's Annual Report, which was presented to the July meeting of the Audit Committee.

We are satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources but made a number of improvement recommendations to further strengthen arrangements going forward.

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 upon the completion of our work on the Council's VFM arrangements, which will be reported in our Annual Auditor's report in May 2023.

Significant Matters

As set out on the previous page resourcing constraints within the finance team have impacted on the efficiency and timeliness of the delivery of our audit.

This, combined with the raising of the bar and the application of increased challenge and scepticism within this year's audit has resulted in additional audit time being required to complete the audit. We also recognise that this further impacts on your own finance officers who continue to respond to audit queries throughout the duration of the audit.

The additional time spent by the audit team in gaining assurance over all elements of the financial statements as well as the extra work required on the update pension fund liability disclosures has resulted in an increase in our fee from the indicative fee at the planning stage of the audit. Further details are set out on page 27 of this report.

Acknowledgements

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

2. Financial Statements

Overview of the scope of our audit

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

As 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 had to alter our audit plan, as communicated to you in September 2022.

Conclusion

We have substantially completed our audit of your financial statements and subject to the completion of our closing procedures, we anticipate issuing an unqualified audit opinion on 28 September 2023, as detailed in [Appendix E]. These closing procedures include:

- Receipt of management representation letter;
- Completion of our subsequent events review.

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 the disclosure requirements and adherence to acceptable accounting practice and applicable law.

We have not changed our materiality, performance materiality and our level of triviality set out within our Audit Plan.

We detail in the table our determination of materiality for Cotswold District Council.

	Planning	Final
Materiality for the financial statements	£0.820m	£0.820m
Performance materiality	£0.610m	£0.610m
Trivial matters	£0.040m	£0.040m
Materiality for Senior Officer Remuneration	£5,000	£5,000



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

Management override of controls

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.

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.

As part of our work we:

- evaluated the design effectiveness of management controls over journals;
- analysed the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals;
- gained an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence; and
- evaluated the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.
- Tested high value and unusual journals processed during the year and at the accounts production stage for appropriateness and corroboration.

Our audit work, including our review of journal entries and the related control environment, has not identified any significant issues with regards to management override of controls. For all the journals reviewed we concluded that they were appropriate transactions.

There were a number of back-posted journals (30) in the ledger. We would note that this is a high number compared to other Councils with the expectation being this is not a common occurrence however our review indicated that proper procedures were followed. We also noted two recommendations (detailed in Appendix A) to further strengthen control arrangements in this area.

2. Financial Statements - Significant risks

Risks identified in our Audit Plan

Commentary

The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions (rebutted)

Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.

This presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue recognition.

In our Audit Plan we set out that having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Council, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:

- there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition
- opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited
- the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Cotswold District Council mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.

We re-considered this assessment on receipt of the draft financial statement and have not identified any reasons to change this assessment.

The expenditure cycle includes fraudulent transactions (rebutted)

Practice Note 10: Audit of Financial Statements of Public Sector Bodies in the United Kingdom (PN10) states:

"As most public bodies are net spending bodies, then the risk of material misstatement due to fraud related to expenditure may be greater than the risk of material misstatements due to fraud related to revenue recognition". Public sector auditors therefore need to consider whether they have any significant concerns about fraudulent financial reporting of expenditure which would need to be treated as a significant risk for the audit.

In our Audit Plan we set out that we had rebutted this presumed risk for Cotswold District Council because:

- expenditure is well controlled and the Council has a strong control environment; and
- the Council has clear and transparent reporting of its financial plans and financial position to the Council.

We re-considered this assessment on receipt of the draft financial statement and have not identified any reasons to change this assessment.

2. Financial Statements - Significant risks

Risks identified in our Audit Plan

Valuation of the pension fund net liability and the key assumptions that underpin this significant estimate

The Authority'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 (£35m 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. 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 Authority's pension fund net liability as a significant risk.

Commentary

We have:

- updated our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Council's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluated the design of the associated controls;
- evaluated the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work;
- assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Council's pension fund valuation;
- assessed the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Council to the actuary to estimate the liability;
- tested the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary;
- undertook procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; and
- obtained assurances from the auditor of Gloucestershire Pension Fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements.

As highlighted earlier in our report, all unsigned audits for 2021-22 were paused at the 31 March 2023 to consider the impact of publication of the results of the triennial actuarial review of pensions valuations. This resulted in changes in member numbers within pension funds and has led to an adjustment in the pension liability disclosures for the Council as at 31 March 2022. This has required management to commission a new actuarial valuation and adjust the accounts accordingly. The Council has prepared revised financial statements reflecting the new actuarial assumptions relevant to 31 March 2022. This has resulted in an overall increase to the Council's net pensions liability of £2.4m and an increase in the cost of services by the same amount.

We have performed additional audit procedures to ensure the revised pension valuation has been adjusted appropriately within the financial statements, as we as performed additional member data testing on the inputs used to inform the actuary's triennial valuation of the fund as a whole. Furthermore, we have reviewed the revised actuarial assumptions used by the actuary in preparing its revised valuation and we are satisfied that these revised assumptions are within expected tolerances as set out by our consulting actuary (as auditor's expert).

Our audit work has not identified any other issues in respect of valuation of the pension fund liability.

2. Financial Statements - Significant risks

Risks identified in our Audit Plan

Commentary

Valuation of Investment Property [Annual Revaluation]

The Council revalue its investment property on an annual basis to ensure that the carrying value is not material different from the fair value as at the balance sheet date. 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.

We have therefore identified the appropriateness of the specific inputs and assumptions that drive the valuation of investment property as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.

As part of our work we have:

- evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work;
- evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert;
- written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out;
- challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding, the Council's valuer's report and the assumptions that underpin the valuation; and
- tested revaluations made during the year to see if they had been input correctly into the Council's asset register.
- evaluated the assumptions made by the valuer for those assets revalued at 31 March 2022. For the assets not formally revalued in year we have assessed how management has satisfied themselves that these assets are not materially different to the current value at the year end.

Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of the valuation of investment properties.

Valuation of land and buildings and the key assumptions and judgements that underpin this significant estimate

The Council revalues its land and buildings on a rolling three year 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 Council's financial statements is not materially different from the current value 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, and a key audit matter. In particular the key assumptions that underpin the valuations.

As part of our work we have:

- evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work;
- evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert;
- written to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out;
- challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding, the Council's valuer's report and the assumptions that underpin the valuation; and
- tested revaluations made during the year to see if they had been input correctly into the Council's asset register.
- evaluated the assumptions made by the valuer for those assets revalued at 31 March 2022.

Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of valuation of the Council's Land and Buildings.

2. Financial Statements - key judgements and estimates

Significant judgement or estimate	Summary of management's approach	Audit Comments	Assessment																																							
Net pension liability – £37.92m	<p>The Council's net pension liability at 31 March 2022 is £37.92m (PY £46.3m) comprising the Gloucestershire Local Government and unfunded defined benefit pension scheme obligations. 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. As a result of the updated Triennial Valuation to Gloucestershire Pension Fund, Cotswold District Council have obtained an update IAS19 report and have opted to amend the accounts for the material movement in their share of net liabilities. This has resulted in a balance sheet movement in the net liabilities line of £2.4m.</p>	<p>We have carried out the following work in relation to this estimate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed management's expert to ensure suitably qualified and independent, Assessed the actuary's roll forward approach taken, We have used PwC as auditors expert to assess actuary and assumptions made by actuary. The table below summarises where Cotswold District Council fall in the acceptable ranges set by PwC: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Assumption</th> <th>Assumption</th> <th>Actuary Value</th> <th>PwC range</th> <th>Assessment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Discount rate</td> <td>Discount rate</td> <td>2.70%</td> <td>2.70% - 2.75%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pension increase rate</td> <td>Pension increase rate</td> <td>3.20%</td> <td>3.15%-3.30%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Salary growth</td> <td>Salary growth</td> <td>3.50%</td> <td>3.20%-4.20%</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Duration of liabilities</td> <td>Duration of liabilities</td> <td>19 years</td> <td>15-22 years</td> <td>●</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2">Life expectancy - Males currently ages 45 / 65</td> <td rowspan="2">Life expectancy - Males currently ages 45 / 65</td> <td>Current 21.7</td> <td>Current 20.1 - 22.7</td> <td rowspan="2">●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Future 22.6</td> <td>Future 21.4 - 24.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2">Life expectancy - Females currently ages 45 / 65</td> <td rowspan="2">Life expectancy - Females currently ages 45 / 65</td> <td>Current 24.1</td> <td>Current 22.9 - 24.9</td> <td rowspan="2">●</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Future 25.8</td> <td>Future 24.8 - 26.7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have gained assurance over the completeness and accuracy of the underlying information used to determine the estimate, We have gained assurance over the reasonableness of the Council's share of LGPS pension assets, and We have reviewed the adequacy of disclosure of the estimate in the financial statements. 	Assumption	Assumption	Actuary Value	PwC range	Assessment	Discount rate	Discount rate	2.70%	2.70% - 2.75%	●	Pension increase rate	Pension increase rate	3.20%	3.15%-3.30%	●	Salary growth	Salary growth	3.50%	3.20%-4.20%	●	Duration of liabilities	Duration of liabilities	19 years	15-22 years	●	Life expectancy - Males currently ages 45 / 65	Life expectancy - Males currently ages 45 / 65	Current 21.7	Current 20.1 - 22.7	●	Future 22.6	Future 21.4 - 24.3	Life expectancy - Females currently ages 45 / 65	Life expectancy - Females currently ages 45 / 65	Current 24.1	Current 22.9 - 24.9	●	Future 25.8	Future 24.8 - 26.7	Light purple
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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 - key judgements and estimates

Significant judgement or estimate	Summary of management's approach	Audit Comments	Assessment
Investment Property Valuation - £5.9m	<p>The Investment properties comprises £5.9m of assets, which are required to be valued at fair value.</p> <p>The Council has used an external valuer (Carter Jonas) to complete the valuation of properties as at 31 March 2022. In line with the CIPFA Code, all investment properties were revalued during 2021/22.</p> <p>The total year end valuation of investment properties was £5.9m, this is a net decrease of £0.3m from 2020/21 (£6.2m).</p>	<p>We have carried out the following work in relation to this estimate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed management's expert to ensure suitably qualified and independent, Assessed the completeness and accuracy of the underlying information used to determine the estimate, Confirmed there were no changes to valuation method, Assessed the consistency of the estimate against near neighbours and using the Gerald Eve report, and Assessed the adequacy of disclosure of the estimate in the financial statements. <p>We concur with the Council's categorisation of these assets as investment properties.</p>	Light purple

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 – key judgements and estimates

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

Significant judgement or estimate	Summary of management's approach	Audit Comments	Assessment
Land and Building valuations – £63.3m	<p>Other land and buildings comprises £63.3m of assets which are required to be valued at either current market value or 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 Council used an external valuer and its in house valuer to complete the valuation of properties as at 31/03/22 on a three yearly cyclical basis. 60% of total assets were revalued during 2021/22.</p> <p>For the remaining assets not formally revalued an exercise is undertaken to ensure that the carrying value is not materially different to the current value. Management applied indices to the values of those assets that have not been formally revalued in year to determine whether there has been a material change in the total value of these assets. Management's assessment of assets not revalued has identified no material change to the values.</p> <p>The total year end valuation of land and buildings was £63.3m, a net increase of £1.6m from 2020/21 (£61.7m PY).</p>	<p>We have carried out the following work in relation to this estimate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed management's expert to ensure suitably qualified and independent, Assessed the completeness and accuracy of the underlying information used to determine the estimate, Confirmed there were no changes to valuation method, Assessed the consistency of the estimate against near neighbours and using the Gerald Eve report, and Assessed the adequacy of disclosure of the estimate in the financial statements. 	Light purple

Assessment

- [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 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	We are not aware of any related parties or related party transactions which have not been disclosed.
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 will be requested from the Council.

2. Financial Statements - other communication requirements



Issue	Commentary
Confirmation requests from third parties	We requested from management permission to send confirmation requests for bank and investment balances. This permission was granted and the requests were sent. No discrepancies were noted with bank confirmation balances.
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. 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"> 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 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. <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"> the nature of the Council and the environment in which it operates the Council's financial reporting framework the Council's system of internal control for identifying events or conditions relevant to going concern management's going concern assessment. <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"> a material uncertainty related to going concern has not been identified management's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

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>We have nothing significant to report on these matters. A small number of minor changes were made to the draft statements.</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"> • 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, • if we have applied any of our statutory powers or duties. • where we are not satisfied in respect of arrangements to secure value for money and have reported [a] significant weakness/es. <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. No detailed work is required in this area as the Council is below the thresholds set by the NAO.

3. Value for Money arrangements

Approach to Value for Money work for 2021/22

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

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 presented to Audit Committee in July 2023.

The key findings in each of the 3 areas are set out below:

Financial sustainability

The Council, like others, continues to operate in an uncertain financial environment. The Council understands the financial risks it faces particularly in respect of its key income streams, the impact of inflationary pressures and the need to identify and then delivery savings over the medium term. The Council has put in place appropriate measures, including the recent formation of a cabinet transformation working group, to support financial sustainability.

As part of our initial audit plan, we identified a risk of significant weakness in relation to financial sustainability reflecting the uncertainty regarding local government funding in the medium term. Our subsequent work has not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements to secure financial sustainability but has identified four improvement recommendations.

Governance

The Council enhanced its governance arrangements during 2021/22 through a review of the Council's constitution and the introduction of a revised Risk and Opportunity Management Strategy, with further development of the Council's governance and control environment planned as part of the Council's corporate peer challenge 2023 action plan. Our work has not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements but has identified four improvement recommendations.

Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

The Council has demonstrated a clear understanding of its role in securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Council is seeking to significantly develop its benchmarking and performance management activities whilst also assessing key partnership arrangements. These planned areas of focus will help strengthen arrangements for improving the way the Council delivers its services.

Conclusion

We did not identify any risks of significant weakness in arrangements as a result of work performed. We are satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

4. Independence and ethics

Ethical Standards and ISA (UK) 260 require us to give you timely disclosure of all significant matters that may bear upon the integrity, objectivity and independence of the firm or covered persons relating to our independence.

In this context, we disclose to you that during the early part of the 2019/20 financial year, the previous audit manager, applied for a job with Publica. Following the application process, she was successful and has now take up her new role. The role involves the completion of accounting transactions and the preparation of the financial statements for Cotswold District Council. As a result this has required us to put certain safeguards in place to ensure that we can continue with the audit appointment and comply with the ethical standards as a firm.

The safeguard has been agreed by our ethics function and is such that the audit with effect from 2021/22 has been conducted with a new engagement lead from the South West Office, but then with the remainder of the audit team being sourced from our Midlands Public Sector Team. This is the last year these safeguarding procedures are required to be in place.

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.

Audit and non-audit services

For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Council. No non-audit services were identified which were charged from the beginning of the financial year to date.

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 D

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 [Transparency report 2020 \(grantthornton.co.uk\)](https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/transparency-report-2020)

Appendices

A. Action plan – Audit of Financial Statements

We have identified three recommendations for the Council as a result of issues identified during the course of our audit. We have agreed our recommendations with management and we will report on progress on these recommendations during the course of the 2022/23 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. Management have agreed with our recommendations.

Assessment	Issue and risk	Recommendations
High	The S151 office recognises that capacity within the finance team remains a significant issue. We are of the view that there is not sufficient skilled finance expertise below the S151 officer and Chief Accountant to support the multiple responsibilities of a LG finance team. Specifically, the reliance on the Chief Accountant, who has taken on almost sole responsibility for supporting the external audit process, means that timely audit completion is compromised.	We recommend that the Council strengthen its finance capacity to enable it to commit sufficient time to all aspects of internal and external financial reporting.
Low	The journal authorisation process in place involves the Chief accountant reviewing all journals, with any journals posted by the latter subject to a separate review by the Finance Business Manager. The second review did not consistently include a date.	We recommend that all levels of review be properly documented with the date the review took place.
Low	As part of our review of the ledger we noted one journal had a blank description. Journal line descriptions are not mandated in the Agresso system. It is best practise within the Council that this be filled in.	We would recommend that journal line description be a mandatory field in the Agresso system.

Controls

- High – Significant effect on financial statements
- Medium – Limited Effect on financial statements
- Low – Best practice

B. Follow up of prior year recommendations

We identified the following issues in the audit of Cotswold District Council's 2020/21 financial statements, which resulted in two recommendations being reported in our 2020/21 Audit Findings report. We have followed up on the implementation of our recommendations and note these have been addressed.

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
✓	Disclosures relating to both critical judgements and estimation uncertainty lack the level of detail envisaged by IAS 540 and as described in the most recent FRC thematic review.	More detail has been added to note F8 compared to 2020/21 in the estimation uncertainties around the value of PPE & Investment Property.
In progress	Our audit testing identified a number of assets recorded in the asset register at nil net book value. While this has no bottom line impact on the accounts, it does suggest that officers need to review the UEL and determine whether they remain appropriate for the assets that are still recorded in the asset register	Review of the closing Fixed Asset Register as at 31/3/22 confirms there are still a number of assets at nil net book value. These assets and their useful lives are being reviewed as part of the 22/23 final accounts process.

Assessment

- ✓ Action completed
- X Not yet addressed

C. Audit Adjustments



Impact of unadjusted misstatements

We have not identified any unadjusted misstatements during the course of the audit.

Impact of adjusted misstatements

The table below provides details of adjustments identified during the 2021/22 audit which have been made within the final set of financial statements. The Audit Committee is required to approve management's proposed treatment of all items recorded within the table below.

Detail	Income and Expenditure £	Balance Sheet £	Impact on total net expenditure £
A car park valuation was included in the accounts at the incorrect value as a result of the wrong valuation sheet being provided to the finance team. This has resulted in an overstatement of PPE.	378,700	(378,700)	0
We've noted an additional car park valuation had the wrong income value for 2020 – this resulted in an overstated valuation of the asset.	270,650	(270,650)	0
As a result of the Triennial valuation dated 31/03/2022, there has been an increase in the value of the Council's share of the Pension Fund net liability.	£2,404,000	(£2,404,000)	0
Overall impact	3,053,350	(3,053,350)	0

C. 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.

Misclassification and disclosure changes

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

Disclosure omission	Adjusted?
There are a number of balances on page 7 of the Narrative report which do not agree to the accounts.	✓
Audit fees in Note B7 did not agree to the balance disclosed in the audit plan and agreed with management. This resulted from the exclusion of additional fees.	✓
Our testing noted an error in the value of the Covid Outbreak Management Fund of £44,600. This has resulted in the Grant balance being understated in the Grants disclosure note.	✓
We noted a discrepancy in supporting workings resulting in the Debtors and Creditors notes being understated by £169,551.78.	✓
During the course of the audit a number of small disclosure amendments including typos or syntax improvements were made to the financial statements, Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report. These have not been reported separately due to their insignificant nature.	✓

D. Fees

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

Audit fees	Proposed 2021/22 fee	Final 2021/22 fee
Anticipated fee at planning stage	£62,658	£62,658
Additional IAS19 procedures required in relation to triennial pensions valuation as at 31 March 2022		£6,000
Final audit fees (excluding VAT)		£68,658*

* Final fee subject to PSAA approval for additional fees in year.

E. Draft Audit opinion

Our draft audit opinion is included below. We anticipate we will provide the Council with an unmodified audit report.

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

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

Opinion on financial statements

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

In our opinion, the financial statements: give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2022 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended;

- have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2021/22; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law, as required by the Code of Audit Practice (2020) ("the Code of Audit Practice") approved by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements' section of our report. We are independent of the Authority in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We are responsible for concluding on the appropriateness of the Chief Finance Officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify the auditor's opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Authority to cease to continue as a going concern.

In our evaluation of the Chief Finance Officer's conclusions, and in accordance with the expectation set out within the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2021/22 that the Authority's financial statements shall be prepared on a going concern basis, we considered the inherent risks associated with the continuation of services provided by the Authority. In doing so we had regard to the guidance provided in Practice Note 10 Audit of financial statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom (Revised 2020) on the application of ISA (UK) 570 Going Concern to public sector entities. We assessed the reasonableness of the basis of preparation used by the Authority and the Authority's disclosures over the going concern period.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Authority'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.

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the Chief Finance Officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

The responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer's with respect to going concern are described in the 'Responsibilities of the Authority, Chief Finance Officer's and Those Charged with Governance for the financial statements' section of this report.

E. Audit opinion (continued)

Other information

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the 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. 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 the other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

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

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office in April 2020 on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the Code of Audit Practice) we are required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with 'delivering good governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition' published by CIPFA and SOLACE or is misleading or inconsistent with the information of which we are aware from our audit. We are not required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement addresses all risks and controls or that risks are satisfactorily addressed by internal controls.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters required by the Code of Audit Practice

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit of the financial statements and our knowledge of the Authority, the other information published together with the financial statements in the Statement of Accounts for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

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

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

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matters.

Responsibilities of the Authority, the Chief Finance Officer's and Those Charged with Governance for the financial statements

As explained in the Statement of Responsibilities, the Authority is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. In this authority, that officer is the Chief Finance Officer.

E. Audit opinion (continued)

The Chief Finance 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 2021/22, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Chief Finance Officer's determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

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

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

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

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

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

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

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

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

- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory frameworks that are applicable to the Authority and determined that the most significant, which are directly relevant to specific assertions in the financial statements, are those related to the reporting frameworks (international accounting standards as interpreted and adapted by the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2020/21, the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Local Government Act 2003, and the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 1992) and the Local Government Finance Act 2012.
- We enquired of senior officers and the Audit Committee, concerning the Authority's policies and procedures relating to:
 - the identification, evaluation and compliance with laws and regulations;
 - the detection and response to the risks of fraud; and
 - the establishment of internal controls to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- We enquired of senior officers, internal audit and the Audit Committee, whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations or whether they had any knowledge of actual, suspected or alleged fraud.

E. Audit opinion (continued)

- We assessed the susceptibility of the Authority's financial statements to material misstatement, including how fraud might occur, by evaluating officers' incentives and opportunities for manipulation of the financial statements. This included the evaluation of the risk of management override of controls. We determined that the principal risks were in relation to journals, accounting estimates and critical judgements made by management.
- Our audit procedures involved:
 - evaluation of the design effectiveness of controls that the Chief Finance Officer has in place to prevent and detect fraud;
 - journal entry testing, with a focus on management override of controls;
 - challenging assumptions and judgements made by management in its significant accounting estimates in respect of land and buildings, investment property and defined benefit pensions liability valuations;
 - assessing the extent of compliance with the relevant laws and regulations as part of our procedures on the related financial statement item.
- These audit procedures were designed to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements were free from fraud or error. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement due to fraud is higher than the risk of not detecting one resulting from error and detecting irregularities that result from fraud is inherently more difficult than detecting those that result from error, as fraud may involve collusion, deliberate concealment, forgery or intentional misrepresentations. Also, the further removed non-compliance with laws and regulations is from events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, the less likely we would become aware of it.
- Our assessment of the appropriateness of the collective competence and capabilities of the engagement team included consideration of the engagement team's:

- understanding of, and practical experience with audit engagements of a similar nature and complexity through appropriate training and participation
- knowledge of the local government sector
- understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements specific to the Authority including:
 - the provisions of the applicable legislation
 - guidance issued by CIPFA/LASAAC and SOLACE
 - the applicable statutory provisions.
- In assessing the potential risks of material misstatement, we obtained an understanding of:
 - the Authority's operations, including the nature of its income and expenditure and its services and of its objectives and strategies to understand the classes of transactions, account balances, expected financial statement disclosures and business risks that may result in risks of material misstatement.
 - the Authority's control environment, including the policies and procedures implemented by the Authority to ensure compliance with the requirements of the financial reporting framework.

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

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

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

E. Audit opinion (continued)

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matter. .

Responsibilities of the Authority

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

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

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

We undertake our review in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in December 2021. This guidance sets out the arrangements that fall within the scope of 'proper arrangements'. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code of Audit Practice requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

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

We document our understanding of the arrangements the Authority has in place for each of these three specified reporting criteria, gathering sufficient evidence to support our risk assessment and commentary in our Auditor's Annual Report. In undertaking our work, we consider whether there is evidence to suggest that there are significant weaknesses in arrangements.

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

We certify that we have completed the audit of West Oxfordshire District Council for the year ended 31 March 2023 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice.

Use of our report

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

Peter Barber, Key Audit Partner

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

F. Management Letter of Representation

Dear Sirs

Cotswold District Council
Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022

This representation letter is provided in connection with the audit of the financial statements of Cotswold District Council for the year ended 31 March 2022 for the purpose of expressing an opinion as to whether the Council financial statements are presented fairly, in all material respects in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards, and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2021/22 and applicable law.

We confirm that to the best of our knowledge and belief having made such inquiries as we considered necessary for the purpose of appropriately informing ourselves:

Financial Statements

We have fulfilled our responsibilities for the preparation of the Council's financial statements in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2021/22 ("the Code"); in particular the financial statements are fairly presented in accordance therewith.

We have complied with the requirements of all statutory directions affecting the Council and these matters have been appropriately reflected and disclosed in the financial statements.

The Council has complied with all aspects of contractual agreements that could have a material effect on the financial statements in the event of non-compliance. There has been no non-compliance with requirements of any regulatory authorities that could have a material effect on the financial statements in the event of non-compliance.

We acknowledge our responsibility for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud.

Significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value, are reasonable. We are satisfied that the material judgements used in the preparation of the financial statements are soundly based, in accordance with the Code and adequately disclosed in the financial statements. We understand our responsibilities includes identifying and considering alternative, methods, assumptions or source data that would be equally valid under the financial reporting framework, and why these alternatives were rejected in favour of the estimate used. We are satisfied that the methods, the data and the significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates and their related disclosures are appropriate to achieve recognition, measurement or disclosure that is reasonable in accordance with the Code and adequately disclosed in the financial statements.

We confirm that we are satisfied that the actuarial assumptions underlying the valuation of pension scheme assets and liabilities for IAS19 Employee Benefits disclosures are consistent with our knowledge. We confirm that all settlements and curtailments have been identified and properly accounted for. We also confirm that all significant post-employment benefits have been identified and properly accounted for.

Except as disclosed in the financial statements:

- a. there are no unrecorded liabilities, actual or contingent
- b. none of the assets of the Council has been assigned, pledged or mortgaged
- c. there are no material prior year charges or credits, nor exceptional or non-recurring items requiring separate disclosure.

Related party relationships and transactions have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards and the Code.

All events subsequent to the date of the financial statements and for which International Financial Reporting Standards and the Code require adjustment or disclosure have been adjusted or disclosed.

F. Management Letter of Representation (continued)

We have considered the adjusted misstatements, and misclassification and disclosures changes schedules included in your Audit Findings Report. The Council's financial statements have been amended for these misstatements, misclassifications and disclosure changes and are free of material misstatements, including omissions.

The financial statements are free of material misstatements, including omissions.

Actual or possible litigation and claims have been accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards.

We have no plans or intentions that may materially alter the carrying value or classification of assets and liabilities reflected in the financial statements.

We have updated our going concern assessment. We continue to believe that the Council's financial statements should be prepared on a going concern basis and have not identified any material uncertainties related to going concern on the grounds that:

- a. the nature of the Council means that, notwithstanding any intention to cease its operations in their current form, it will continue to be appropriate to adopt the going concern basis of accounting because, in such an event, services it performs can be expected to continue to be delivered by related public authorities and preparing the financial statements on a going concern basis will still provide a faithful representation of the items in the financial statements
- b. the financial reporting framework permits the entry to prepare its financial statements on the basis of the presumption set out under a) above; and
- c. the Council's system of internal control has not identified any events or conditions relevant to going concern.

We believe that no further disclosures relating to the Council's ability to continue as a going concern need to be made in the financial statements

The Council has complied with all aspects of ring-fenced grants that could have a material effect on the Council's financial statements in the event of non-compliance.

Information Provided

We have provided you with:

- a. access to all information of which we are aware that is relevant to the preparation of the Council's financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
- b. additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of your audit; and
- c. access to persons within the Council via remote arrangements from whom you determined it necessary to obtain audit evidence.

We have communicated to you all deficiencies in internal control of which management is aware.

All transactions have been recorded in the accounting records and are reflected in the financial statements.

We have disclosed to you the results of our assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud.

We have disclosed to you all information in relation to fraud or suspected fraud that we are aware of and that affects the Council and involves:

- a. management;
- b. employees who have significant roles in internal control; or
- c. others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.

F. Management Letter of Representation (continued)

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

- i. We have disclosed to you all known instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations whose effects should be considered when preparing financial statements.
- ii. We have disclosed to you the identity of the Council's related parties and all the related party relationships and transactions of which we are aware.
- iii. We have disclosed to you all known actual or possible litigation and claims whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements.

Annual Governance Statement

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

Narrative Report

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

Signed on behalf of the Council

Date

G. Delivering audit quality – proven success in regulatory inspections

The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) published the findings of its annual Quality Inspection of our firm, alongside the six other ‘Tier One’ auditing firms in the UK, on 20 July 2022.

Our results

- We’re the first firm to ever be awarded the highest quality grading for 100% of files reviewed
- For the second consecutive year, we have the highest proportion of audits with the top-quality grades out of the seven major firms
- [Click here](#) to see FRC’s latest inspection report into our firm. The graph to the right shows Grant Thornton is the only firm to have all files reviewed in the highest quality grading bracket awarded (“Good or limited improvements required”).

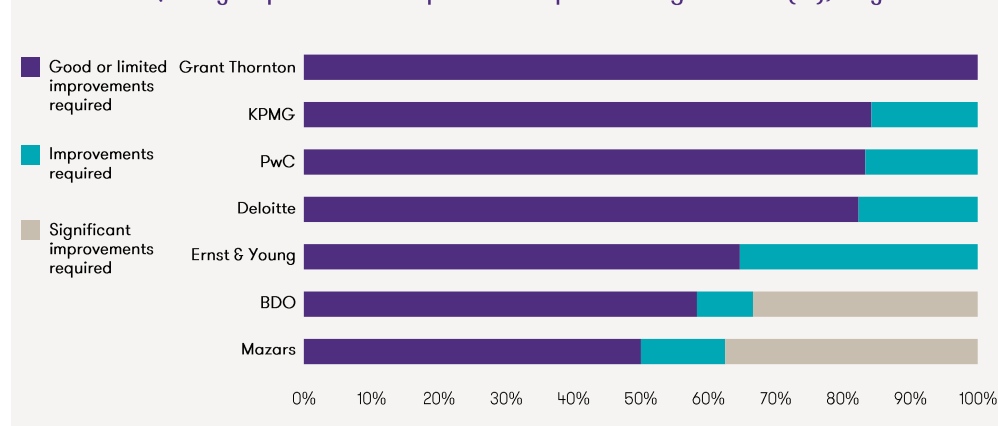
Continued commitment to audit quality

We continuously evolve our audit practice, so we deliver quality against the backdrop of continually evolving scrutiny and challenge, whilst ensuring we exceed client stakeholder expectations. The past two FRC inspection results are evidence of this.

Our commitment to quality, includes us continuing to:

- **hold ourselves accountable.** It’s what our Audit Quality Board, with external audit experts, does
- **challenge management.** It’s part of our approach – to robustly explore areas that are complex, significant or highly judgmental, for example, certain accounting estimates, going concern evaluations, revenue recognition and other such areas
- **challenge ourselves.** It’s why we have a continuous improvement approach focussed on how we can be even better year on year, in technical skills, project management skills, digital, culture, and working as effectively as possible with you
- **invest, significantly.** It’s why we have centres of excellence and an Audit Quality Academy, and have grown and developed our IT audit and Digital Audit Technology practices

FRC’s Audit Quality Inspection and Supervision Report Findings 2021-22 (%), July 2022



What has the FRC said about us?

Our firm is immensely proud of the “good practice” areas highlighted by the FRC:

- Detailed reporting and effective communication with Audit Committees
- Robust challenge and scepticism to Management’s accounting around complex areas, particularly around impairment and journals
- Discussions with those outside of the finance team to provide broader audit evidence and insight

In our recent reports, our internal use of specialists and approach to use of data analytics has also been highlighted by the regulator; both of which remain integral to the success of our results and approach to quality.



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