

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Audit, Standards and Governance Committee

15th July 2024

Accounting Policies Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Steve Colella Finance and Enabling Portfolio Holder
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Debra Goodall
Report Author	Job Title: Interim Head of Finance & Customer Services Contact email: Debra Goodall@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	All
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Audit, Standards and Governance and Committee **RECOMMEND** that:

- 1) Progress on the 2020/21 Audit process be noted.
- 2) Any areas of concern within this key compliance report are raised with Cabinet.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 From a Governance point of view, the financial framework under which the Council works is set out in the Constitution. In addition to this there are legislative reporting requirements which set out what needs to be done and by when. The Accounting Policies report which was tabled at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on the 1st June set out the Financial Governance Framework, and associated references to key documentation, that the Council, it's Member and Officers work to. These are (in summary):

- **The Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.** These set out: The framework for Cabinet Decisions, Decisions outside the budget or policy framework, Urgent Decisions outside of the Budget or Policy Framework, Virement rules, In-year changes to policy framework and, Call-in of decisions outside the budget or policy framework. These rules set out how decisions can be made, by whom and how they can be challenged.
- **Financial Procedure Rules** which are set out in Part 15 of the Constitution. These "operational policies" run to 36 pages and set out how the organisation financially runs it's "day to day" business.
- **Finance Protocols** which set out requirements and expectations of the Finance Team and Services in terms of financial administration and demarcation of duties.

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- 2.2 One of the legislative reporting requirements the Council has not achieved is the delivery of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts. As such, the Council was issued with a Section 24 Statement. Redditch Borough Council (RBC) were also issued with a Section 24 Statement for the same non delivery of the 2020/21 accounts which is understandable given that officers support both Councils via a shared service.
- 2.3 Draft 2020/21 accounts have been presented to Audit Committee for comment in May and are open for Public Inspection. 2021/22 to 2023/4 are being worked on in sequence with 21/22 and 22/23 being in draft by August.
- 2.4 The 2024/5 budget was approved at Council on the 21st February 2024.

Legislative Requirements

- 2.5 The previous section sets out how the Council works, however equally important are the Central Government Legislative Requirements to which we deliver to and are compared to other Councils across the Council. This section lists those key deliverables.
- 2.6 The following are key legislative deliverables, which were circulated by the Government in December 2023 for the period December 2023, through the 2024/5 financial year. Delivery against these requirements will be set out in the final column of the table.
- 2.7 In wider sets of deliverables (outside the 2024/5 DLUHC Listing) we have the following returns that have been delivered:

Form	Code	Description	Proposed Dispatch	Deadline	Proposed Publication	Position
Capital Payments & Receipts - Q3	CPR3	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1, Q2 and Q3 2023-24	15-Dec-23	19-Jan-24	15-Feb-24	Delivered 26/1/24
Non-Domestic Rates Forecast	NNDR1	Billing authority forecasts of the amount of non-domestic rates to be collected in the 2024-25	15-Dec-23	31-Jan-24	21-Feb-24	Delivered 9/2/24 (Civica issue)
Council Tax & NDR Collection - Q3	QRC3	Quarterly return of how much council tax and non-domestic rates are collected in Q3 2023-24	15-Dec-23	12-Jan-24	14-Feb-24	Delivered 15/2/24 (Civica issue)
Quarterly Borrowing & Lending - Q3	QB3	Local authority borrowing and investments from all local authorities to the end of Q3 2023-24	15-Dec-23	08-Jan-24	15-Feb-24	Delivered 17/1/24
Quarterly Revenue Update - Quarters 3 & 4	QRU3	Quarter 1 to 3 2023-24 data and forecast end year local authority	15-Dec-23	26-Jan-24	07-Mar-24	Delivered 19/2/24

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		revenue expenditure update.				
Council Tax Requirement/ Parish Council Tax	CTR1/2/3/4	Information on council tax levels set by local authorities in 2024-25 and Council tax levels for 2024-25 set by parishes.	02/02/2024 (tbc)	11-Mar-24	21-Mar-24	Delivered 26/2/24
of which: Parish council tax	-	-	-	11-Mar-24	08-May-24	Delivered 26/2/24
Revenue Account Budget	RA	Local authority revenue expenditure and financing for 2024-25 Budget	16-Feb-24	05-Apr-24	20-Jun-24	Draft completed. 8/4/24
Capital Estimates Return	CER	Capital forecast for 2024-25	23-Feb-24	22-Mar-24	13-Jun-24	Delivered 22/3/24
Non-Domestic Rates Outturn- unaudited	NNDR3	Collects information from all billing authority on the amount of non-domestic rates collected in 2023-24- provisional data	28-Mar-24	30-Apr-24	10-Jul-24	Draft delivered to Pool 14/4
Non-Domestic Rates Outturn- audited	NNDR3	Collects information from all billing authority on the amount of non-domestic rates collected in 2023-24- final data	n/a	30-Sep-24	15-Nov-24	
Quarterly Borrowing & Lending - Q4	QB4	Local authority borrowing and investments from all local authorities to the end of Q4 2023-24	22-Mar-24	05-Apr-24	13-Jun-24	Delivered 5/4/24
Capital payments & receipts Q4 and provisional outturn	CPR4	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 2023-24. Expanded collection, used as provisional outturn.	22-Mar-24	19-Apr-24	13-Jun-24	Delivered 29/4/24
Council Tax & NDR Collection - Q4	QRC4	Annual data of levels of council tax and non-domestic rates collected by local authorities in 2023-24 and Q4 2023-24	12-Apr-24	03-May-24	19-Jun-24	Needed
Capital Outturn Return	COR	Final capital outturn figures for 2023-24	26-Apr-24	26-Jul-24	10-Oct-24	Expected to be completed by 5/7/24
Revenue Outturn suite - provisional	RO	Local authority revenue expenditure and financing for 2023-24 Outturn (provisional)	26-Apr-24	28-Jun-24	29-Aug-24	Expected to be completed by 5/7/24
Revenue Outturn suite - certified	RO	Local authority revenue expenditure and	n/a	11-Oct-24	12-Dec-24	

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		financing for 2023-24 Outturn (final)				
Exit payments	-	Local authority exit payments 2023-24	03-May-24	07-Jun-24	18-Jul-24	Delivered 05/06/2024
Quarterly Borrowing & Lending - Q1	QB1	Local authority borrowing and investments from all local authorities to the end of Q1 2024-25	24-Jun-24	05-Jul-24	08-Aug-24	Expected to be completed by deadline
Quarterly Revenue Update - Q1	QRU1	Q1 2024-25 data and forecast end year local authority revenue expenditure update	28-Jun-24	02-Aug-24	12-Sep-24	
Capital Payments & Receipts - Q1	CPR1	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1 2024-25	21-Jun-24	19-Jul-24	08-Aug-24	Expected to be completed by deadline
Council Tax & NDR Collection - Q1	QRC1	Quarterly return of how much council tax and non-domestic rates are collected in Q1 2024-25	21-Jun-24	12-Jul-24	14-Aug-24	Expected to be completed by deadline
Local Government Pension Funds	SF3	Collect information on income and expenditure on local government pension schemes for 2023-24	05-Jul-24	13-Sep-24	23-Oct-24	
Council Tax Base/ Supplementary	CTB	Information about the 2024 council tax base for each billing authority.	20-Sep-24	11-Oct-24	06-Nov-24	
Quarterly Borrowing & Lending - Q2	QB2	Local authority borrowing and investments from all local authorities to the end of Q2 2024-25	23-Sep-24	04-Oct-24	14-Nov-24	
Quarterly Revenue Update - Q2	QRU2	Quarter 1 & 2 2024-25 data and forecast end year local authority revenue expenditure update	20-Sep-24	25-Oct-24	05-Dec-24	
Capital Payments & Receipts - Q2	CPR2	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1 and Q2 2024-25	20-Sep-24	20-Oct-24	14-Nov-24	
Council Tax & NDR Collection - Q2	QRC2	Quarterly return of how much council tax and non-domestic rates are collected in Q2 2024-25	20-Sep-24	04-Oct-24	20-Nov-24	
Capital Payments & Receipts - Q3	CPR3	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1, Q2 and Q3 2024-25	13-Dec-24	17-Jan-25	13-Feb-25	
Non-Domestic Rates Forecast	NNDR1	Billing authority forecasts of the amount of non-domestic rates to	13-Dec-24	31-Jan-25	19-Feb-25	

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		be collected in the 2025-26				
Quarterly Revenue Update - Quarters 3 & 4	QRU3	Quarter 1 to 3 2024-25 data and forecast end year local authority revenue expenditure update.	13-Dec-24	24-Jan-25	06-Mar-25	
Quarterly Borrowing & Lending - Q3	QB3	Local authority borrowing and investments from all local authorities to the end of Q3 2024-25	13-Dec-24	06-Jan-25	13-Feb-25	
Council Tax & NDR Collection - Q3	QRC3	Quarterly return of how much council tax and non-domestic rates are collected in Q3 2024-25	13-Dec-24	10-Jan-25	12-Feb-25	
Council Tax Requirement/ Parish Council Tax	CTR1/2/3/4	Information on council tax levels set by local authorities in 2025-26. Council tax levels for 2025-26 set by parishes	Early Feb 2025	12-Mar-25	20-Mar-25	
of which: Parish council tax	-	-	Early Feb 2025	12-Mar-25	07-May-25	
Revenue Account Budget	RA	Local authority revenue expenditure and financing for 2025-26 Budget	14-Feb-25	04-Apr-25	19-Jun-25	
Capital Estimates Return	CER	Capital forecast for 2025-26	21-Feb-25	21-Mar-25	12-Jun-25	
Monthly Borrowing & Lending	MB	Monthly sample used to provide an estimate of the level of net borrowing by local authorities to go into the ONS/HMT monthly publication Public Sector Finance Statistics	5 working days before 1st working day of the month	Day 5 of each month	for quarter months only, see QB1, QB2, QB3, QB4 dates	Expected to be completed by deadline
Local Government Finance Statistics	LGFS33	Annual compilation of finance data collected from local authorities covering out-turn data for 2022-23	N/A	N/A	Spring 2024	

Budget

- Delivered by 11th March in preceding financial year – **2024/5 Budget and MTFP delivered 21st Feb 2024**
- Council Tax Base – Yearly – **2024/25 delivered in 17th January 2024**
- Council Tax Resolution – **Yearly 2024/5 delivered in 21st February 2024**
- Council Tax Billing – Yearly (2 weeks before 1st DD is due to be taken) – **Bills distributed in March 2024**

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- **Policies**
 - Treasury and Asset Management Strategies
 - 24/25 Strategy Approved **delivered 21st Feb 2024**
 - 23/24 Half Yearly Report **delivered November 23.**
 - 22/23 Draft Outturn Report **delivered September 23**
 - 24/5 Council Tax Support Scheme **approved on 24th January 2024.**
 - Minimum Revenue Provision – yearly – **Approved as part of the 2024/5 MTFP.**
 - Financial Monitoring – **delivered quarterly to Cabinet – Q1 in October, Q2 in November 2023. Q3 In March 2024.**
 - Risk Management – **Delivered quarterly to this Committee (Q4 delivered today)**
 - Savings Report – **Delivered quarterly to this Committee (Q4 delivered today)**
 - Financial Controls (still in development)
 - Clearance of suspense accounts – See the chart at the end of this Report for progress.
 - Bank Reconciliation - **linked to above point although a separate stream assessing/clearing 2023/4 and prior year items.**
 - Over £500 spending.
 - **Updated to February 2024.**

The following deliverables, prior to December 2023 are still to be delivered:

- **Closure**
 - Draft Accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23.
 - 2020/21 Audit **see the later section.**
- Government Returns
 - VAT – Monthly
 - **Still to be delivered for 20/21 – dependent on closure of accounts, discussions ongoing with HMRC.**
 - Revenue Outturn Reports – July
 - **Still to be delivered for 20/21 and 21/22 – dependent on closure of accounts**
 - Whole of Government Accounts Returns – August
 - **Still to be delivered for 20/21, 21/22 and 22/23 – dependent on closure of accounts**

2.8 The key returns that have still not been delivered are the Revenue and Capital Outturn forms for 2020/21 and 2021/22 and the VAT returns. These will now be completed over the summer as draft accounts are compiled.

Update on the Statement of Accounts

2.9 The key Closure deliverables for each financial year are set out below:

- **Closure 2020/21**
 - Agreement of Treatment of Take on Balances – The final position on the Opening Balances is a difference between the Opening Balances on TechOne is only £3k, which is significantly below the Council's trivial materiality level. **The**

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2020/21 Accounts were presented to Audit Committee in May for comment and have now been opened for public scrutiny.

- **Closure 2021/22**
 - Draft 21/22 Accounts are now being prepared and a draft (without any 2020/21 Audit Adjustments) is expected in early July. Once ready with will be published on the Council's Website with the appropriate disclaimers. This will include the final outturn position.
 - Audit and Sign-Off of the Accounts following Audit of 2020/21 Accounts dependent on the Governments proposed Statutory Closure deadlines.
- **Closure 2022/23**
 - Draft 22/23 Accounts (without any 2020/21 or 2021/22 Audit Adjustments) is expected in August. Once ready with will be published on the Council's Website with the appropriate disclaimers. This will include the final outturn position
 - Audit and Sign-Off of the Accounts following Audit of 2020/21 Accounts dependent on the Governments proposed Statutory Closure deadlines.
- **2023/4 Accounts**
 - "Nuts and bolts" closure being completed for the end of May 2024.
 - Accounts must be completed and Audited under the present updated rules by the 31st March 2025.
 - Draft Outturn Position will be reported to Cabinet on the 24th July.
- **Closure Process being undertaken (high level view)**
 - The Council are closing 3 years in parallel and concurrently.
 - DG has updated the 21/2 and future years formats so easier to manipulate and complete.
 - IAS19 Pension Reports have been received and will be addressed on a concurrent basis.
 - Initial PPE valuations have been received and updates to these are being made following discussions with the valuers. All three years are being provided at the same time and will be combined into a single document.
 - NNDR/Council Tax (Collection Fund) – Journals awaiting actioning.
 - Reconciliations – significant team of 5 now working on these over all the open financial years.
 - Bank Reconciliation – Banks have been reconciled although the correcting journals have not been actioned.
 - VAT working plan required in order to move from central assessment in Q2 2024/5.
- **Value for Money Opinions for 2021/22 and 2022/23**
 - External Auditors delivered their joint Value for Money Opinions in November 2023:
 - S24 Recommendation still in place and extended for 2021/2 and 2022/3 Accounts.
 - 5 of the 6 2020/21 Key Recommendations either delivered or now linked to Improvement Recommendations.
 - 9 of 13 2020/21 Improvement Recommendations either fully or partially delivered.
 - One new Key Recommendation – linked to Workforce Strategy.

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- Ten updated Improvement Recommendations.

2.10 As reported in the July and September Reports, DLUHC have stated that they are moving to rectify these backlogs by changing how audits are performed over the medium term. DLUHC are concerned that the most time should be spent on auditing more recent accounts, so scopes of audits will be reduced (still to be confirmed) however Auditors will still be expected to serve S114 and other Statutory Recommendations. The governments' view is that Audits will be given statutory deadlines for completion as follows:

- All accounts up to 2022/23 to be completed by the 30th September 2024.
- Year ended 31 March 2024: 31 May 2025.
- Year ended 31 March 2025: 31 March 2026.
- Year ended 31 March 2026: 31 January 2027.
- Year ended 31 March 2027: 30 November 2027.
- Year ended 31 March 2028: 30 November 2028.

The Council replied to consultations from DLUHC and the NAO in early March.

2.11 The NAO issued guidance on the 19th June for Auditors. This Supplementary Guidance Note (SGN) set out that:

- Auditors will be aware that on 22 May, the Prime Minister called a general election for 4 July. As a result, Parliament was dissolved on 30 May. This means that the proposals consulted upon by the NAO and DLUHC respectively for changes to the Code of Audit Practice and the introduction of statutory publication deadlines for audited accounts ('backstop' dates) cannot proceed until a new Parliament is formed and the new government has had the opportunity to consider whether it wishes to proceed with the proposals.
- Until then, auditors should continue to follow the current Code of Audit Practice. Where auditors are planning to complete audits, they should continue to make every effort to do so and as soon as possible.
- As information on the new government's policy for local audit in England becomes available the C&AG will keep the need for further guidance under review. He will also consider the timetable for a new Code of Audit Practice which will have to be in place by March 2025 as the current Code reaches the end of its five-year life.
- Until the new government has a policy position on the future of local audit in England it is not possible to provide any further clarity to auditors on next steps above and beyond what is set out in this SGN.

2.12 Bishop Fleming, our Auditors for 23/4 onwards, are still waiting for the formal outcomes of the various consultations (NAO, DLUHC and CIPFA) which took place earlier this year and therefore don't know exactly what this will mean for any audits which are likely to have disclaimed audits up to and including 2022/23. Their view is that it is better for them to pause issuing any audit plans for now. When they have the outcomes, they will be in a better position to set out what work they as auditors need to do on disclaimed audits. (They had hoped by this stage (July) they would have this information but clearly this has not been the case as per the guidance note in 2.11 above.)

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- 2.13 The Council is now on the latest version of TechOne although because Redditch and Bromsgrove are still the only Council's on Cash Receipting, when the weekly updates come in they have to do additional checks to ensure the functionality is working as expected. The Council will now update to the latest version of TechOne every summer.

Update On 2024/25 Budget

- 2.14 The Council's 2024/25 Budget was approved on the 21st February 2024 at Council. Budgets will be loaded onto TechOne in March.
- 2.15 Quarter One 2023/4 financial and performance monitoring went to Cabinet in October and the Quarter Two Monitoring went to Cabinet on the 22nd November. The financial monitoring for Quarter 2 was delivered for the first time directly from the TechOne system with budget managers data input onto it and not into spreadsheets. Quarter Three Monitoring was presented to Cabinet in March.
- 2.16 To increase capacity, a number of the finance posts presently covered by Agency have been advertised internally and externally. Interviews for these posts took place on the 25th and 26th of January and 6 offers have been accepted.

Compliance Items

- 2.17 In their meeting in January 2024, Members requested further training to ensure they were informed in their decision making in this committee. The first of these training sessions has been set up in advance of the May Audit, Standards and Governance Meeting at 5pm on Thursday 23rd May.
- 2.18 There are a number of areas where compliance will be measured going forwards. Compliance to process and timetable is a key underlying theme of the Draft External Audit Report 2020/21 and the Combined 2021/22 & 2022/23. These items are being measured to improve how we work and change behaviours. This will lead to an improved financial health/knowledge across both Councils. Not all these measures can be put in place instantly but there should be the full suite by the middle of the summer (Debt indicators depend on the clearing of suspense and the updating of the bank reconciliations).

Training:

- Closure Training took place in March with 83 attending.
- Mandatory Budget Manager Training (including the use of TechOne) took place in September 2023 – upskilling budget managers with the tools to input their forecasts directly onto TechOne.
- Mandatory Financial Awareness Training for managers took place in August and September.
- Payments Purchase Order Training takes place monthly.

New tranches of training are being organised

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Treasury Management

- The Half Yearly Treasury Management Report was presented to Cabinet on the 22nd November.

Audit VFM Report Requirements

- More Budget Consultation.
- Wider savings monitoring will be undertaken by this Committee quarterly.
- Capital and its deliverability will be reviewed as part of the Budget Tranche 2.
- Benchmarking is now incorporated into the budget process (using LG Futures data).
- The Internal Audit Service will be externally assessed in early 2024.
- The Council will seek an independent Audit Committee member and ensure the Committee remains apolitical in nature.
- The whistleblowing policy will be updated before the end of the financial year.
- Procurement and contract rules will be updated by the end of the financial year (to reflect changes to legislation happening in April 2024).
- Performance Indicators will be reviewed and updated following Strategic Priority setting sessions.

The Council is still to run sessions to assess its “risk appetite”.

Errors:

- Non delivery of GPC Card Data (monthly basis) – still to be started.
- Miscoding on TechOne per month – by Service Area - will begin once the cash receipting suspense has been cleared.

Procurement:

- The new ‘No Compliance No Order’ process has been live since April 2023.
- The number of contracts in place is growing regularly and we are confident that this process is having a positive effect. We hope that eventually we get to the place where the number of orders coming to procurement for approval as contracts are not in place are minimal.
- Council in February approved an increase of the Key Decision Level from £50k to £200k. The Q1, Q2 and Q3 Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports now set out:
 - All contracts requiring renewal over the next year that are over the present £200k threshold and these are placed on the forward plan.
 - All contracts requiring renewal over the next year that are between £50k and £200k for reference.
 - All contracts that are being procured by Redditch over this period that relate to Bromsgrove Services.

2.19 Work is ongoing on the clearance of the Cash Receipting suspense accounts. As reported to this committee, the Council are working to have clear the backlog linked to the timetable set out in section 2.9 above. Present progress is set out in the table below. This progress

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will be updated verbally at the Committee meeting. Note, significant numbers of large items on values over £1,000 are treasury transactions which are undertaken manually.

Row Labels	Number of Items under £1000	Value	Number of Items over £1,000	Value	Reconciled Items	Reconciled value	Total Items to Resolve	Total Value to Resolve
20/21 items	5,346	-150,197.64	102	-244,999.61	24,954	11,693,050.58	30,402	11,297,853.33
21/22 Items	27,207	214,783.54	261	4,723,679.65	6,814	-46,132,548.83	34,282	-41,194,085.64
22/23 Items	6,520	-82,541.29	550	140,124,905.14	18,693	-43,885,713.17	25,763	96,156,650.68
23/24 Items	10,501	86,782.18	594	-55,864,203.73	6,032	78,325,213.32	17,127	22,547,791.77
Grand Total	49,574	68,826.79	1,507	88,739,381.45	56,493	1.90	107,574	88,808,210.14

Summary

2.20 This report sets out the policies (local and national) that underpins the Council finances and the key deliverables. The 20/21 Accounts have now been submitted for Audit and the report sets out the Plan for the delivery of other years accounts. This report is now updated for data as at the end of April and is delivered to each Audit, Standards and Governance Committee at Bromsgrove to updates it on progress against targets and also alert them to any issues and risks.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 This paper sets out the financial frameworks within which the Council works.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising as a result of this report, however the frameworks are generally linked to statute or the Council's Constitution.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

5.1 The Strategic purposes are included in the Council's Corporate Plan and guides the Council's approach to budget making ensuring we focus on the issues and what are most important for the District and our communities. Our Financial monitoring and strategies are integrated within all our Strategic Purposes.

Climate Change Implications

5.2 There are no direct climate change implications arising as a result of this report.

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6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

Operational Implications

6.2 Operational implications have been dealt with as part of the 2023/24 MTFP and 2024/25 MTFP, quarterly monitoring and the Closedown process.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 The financial stability and sustainability of the Council is a core underlying theme of the Council's Risk Management Strategy.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Interim Auditors Annual Report on Bromsgrove District Council 2021/22 & 2/22/23 – Audit Standards and Governance Committee November 2023, Council December 2023.

Section 24 Report to Audit and Council – November/December 2022.

Accounting Policies Report – March, July, September and November 2023, January, March and May 2024 – Audit, Standards and Governance Committee

Finance Recovery Report – July 2023, October 2023 – Cabinet

Programme Management Office Requirements – June 2023 – Cabinet

Approvals to Spend Report - July 2023 – Cabinet

9. Appendices

None