

Audit Completion Report North West Leicestershire District Council – year ended 31 March 2022

**December 2024** 





Those Charged With Governance

North West Leicestershire District Council

Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN December 2024

Forvis Mazars
2 Chamberlain Square
Birmingham
B3 3AX

Dear Committee Members,

#### **Audit Completion Report – Year ended 31 March 2022**

We are pleased to present our Audit Completion Report for the year ended 31 March 2022. The purpose of this document is to summarise our audit conclusions. The scope of our work, including identified significant audit risks, and other key judgement areas, was outlined in our Audit Strategy Memorandum, which we presented to you on 26 April 2023.

As a result of the legislative backstop arrangements introduced by the amendments to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, as communicated to you via our audit progress report in April 2024 we are unable to complete the audit as originally planned, in advance of the backstop date of 13 December 2024. We provide more information on the legislative backstop arrangements and its implications for the audit and our audit report, in section 3.

2022/23 is the final year of our appointment as the Council's auditor. We have had no contact from the incoming auditor, but when we do we will fully cooperate with the incoming auditor to support an efficient audit handover process and provide access to such information from our audits that they deem necessary.

We would like to express our thanks for the assistance of your team during our audit.

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

Yours faithfully

Mark Surridge

Forvis Mazars LLP

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# 

# **Executive Summary**

### **Executive summary**

#### The scope of our audit and implications of the backstop arrangements

#### Our audit of the financial statements

The detailed scope of our work as your appointed auditor for 2021/22 is set out in the National Audit Office's (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'). Our responsibilities and powers are derived from the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ("the 2014 Act") and, as outlined in our Audit Strategy Memorandum, our audit has been conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) ("auditing standards") and means we focus on audit risks that we have assessed as resulting in a higher risk of material misstatement.

The scope of our work, including identified significant audit risks, and other key judgement areas, was outlined in our Audit Strategy Memorandum, which we presented to you on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Since then, Government has introduced measures intended to resolve the local government financial reporting backlog. Amendments to the Accounts and Audit Regulations require the Council to publish its audited 2021/22 financial statements and accompanying information on or before 13 December 2024. In accordance with the Code, we are required to provide our audit report in sufficient time to enable the Council to meet these responsibilities, whether the audit is completed or not.

Auditing standards require auditors to consider whether they have obtained sufficient appropriate assurance that the financial statements present a true and fair view and have been prepared, in all material respects, in line with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting. Where the auditor determines they have been unable to obtain sufficient appropriate assurance, they must consider the implications of this on their audit report.

As a result of the backstop arrangements, whilst we have performed some work on the 2021/22 financial statements, we have determined that there is insufficient time to complete our audit procedures so as to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence, and, in our view, the effects of the resulting lack of assurance is pervasive to the financial statements as a whole. As a result, we intend to issue a disclaimer of opinion on the [Council's] financial statements. We have included our proposed audit report in Appendix B.

When an opinion is disclaimed the auditor does not express an opinion on the financial statements and, consequently, no assurance is provided on the financial statements. Members will note that the form and content of this report differs substantially from the report which they will have seen in previous years. We provide more details on this in section 3.

#### Internal control recommendations and misstatements

Despite our intention to issue a disclaimer of opinion, where matters come to our attention through the course of our audit, we may be required to report these to you. Section 3 sets out any internal control recommendations we have made and any misstatements identified in the draft financial statements and how these have been addressed by management.

#### **Value for Money arrangements**

The amendments to the Accounts and Audit Regulations do not affect our responsibilities in relation to the Council's Value for Money arrangements. We anticipate having significant weaknesses in arrangements in relation to the arrangements that the Council has in place for Governance. A summary is provided in section 7 of this report.. Further detail on our Value for Money work is provided in section 4 of this report.

#### **Whole of Government Accounts**

As a result of the backstop arrangements and our intention to issue a disclaimer of opinion on the Council's financial statements, we anticipate reporting to the NAO that we are unable to complete the mandatory audit procedures specified in their Group Audit Instructions. We are awaiting confirmation of when and how this should be reported to the NAO.

#### **Wider powers**

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



# 02

# Audit Approach

## **Audit Approach**

#### Changes since we issued our Audit Strategy Memorandum

Section 1 of this report explains the implications of the backstop arrangements introduced by the recent amendments to the Accounts and Audit Regulations and confirms that we intend to issue a disclaimer of opinion on the Council's financial statements. As a result, we have not completed our planned procedures to respond to the significant and enhanced risks which we previously reported to you.

#### **Materiality**

We are required to determine materiality and report this to you, irrespective of whether we are disclaiming our opinion

Our provisional materiality at the planning stage of the audit was set at £1.19m using a benchmark of 2% of gross revenue expenditure at surplus / deficit on provision of services.

Based on the final financial statement figures, the final overall materiality we applied was £1.3m (final performance materiality: £1.04m final clearly trivial threshold: £39,000.

#### **Summary of Risks**

There have been no changes to the risks identified which we communicated in our Audit Strategy Memorandum, issued in April 2023.

Whilst we planned our audit to address the risks of material misstatement we identified at the planning stage, we will not have completed our work in advance of the backstop date and as such do not provide any assurance over individual areas of the financial statements or the financial statements as a whole, nor do we provide assurance over any of the identified risks. These risks are summarised below.

#### Significant risks

- 1. Management override of controls;
- 2. Defined benefit liability valuation; and
- 3. Valuation of land & buildings, investment properties and council dwelling.

Although we are unable to provide any assurance over the areas of risks we have identified, where matters have come to our attention during the course of the audit that we consider to be important to bring to your attention, we have included these in section 3 of this report.



# 03

# Significant findings

## Significant findings

#### Background and modification of the audit opinion

As we outlined earlier in this report, as a result of the backstop arrangements, we have not been able to complete sufficient audit procedures to enable us to provide an unmodified opinion on the Council's financial statements. As we have determined that the pervasive effects, or potential pervasive effects on the financial statements of the lack of sufficient appropriate assurance are pervasive, we will be issuing a disclaimer of opinion. This means we are expressing no opinion on the financial statements.

Appendix B sets out our draft audit report which explains the basis of our disclaimer of opinion being the introduction of the backstop arrangements which require the Council to publish its audited 2021/22 financial statements by 13 December 2024.

Members will note that the draft audit report does not report on other matters that would usually appear in an unmodified audit report. These include:

- the use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements; and
- the consistency of the other information presented with the financial statements.

Although we are disclaiming our audit opinion, auditing standards require us to report matters to you that have come to our attention during the course of our audit, which we include in this section of this report.

#### Wider responsibilities

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

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

We have not exercised any of these powers as part of our 2021/22 audit.

The 2014 Act also gives rights to local electors and other parties, such as the right to ask questions of the auditor and the right to make an objection to an item of account. No such objections have been raised.

#### Significant matters discussed with management

During our audit we communicated the following significant matters to management:

- Accounting treatment of an investment property disposal where there were contingencies built into the contract around the fee the Council would receive for the asset;
- Completeness of the Council's asset register with several assets being added to the register in year despite being owned for a significant period of time;
- The unavailability of expected information examples include a reconciliation between the valuation report to the financial statements, and payroll reconciliations.

As part of our audit, we sought and obtained information from management in relation to actual or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations, and any actual or suspected fraud which could materially impact upon the financial statements.

Based on our review of the information received, we have no matters to report in relation to fraud and the Council's compliance with laws and regulations. We have not undertaken any further work in these areas and do not provide any assurance that the financial statements are free from material error.

#### Significant difficulties during the audit

The Council's finance team experienced a number of staffing issues during the accounts production and audit timeframe. As a result our audit has identified that the standard of the working papers provided to support the figures within the financial statements fell below our expectations. Examples include missing information, and incorrect interpretation and application of guidance. It also led to extensive unexpected effort required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence/



#### Our observations on internal control

As part of our planning procedures, we obtained an understanding of the Council's internal control environment and control activities relevant to the preparation of the financial statements, which was sufficient to plan our audit and to determine the nature, timing and extent of our audit procedures. Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of the Council's internal controls, we are required to evaluate any deficiencies in internal control that come to our attention, even though we intend to issue a disclaimer of opinion.

A deficiency in internal control exists if:

- a control is designed, implemented, or operated in such a way that it is unable to prevent, detect, and/ or correct potential misstatements in the financial statements; or
- a necessary control to prevent, detect, and/ or correct misstatements in the financial statements on a timely basis is missing.

The purpose of our audit, as originally planned before the backstop arrangements came into force, was to express an opinion on the financial statements. The matters reported in this section of our report are limited to those deficiencies and other control recommendations that we have identified through the audit procedures we were able to complete before the backstop date. If we had performed more extensive procedures on internal control, we might have identified more deficiencies to report or concluded that some of the reported deficiencies need not in fact have been reported. Our comments in this section should not be regarded as a comprehensive record of all deficiencies that may exist or improvements that could be made.

#### Significant deficiencies in internal control

A significant deficiency in internal control is one which, in our professional judgement, has the potential for financial loss, damage to reputation, or a loss of information which may have implications on the achievement of business strategic objectives. Our view is that observations categorised as a significant deficiency are of sufficient importance to merit the attention of Those Charged With Governance.

The significant deficiencies in the Council's internal controls that we have identified as at the date of this report are in set out on the following pages.

#### Other observations on internal control

We also report to you, our observations on the Council's internal controls where, in our professional judgement, there is a need to strengthen internal control or enhance business efficiency that do not constitute significant deficiencies in internal control but which we view as being important for consideration by management.

We do not have any other internal control observations to bring to your attention as at the date of this report.

Whether internal control observations merit attention by Those Charged With Governance and/ or management is a matter of professional judgment, taking into account the risk of misstatement that may arise in the financial statements as a result of those observations.



#### Our observations on internal control

#### Significant deficiencies in internal control

In our view, the deficiencies in internal control set out in this section result in a potential for financial loss, damage to reputation, or a loss of information. This may have implications for the achievement of business strategic objectives. Our recommendations should be considered for immediate action.

#### **Description of deficiency**

The Council identified several assets during the year that should have been included on the asset register but had been incorrectly excluded and hence they had not been included in the asset revaluation cycle.

#### **Potential effects**

The Council is unaware of what assets are owned, hence the assets are not revalued in a timely manner as required and the balance sheet could be materially misstated.

#### Recommendation

The Council performs an exercise with the Estate's Team to reconcile all of the assets owned to the fixed asset register to ensure all necessary assets have been included.

#### Management response

An exercise will be completed during the completion of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts to ensure all material assets are included within the balance sheet.

#### **Description of deficiency**

During our testing of related parties we identified a number of related parties that had not been disclosed as part of the register of interest returns. For a number of related parties transactions had taken place in year which in several cases were of a material nature and had not been disclosed in the Council's statement of accounts.

#### **Potential effects**

Related party transactions are not undertaken at arms length and material transactions are incorrectly disclosed in the statement of accounts.

#### Recommendation

The Council conducts training to ensure that Members and Officers are aware of what relationships need to be disclosed in the register of interest returns. This will ensure that the register of interests is kept up to date and the Council can have oversight of any related party transactions and put controls in place to ensure that they are at arms length.

#### **Management response**

Training and updated guidance will be provided prior to March 2025, to ensure Members and Officers are aware of what needs to be disclosed in time for the completion of the 2024/25 Register of Interests return.



### Summary of amendments to the financial statements

The Council's S151 Officer authorised the Council's draft financial statements for issue.

Although we intend to issue a disclaimer of opinion, we still report any amendments which management have made to the draft financial statements, identified either through the audit procedures that we have undertaken, or separately by management.

This information is provided to the Audit and Governance Committee for information and to support it to discharge its responsibilities. It is important for members to note that, given we are issuing a disclaimer of opinion, we provide no assurance over the material accuracy of the amendments that have been made to the draft financial statements which are summarised in this section.

#### Amendments to the financial statements

Management has processed the amendments set out in the table below which exceed the trivial threshold for adjustment of £39,000.

Details of amendment	Comprehensive Income an	d Expenditure Statement	Balance Sheet	
	Dr (£ '000)	Cr (£ '000)	Dr (£ '000)	Cr (£ '000)
Dr: I & E gain / loss on disposal				
Cr: Debtors	0.000			0.000
This relates to the sale of Cropstone Drive which the Council sold during the year receiving £500,000 cash for the asset with further income of £2,300,000 expected based on contingencies including houses being built and sold on the land. The whole £2,800,000 was recorded as income with £2,300,000 recorded as a long term debtor. However, this treatment is incorrect as the income is not certain and instead the Council should recognise a £2,300,000 contingent asset.	2,300			2,300
Aggregate effect of amendments	2,300			2,300

#### Classification and other amendments processed

- We noted that £3.37m of capital grants was incorrectly included within fees, charges and other service income. It should instead be split out as its own separate line item.
- Several related party transactions were identified that had not been disclosed the only transaction identified as being material to both parties was with Dunkin Rushton for £15,000

#### **Unadjusted misstatements**

When we issue a disclaimer of opinion as a result of the backstop arrangements, auditing standards require us to consider whether we are aware of any matter that would have otherwise required a modification to our opinion. Such matters may include, for example, material misstatements that have been identified which have not been amended by management in the final financial statements. We confirm that no such matters have come to our attention. We did identify one immaterial error that we have agreed with the client does not require adjustment this is in relation to the Accumulated Absences account where the figures do not cast by £258,000..



# 04

Value for Money arrangements

## Value for Money

#### **Approach to Value for Money**

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

- **Financial sustainability** How the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services:
- Governance How the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; 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.

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

The table overleaf outlines the risks of significant weaknesses in arrangements that we have identified, the risk-based procedures we have undertaken, and the results of our work.

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

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

#### Status of our work

We have completed our work in respect of the Council's arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2022 and 2023 (we have issued a combined report) and have identified 1 significant weakness in arrangements and have made associated recommendations. We provide further details on the identified significant weaknesses and our recommendations later in this section of our report.

Our draft audit report at Appendix B confirms that we have matters to report in respect of significant weaknesses. As noted above, our commentary on the Council's arrangements will be provided in the Auditor's Annual Report in December 2024.



## Value for Money

#### Identified significant weaknesses in arrangements and recommendations for improvement

As a result of our work we have identified significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness it its use of resources. These identified weaknesses have been outlined in the table below.

lde	ntified significant weakness in arrangements	Financial Sustainability	Governance	Improving the 3Es	Recommendation for improvement	Council response
1	Financial statement preparation  We have been unable to complete the majority of our work on the 2022/23 statement of accounts audit which has mainly been due to:  • the Council not maintaining accurate or up-to-date property records leading to materially incorrect asset valuations in the financial statements; and  • capacity challenges in the finance team exacerbated by a shortage of skilled and capable resources in the labour market."  The Council made a conscious decision that constrained resources were diverted into budget setting and financial ledger implementation rather than financial reporting. Further, as the identified accounting issues lie in asset valuations, we do not believe there is a threat to financial sustainability or unreliable budget setting/financial planning as a result of the delays.		•		<ul> <li>We recommend that the Council:</li> <li>Ensure that there is suitable capacity within their finance team;</li> <li>Ensure that now the financial ledger system implementation is completed priority is turned to rebuilding assurances over the financial statements.</li> </ul>	Additional capacity has been brought into the finance team to provide support for the completion of the Statement of Accounts, budget setting/ monitoring, and continued implementation of Unit 4. An action plan has been produced and is regularly monitored to ensure the Council rebuilds the assurances over the financial statements.



# Appendices

A: Draft management representation letter

B: Draft audit report

C: Confirmation of our independence

3 Chamberlain Square
Birmingham
B3 3AX

XX December 2024

Dear Mark Surridge,

#### North West Leicestershire District Council - Audit for Year Ended 31 March 2022

This representation letter is provided in connection with your audit of the financial statements of North West Leicestershire District Council the Council for the year ended 31 March 2022. I note that you intend to intend to issue a disclaimer of opinion in respect of your audit. I understand I am still required to provide the representations set out in this letter so you can complete your audit in accordance with relevant auditing standards.

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

#### My responsibility for the financial statements and accounting information

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

#### My responsibility to provide and disclose relevant information

I have provided you with:

- access to all information of which I am aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as records, documentation and other material;
- · additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of the audit; and
- unrestricted access to individuals within the Council you determined it was necessary to contact in order to obtain audit evidence.

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

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

#### **Accounting records**

I confirm that all transactions that have a material effect on the financial statements have been recorded in the accounting records and are reflected in the financial statements. All other records and

related information, including minutes of all Council and committee meetings, have been made available to you.

#### **Accounting policies**

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

#### Accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value

I confirm that the methods, significant assumptions and the data used by the Council in making the accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value, are appropriate to achieve recognition, measurement or disclosure that is in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework.

#### Contingencies

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

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

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

There are no contingent gains which should be disclosed.

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

#### Laws and regulations

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

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

#### Fraud and error

I acknowledge my responsibility as Strategic Director of Resources for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud and error and I believe I have appropriately fulfilled those responsibilities.

I have disclosed to you:

all the results of my assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud;

- all knowledge of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the Council involving:
  - management and those charged with governance;
  - o employees who have significant roles in internal control; and
  - o others where fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.

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

#### Related party transactions

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

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

#### Impairment review

To the best of my knowledge, there is nothing to indicate that there is a permanent reduction in the recoverable amount of the property, plant and equipment and intangible assets below their carrying value at the balance sheet date. An impairment review is therefore not considered necessary.

#### Charges on assets

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

#### **Future commitments**

The Council has no plans, intentions or commitments that may materially affect the carrying value or classification of assets and liabilities or give rise to additional liabilities.

#### Subsequent events

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

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

#### Impacts of Russian Forces entering Ukraine

I confirm that I have carried out an assessment of the potential impact of Russian Forces entering Ukraine on the Council, including the impact of mitigation measures and uncertainties, and that the disclosure in the Annual Report and the subsequent events note to the financial statements fairly reflects that assessment.

#### Covid-19

I confirm that I have carried out an assessment of the potential impact of the Covid-19 Virus pandemic on the business, including the impact of mitigation measures and uncertainties, and that the

disclosure in the Annual Report and the subsequent events note to the financial statements fairly reflects that assessment.

#### **Brexit**

I confirm that I have carried out an assessment of the impact of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, including the impact of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and that the disclosure in the Annual Report fairly reflects that assessment.

#### Going concern

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

#### **Annual Governance Statement**

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

#### **Narrative Report**

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

# Arrangements to achieve economy, effectiveness and efficiency in Use of Resources (Value for Money arrangements)

I confirm that I have disclosed to you all findings and correspondence from regulators for previous and ongoing inspections of which I am aware. In addition, I have disclosed to you any other information that would be considered relevant to your work on value for money arrangements.

Yours	faithfully	٧.

Strategic Director of Resources / s151 officer

# Appendix B: Draft audit report

The report is pending consultation prior to being finalised.



## Appendix C: Confirmation of our independence

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

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



### Contact

#### **Forvis Mazars**

Mark Surridge

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