

Report to: **Audit Committee**
Date: **13 October 2020**
Title: **Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/2020**
Portfolio Area: **Performance & Resources – Cllr C Edmonds**
Wards Affected: **All**
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **13 October 2020**

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Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members approve:

1. The wording of the Letter of Representation (Appendix A)
2. The audited Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2020 (Appendix B).

The Annual Governance Statement post audit (Appendix C)

1. Executive summary

- 1) This report presents a summary of net revenue and capital expenditure for Members' consideration and seeks approval of the audited Statement of Accounts for 2019/20. **Following approval of the accounts, the Chairman of the Audit Committee is required to sign and date the accounts.** Members are also required to consider the content of the Letter of Representation. **Following approval of its wording, the Chairman of the Audit Committee and the Section 151 Officer (Director of Strategic Finance) are required to sign the Letter of Representation.**

2. Background

- 1) The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 set out the requirements for the production and publication of the local authority's annual Statement of Accounts (SOA). These regulations introduced revised procedures for the approval and publication of accounting statements. In line with common practice in the commercial sector, local authorities are now required to approve the accounts following the completion of the audit.
- 2) The statutory timetable relating to the production and publication of the final accounts was brought forward from 2017/18. Since then the Council has been required to publish the draft SOA by 31 May, one month earlier than previously. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the 2019/20 statutory timetable was extended. On 22 April 2020 the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government wrote to all Local Authority Chief Executives in England, confirming that the draft accounts must be approved by 31 August 2020 at the latest. This is prior to the period for exercise of public rights which must commence on or before the first working day of September 2020. The letter also stated that local authorities in England must publish their audited SOA by 30 November 2020. This deferral of the publication dates amending the 2015 Regulations for 2019/20 is detailed in The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020 No 4040).
- 3) The SOA is an essential feature of public accountability, since it provides the stewardship report on the use of funds raised from the public. The closing of accounts is also important to the budgetary process, since it confirms the availability of reserves and balances for future use.
- 4) The attached booklet (Appendix B) contains the Council's final accounts in full, including details of the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, Balance Sheet and Collection Fund together with statements setting out movements in reserves and cash flow.
- 5) The accounts have been prepared in accordance with all relevant and appropriate accounting standards including, International Accounting Standard (IAS) 19 which deals with pension costs. This standard ensures that the full cost of employing people is recognised systematically in the accounts and that creditors reflect the council's liability to pay money into the pension fund. A full explanation of the pension's liability is included in the Council's SOA. Members are advised that the accounting arrangements for IAS 19 are for reporting purposes only. Indeed the required entries are reversed out of the accounts and consequently, IAS 19 has no impact on the Council's surplus for the year.

6) The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2019/20 shown in **Appendix C** reflects the reporting requirements introduced by CIPFA/SOLACE's 2016 Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The requirements include:

- An acknowledgement of responsibility for ensuring there is a sound system of governance.
- A reference to and assessment of the effectiveness of key elements of the governance framework and the role of those responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment.
- An opinion on the level of assurance that the governance arrangements can provide.
- An agreed action plan.
- A conclusion.

The grey shading in Appendix C shows the changes to the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), following the audit of the Accounts and the AGS.

7) The CIPFA/SOLACE 2016 Framework recommends that the Council carries out annually a self-assessment of the extent to which it complies with seven core principles of good governance. Examples of the framework the Council adopts to comply with the Code's key principles are included within the AGS, as well as an accompanying assurance statement.

3. Outcomes/outputs

1) Revenue Expenditure

Revenue expenditure represents the ongoing costs of carrying out day-to-day operations, and is financed from council tax, business rates, fees and charges, government grants and interest earned on investment activity. The under spend on the General Fund in 2019/2020 of £133,000 is essentially a break-even position. ***The 2019/20 budget was £7.08 million and therefore the saving of £133,000 means that the actual spend was 1.9% less than the budget.*** The main variations from budget are shown on Page 9 of the Narrative Statement in the Statement of Accounts. The saving of £133,000 has been earmarked as one of the five options approved by Members to address the 2020/21 budget shortfall due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. The Amended 2020/21 Budget report was approved by Council on 22 September 2020.

2) **Capital Expenditure**

Capital expenditure represents monies spent on the purchase, construction or major refurbishment of assets. The Council's capital expenditure amounted to £1.4 million in 2019/20. The main areas of expenditure were as follows:

- residential renovation grants renovation grants including disabled facilities grants (£1.1m)
- acquisition of land (£0.2m)

3) **Audit of Accounts**

The draft SOA was considered by the Audit Committee on 21 July 2020. These accounts are required to be audited by the Council's external auditors Grant Thornton, who give their opinion on the draft accounts. The annual audit was undertaken remotely due to the current pandemic between the middle of June and the beginning of October. Post audit changes have been incorporated within the SOA in line with the recommendations contained within their 'Audit Findings Report' on this Audit Committee agenda.

4. **Options available and consideration of risk**

- 1) The outbreak of Covid-19 has impacted global financial markets and as at the valuation date, less weight can be attached to previous market evidence to inform opinions of the value of the Council's property, plant, equipment and investment properties. There is an unprecedented set of circumstances on which to base a judgement. Valuations are therefore reported on the basis of 'material valuation uncertainty' as per the RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) Red Book Global. Consequently, less certainty and a higher degree of caution should be attached to the valuation.
- 2) At the current time, it is not possible to accurately predict the longevity and severity of the impact of Covid-19 on the economy. Therefore, values in the 2019/20 SOA have been based on the situation prior to Covid-19, on the assumption that values will be restored when the real estate market becomes more fluid.
- 3) Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Council is undertaking monthly budget monitoring reports. In addition an amended budget was approved by Members at Council on 22 September 2020 to address the projected shortfall in 2020/21 of £501,000.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 1) The Council Constitution delegates approval of the Accounts to the Audit Committee. The Council is also required to sign a Letter of Representation every year, which gives representations to the Council's external auditors. The Chairman of the Audit Committee and the Section 151 Officer (Director of Strategic Finance) are required to sign the Letter of Representation. The letter is attached at Appendix A. It is recommended that Members approve the wording of the Letter of Representation.

6. Implications

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| Legal/Governance | | <p>The Statutory Powers that apply to this report are Section 151 Local Government Act 1972 Section 21 (12), Local Government Act 2003 and the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015.</p> <p>The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).</p> |
| Financial implications to include reference to value for money | | <p>The financial implications to this report are that an under spend of £133,000 was generated in 2019/2020. This means that the Council's actual spend for 2019/2020 was 1.9% less than the budget set for the year.</p> <p>The saving of £133,000 has been earmarked as one of the five options approved by Members to address the 2020/21 budget shortfall due to the current Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>As stated in Grant Thornton's 'The Audit Findings for West Devon', Grant Thornton anticipate issuing an unqualified value for money conclusion. They have concluded that the Council has proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.</p> |
| Risk | | <p>Public Accountability – the accounts have been drawn up in strict accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20 which is recognised by statute as representing proper accounting practice.</p> |

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| | | Resource Planning – the Council takes into account any significant issues when developing the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy. |
| Supporting Corporate Strategy | | <p>The Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement support all of the six Corporate Strategy Themes of Council, Homes, Enterprise, Communities, Environment and Wellbeing, as both encompass and summarise everything that the Council does in monetary terms.</p> <p>In particular for the ‘Council Theme’, the Accounts summarise how the Council is delivering efficient and effective services and demonstrating strong financial management and strategic financial planning.</p> <p>Our Guiding Principles of the Corporate Strategy are ‘to provide value for money and good customer service’. See comments above on the annual Value for Money audit opinion.</p> |
| Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact | | None directly arising from this report. |
| Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications | | |
| Equality and Diversity | | None directly arising from this report. |
| Safeguarding | | None directly arising from this report. |
| Community Safety, Crime and Disorder | | None directly arising from this report. |
| Health, Safety and Wellbeing | | None directly arising from this report. |
| Other implications | | None directly arising from this report. |

Supporting Information

- Appendix A – Letter of Representation
- Appendix B – Statement of Accounts 2019/20
- Appendix C – Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

Background Papers:

- Finance Community of Practice final accounts working papers.
- Audit Committee 21 July 2020 – Draft Statement of Accounts 2019/20.

Approval and clearance of report

| Process checklist | Completed |
|--|------------------|
| Portfolio Holder briefed | Yes |
| SLT Rep briefed | Yes |
| Relevant Exec Director sign off (draft) | Yes |
| Data protection issues considered | Yes |
| If exempt information, public (part 1) report also drafted. (Committee/Scrutiny) | N/A |