

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF ST ALBANS CITY & DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT ON THE AUDIT OF THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Disclaimer of opinion

We were engaged to audit the financial statements of St Albans City & District Council ("the Council") for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Movement in Reserves Statement, the Housing Revenue Account Statement, the Collection Fund Statement, and the related notes, including the Expenditure and Funding Analysis and the accounting policies in note 1.

We do not express an opinion on the financial statements. Due to the significance of the matters described in the Basis for disclaimer of opinion section of our report, we have not been able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion.

Basis for disclaimer of opinion

The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2024 (the "Amendment Regulations") require the Council to publish its financial statements and our opinion thereon for the year ended 31 March 2024 by 28 February 2025 (the "Backstop Date") or as soon as reasonably practicable after the Backstop Date.

We have been unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence over a number of areas of the financial statements as we have been unable to perform the procedures that we consider necessary to form our opinion on the financial statements by the publication date of the financial statements. These areas include, but were not limited to: the carrying amount of Property, Plant and Equipment, Heritage assets and Investment properties; short term debtors; short term creditors; income from business rates; employee benefits expenses; housing revenue account income; related party disclosures; and the balance of, and movements in, usable and unusable reserves for the year ended 31 March 2024.

In addition, we have been unable to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence over the disclosed comparative figures for the year ended 31 March 2023 by the publication date of the financial statements. Therefore, we were unable to determine whether any adjustments were necessary to the opening balances as at 1 April 2023 or whether there were any consequential effects on the Council's income and expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Any adjustments from the above matters would have a consequential effect on the Council's net assets and the split between usable reserves, including the Housing Revenue Account, and unusable reserves as at 31 March 2024 and 31 March 2023, the Collection Fund, and on its income and expenditure and cash flows for the years then ended.

Fraud and breaches of laws and regulations – ability to detect

As stated in the Disclaimer of opinion section of our report, we do not express an opinion on the financial statements due to the reasons described in the *Basis for disclaimer of opinion* section of our report.

Other information

The Assistant Director—Finance is responsible for the other information, which comprises the information included in the Statement of Accounts, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Any opinion on the financial statements would not cover the other information and we do not express an opinion or, except as explicitly stated below, any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether, based on our financial statements audit work, the information therein is materially misstated or inconsistent with the financial statements or our audit knowledge.

Due to the significance of the matters described in the *Basis for disclaimer of opinion* section of our report, and the possible consequential effect on the related disclosures in the other information, whilst in our opinion the other information included in the Statement of Accounts for the financial year is consistent with the financial statements, we are unable to determine whether there are material misstatements in the other information.

Assistant Director—Finance’s and Audit & Governance Committee’s responsibilities

As explained more fully in the statement set out on page 16, the Assistant Director—Finance is responsible for the preparation of financial statements in accordance with CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 and that give a true and fair view. They are also responsible for: such internal control as they determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; 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 they have been informed by the government of the intention to either cease the services provided by the Council or dissolve the Council without the transfer of its services to another public sector entity.

The Audit & Governance Committee of the Council is responsible for overseeing the Council's financial reporting process.

Auditor’s responsibilities

Our responsibility is to conduct an audit of the financial statements in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK), and to issue an auditor's report. However, due to the significance of the matter described in the *Basis for disclaimer of opinion* section of our report, we were not able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion on the financial statements.

We have fulfilled our ethical responsibilities under, and are independent of the Council in accordance with, UK ethical requirements including the FRC Ethical Standard.

REPORT ON OTHER LEGAL AND REGULATORY MATTERS

Report on the Council’s arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office in November 2024 on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the “NAO Code of Audit Practice”), we are required to report to you if we identify any significant weaknesses in the arrangements that have been made by the Council to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Except for the matters detailed below, we have nothing else to report in this respect.

Identified significant weakness – Governance

The Council published its initial draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 on 2 October 2024, which was late compared to the statutory deadline of 31 May 2024.

These initial draft accounts presented for public scrutiny contained casting errors throughout and were substantially incomplete, leading to the Council publishing an updated draft on 26 February 2025 and re-advertising the inspection period. As a result, the Statement of Accounts were not published by the Backstop Date.

These matters are evidence of weaknesses in proper arrangements for reliable and timely financial reporting that supports the delivery of strategic priorities and ensures compliance with statutory deadlines.

We recommend that the Council develops, and then monitors, a detailed action plan outlining how they expect to return to a financial reporting timetable which ensures a good quality set of draft accounts are published in line with the statutory deadline. Where required, the Council

should invest in additional resources within the finance team to ensure future compliance with statutory reporting deadlines.

Respective responsibilities in respect of our review of arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources

The Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We are required under section 20(1) 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 are also not required to satisfy ourselves that the Council has achieved value for money during the year.

We planned our work and undertook our review in accordance with the NAO Code of Audit Practice and related statutory guidance, having regard to whether the Council had proper arrangements in place to ensure financial sustainability, proper governance and to use information about costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services. Based on our risk assessment, we undertook such work as we considered necessary.

Statutory reporting matters

We are required by Schedule 2 to the NAO Code of Audit Practice to report to you if:

- we issue a report in the public interest under section 24 and Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we make written recommendations to the Council under Section 24 and Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; 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; or
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have nothing to report in this respect.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR AUDIT WORK AND TO WHOM WE OWE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

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 members of the Council, as a body, 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.

DELAY IN CERTIFICATION OF COMPLETION OF THE AUDIT

As at the date of this audit report, we have not yet completed our work in respect of the Council's Whole of Government Accounts consolidation pack for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Until we have completed this work, we are unable to certify that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of St Albans City & District Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the NAO Code of Audit Practice.



Christopher Paisley
for and on behalf of KPMG LLP
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12 May 2025