

Independent Auditor's Report to the members of East Staffordshire Borough Council

Report on the audit of the financial statements

Opinion on the financial statements

We have audited the financial statements of East Staffordshire Borough Council (the 'Council') for the year ended 31 March 2024, 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 accounting policies and other information. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and UK adopted international accounting standards, as interpreted and adapted by the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24.

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2024 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with UK adopted international accounting standards, as interpreted and adapted by the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24; 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)), applicable law and Practice Note 10 'Audit of Financial Statements and Regularity of Public Sector Bodies in the United Kingdom', as required by the Code of Audit Practice 2024 ("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 Council in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

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

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Council's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The other information comprises the Annual Governance Statement and information included in the Statement of Accounts, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 is responsible for the other information contained within the Statement of Accounts. 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.

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 this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. 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.

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, the other information published together with the audited 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

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office in November 2024 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 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 respect of the above matter.

Responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151

As explained in the Statement of responsibilities, the Council 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 and Section 151. The Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 is responsible for the preparation of the Council's 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 2023/24, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 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 and Section 151 is responsible for assessing the Council'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 to cease the provision of the services provided by the Council. The Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 is required to comply with the requirements set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24.

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.

Extent to which 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 ISA's (UK).

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

We obtain and update our understanding of the Council, its activities, control environment, and likely future developments, including in relation to the legal and regulatory framework applicable and how the Council is complying with that framework. We determined that the most significant legal and regulatory frameworks that are applicable to the Council, which are directly linked to specific assertions in the financial statements, are those related to the financial reporting frameworks. These include The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Local Government Act 2003, the Local Government Finance Acts of 1988, 1992 and 2012, and international accounting standards, as interpreted and adapted by the Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24. Based on this understanding, we identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit

evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. This includes consideration of the risk of acts by the Council that were contrary to applicable laws and regulations, including fraud.

In response to the risk of irregularities and non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud, we designed procedures which included:

- Enquiry of management, internal audit, and those charged with governance concerning the Council's operations, the key policies and procedures, and the establishment of internal controls to mitigate risks related to fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, together with their knowledge of any actual or potential litigation and claims and actual, suspected and alleged fraud;
- Reviewing minutes of meetings of the Council and those charged with governance;
- Assessing the extent of compliance with the laws and regulations considered to have a direct material effect on the Council's financial statements and the operations of the Council through enquiry and inspection;
- Reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations;
- Performing audit work over the risk of management bias and override of controls, including testing of high-risk journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, evaluating the rationale of any significant transactions outside the normal course of business.
- Reviewing key accounting estimates including the valuation of land and buildings and investment property and defined benefit pension net liability for indicators of potential bias;
- Other audit procedures responsive to the risk of fraud, non-compliance with laws and regulation or irregularity including; and
- Assessing whether the engagement team collectively had the appropriate competence and capabilities to identify or recognise non-compliance with laws and regulations. We concluded that more experienced audit team members needed to be allocated to perform work on the significant risks identified and engaged audit specialists to support our work on defined benefit pension net liability.

We also communicated potential non-compliance with laws and regulations, including potential fraud risks to all engagement team members and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, there is a risk that we will not detect all irregularities, including those leading to a material misstatement in the financial statements or non-compliance with regulations. This risk increases the more that compliance with a law or regulation is removed from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, as we will be less likely to become aware of instances of non-compliance. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.

Report on other legal and regulatory matters

Reports in the public interest or use of other statutory powers

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to report to you if, in the course of or at the conclusion of the audit, we:

- issue a report in the public interest under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014;
- make a written recommendation to the Council under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014;
- 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;
- issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

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

Report on the Council'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 Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2024.

We have nothing to report in this respect.

Responsibilities of the Council

As explained in the Statement of responsibilities, the Council is required to manage its affairs to secure economic, efficient and effective use of resources and safeguard its assets. The Council 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 Council'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 Council 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 Council'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 issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2024. 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 Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance: how the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

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

Delayed certificate

We cannot formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate for East Staffordshire Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice 2024 (the "Code") until we have completed all our responsibilities mandated by the Code.

Our Whole of Government Accounts work for the year ended 31 March 2024, as mandated under the National Audit Office's group instructions, is not yet complete. The Group Audit Instructions state that auditors of components below the audit threshold may be directed to undertake additional work.

We are satisfied that this work does not have a material effect on the financial statements, or on our conclusion on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the members of the Council, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Council'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 Council and the members of the Council as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Signature to add

Laura Hinsley, Key Audit Partner

for and on behalf of Azets Audit Services, Local Auditor
Birmingham

date