

Independent auditor's report to the members of Redditch Borough Council

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Redditch Borough Council (the 'Authority') and its subsidiary (the 'group') for the year ended 31 March 2019 which comprise the Movement in Reserves Statement for the Council and Group, the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Group Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Group Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Group Cash Flow Statement, the Housing Revenue Account, the Movement on the HRA Statement the Collection Fund Statement and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The notes to the financial statements include the Notes to the Core Financial Statements, Notes to the Housing Revenue Account and Notes to the Collection Fund Statement. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2018/19.

In our opinion, the financial statements:

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

Basis for opinion

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

Conclusions relating to going concern

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

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

Other information

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

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

We have nothing to report in this regard.

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

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

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matter required by the Code of Audit Practice

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit of the financial statements and our knowledge of the Authority gained through our work in relation to the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, the other information published together with the financial statements in the Statement of Accounts 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, except on 29 July we made written recommendations to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in relation to financial sustainability. The Council needs to take urgent action to prevent both its General Fund and HRA balances being exhausted by the end of 2020/21. Failure to take effective action will put the Council at risk of breaching its statutory duty to set a balanced budget.

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

As explained more fully in the Statement of Responsibilities set out on pages 11 to 12, 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 Executive Director of Finance and Resources. The Executive Director of Finance and Resources is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which includes the financial

statements, in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2018/19, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Executive Director of Finance and Resources determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

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

The Audit, Governance & Standards 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.

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

Adverse Conclusion

On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, because of the significance of the matters described in the basis for adverse conclusion section of our report, we are not satisfied that, in all significant respects, the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.

Basis for adverse conclusion

In considering the Authority's arrangements for securing efficiency, economy and effectiveness in its use of resources we identified the following matters:

The Authority's medium-term financial plan was updated in February 2019 and covers the period to 31 March 2023. As at 31 March 2019 the Council had a General Fund reserves balance of £1.225 million. The Medium Term Financial Plan, approved in February 2019, identified a £1.17 million financial gap in 2020/21, which if not addressed will leave £55,000 of General Fund balances available as a risk contingency.

In 2018/19 the Council used £0.56 million of balances, rather than the £89,000 planned. This was due to the decision to fund expenditure from balances, rather than identify further savings, and budget overspends in some areas. The budget included £1.50 million savings, of which £1.30 million was delivered. It is likely that some use of General Fund balances will be needed in 2019/20 to balance any under delivery of savings and budget pressures. The Medium-Term Financial Plan, approved in February 2019, identified a savings requirement of £1.13 million for 2019/20. Savings schemes totalling £949,000 are being implemented, but £181,000 of savings are currently unidentified. The Council has

not yet reported on the in-year financial position for 2019/20. The quarter one report is due to be reported to the Executive on 10 September 2019.

From April 2021 the Authority will, even if all of the forecast savings are achieved, be spending £30,000 a week more than it receives, with no reserves balance left based on its existing Medium-Term Financial Plan. There are currently no plans to bridge the gap on a sustainable basis.

Additionally, the HRA reserves balance has decreased from £1.475 million at 31 March 2018 to £0.770 million at 31 March 2019, with a further £0.400 million of reserves planned to be utilised in 2019/20. The balance remaining will then be approximately half of the £0.600 million minimum reserves policy which the Authority has set.

These matters identify weaknesses in the Authority's arrangements for setting sustainable budgets. Failure to take effective action will put the Council at risk of breaching its statutory duty to set a balanced budget.

They are evidence of weaknesses in proper arrangements for sustainable resource deployment in planning finances effectively to support the sustainable delivery of strategic priorities and maintain statutory functions.

Responsibilities of the Authority

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

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

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

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

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

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements - Certificate

We certify that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of the Redditch Borough Council 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.

Richard Percival

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

Birmingham

2 August 2019