

Independent auditor's report to the members of Gloucestershire County Council (the "Authority")

In our auditor's report issued on 29 July 2019, we explained that we could not formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2019, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice (2015), until we had:

- Completed our work to give our conclusion on the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We have now completed this work, and the results of our work are set out below.
- Issued an opinion on the consistency of the pension fund financial statements of the Authority included in the Pension Fund Annual Report with the pension fund financial statements included in the Statement of Accounts. We have now issued this opinion.
- Completed the work necessary to issue our Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) Component Assurance statement for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2019. We have now completed this work.
- Completed our consideration of matters brought to our attention. We have now dealt with these matters.

Opinion on the financial statements

In our auditor's report for the year ended 31 March 2019 issued on 29 July 2019 we reported that, in our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2019 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2018/19; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

No matters have come to our attention since 29 July 2019 that would have a material impact on the financial statements on which we gave this opinion.

Opinion on the pension fund financial statements

In our auditor's report for the year ended 31 March 2019 issued on 29 July 2019 we reported that, in our opinion the pension fund financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial transactions of the pension fund during the year ended 31 March 2019 and of the amount and disposition at that date of the fund's assets and liabilities,
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2018/19; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

No matters have come to our attention since 29 July 2019 that would have a material impact on the pension fund financial statements on which we gave this opinion.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements - Conclusion on the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

Qualified conclusion

On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, except for the effects of the matter described in the basis for qualified conclusion section of our report, we are satisfied that, in all significant respects, Gloucestershire County Council put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.

Basis for qualified conclusion

Our review of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources identified the following matter:

In June 2017 Ofsted published a report on services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Gloucestershire based on their inspection visit in February and March 2017. The overall judgement was that children's services in Gloucestershire were inadequate.

During 2018/19, the Council continued to work with the Department for Education and their improvement partner, Essex County Council, to implement their improvement plan. Following the 2017 inspection, Ofsted undertook a series of monitoring visits to the Authority. The latest of these visits which was relevant to the arrangements in place during 2018/19 was undertaken in April 2019. Following this visit, Ofsted reported that:

- The Authority is making slow progress in improving services for its children and young people.
- The senior leadership team has a clear vision and coherent improvement plan to develop and deliver high-quality services to children and families in Gloucestershire, which it is successfully implementing.
- While there are early indicators of improvements in some areas of practice, there is considerable variability across teams. Overall, key areas that make a difference to children's lives, such as being seen quickly, being kept safe and developing trusting relationships with social workers, are not yet good enough.

As no formal re-inspection was performed during this period, Ofsted's rating of children's services as 'inadequate' remained in place throughout 2018/19.

Having considered the findings and conclusions of the 2017 Ofsted inspection and subsequent monitoring visits, together with the results of our audit work, we have concluded that this matter is evidence of weaknesses in proper arrangements for understanding and using appropriate and reliable financial and performance information to support informed decision making and performance management.

Responsibilities of the Authority

The Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and to review regularly the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.

Auditor's responsibilities for the review of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

We are required under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to be satisfied that the Authority 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 Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

We have undertaken our review in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice issued in 2015, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, as to whether in all significant respects the Authority had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people. The Comptroller and Auditor General determined this criterion as that necessary for us to consider under the Code of Audit Practice 2015 in satisfying ourselves whether the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.

We planned our work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice 2015. Based on our risk assessment, we undertook such work as we considered necessary to be satisfied that the Authority has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements - Certificate

We certify that we have completed the audit of Gloucestershire County Council for the year ended 31 March 2019 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice 2015 issued by the National Audit Office on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the members of the Authority, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and as set out in paragraph 43 of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies published by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited for 2018/19 audits. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Authority's members 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 Authority and the Authority's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Peter Barber

Peter Barber, Key Audit Partner
for and on behalf of Grant Thornton UK LLP, Local Auditor

Bristol

10 November 2021