

Report to: Audit Committee

Date of Meeting: 7 December 2023

Report Title: External Auditor's Annual Report on Hastings Borough Council 2021/22 and 2022/23

Report By: Kit Wheeler, Chief Finance Officer

Key Decision: N

Classification: Open

Purpose of Report

To consider the matters raised by the Council's external auditors (Grant Thornton) in respect of their Annual Report for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Recommendation(s)

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Agree the recommendations contained in the External Auditors report.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014 the external Auditors have to satisfy themselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Introduction and Background

1. The report contained in Appendix A summarises the principal matters arising as a result of the audit and assurance work carried out by the Councils external Auditors Grant Thornton.
2. The financial periods covered in the report are for 2021/22 and 2022/23, and it should be noted that the previous Value for Money (VFM) report presented by Grant Thornton back in January 2023 was in relation to 2020/21 financial year.
3. The current report makes reference to recommendations previously advised in the 2020/21 VFM report, but it should be noted for contextual purposes that this was only presented to Audit Committee and Officers in January 2023.
4. Therefore, for the majority of the two years covered in the latest report the suggested recommendations were not actually known to the Council and therefore could not realistically all have been actioned.
5. The Council has implemented a number of changes and improvements throughout the current 2023/24 financial year, but they are not included as part of the remit of this auditing period.
6. However, where changes and recommendations have already been implemented and actioned, this has been included as part of the management response to each recommendation within the report itself to provide a more relevant update.

Conclusion

7. There are a number of recommendations contained within the report which have been discussed with the External Auditors and shared with the Senior Leadership Team as well as Internal Audit colleagues.
8. Significant improvements have already been made on the majority of the recommendations, some of which relate to historical decisions and processes which are no longer in place.
9. The Council will continue to strive to achieve excellence in securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources and believes that improvements have been made in this area since the reporting periods covered in this auditing cycle.

Timetable of Next Steps

10. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Report to Audit Committee	Audit Committee	7 th December 2023	Senior Leadership Team
Implement Recommendations	Audit Committee	December 2024	Senior Leadership Team

Wards Affected

All.

Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	No
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	No
Anti-Poverty	No
Climate Change	No

Additional Information

Appendix A – Annual Auditor's Report on Hastings Borough Council

Officer to Contact

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