

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Audit, Governance and Standards Committee

5th March 2025

Financial Compliance Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Ian Woodall Executive Member for Finance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Debra Goodall
Report Author: Debra Goodall	Job Title: Assistant Director Finance & Customer Services Contact email: debra.goodall@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	All
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	
Exempt Information – None	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- 1) The Committee note that the 2023/24 Accounts are out for public consultation, with this period finishing on the 3rd March 2025.
- 2) The Committee note the position in relation to the delivery of the 2024/25 Accounts.
- 3) The Committee note the position in regard to other financial indicators set out in this report.
- 4) The ongoing process for inducting the Council's new External Auditor, Ernst and Young, be noted.

To **RECOMMEND** to Executive

- 5) Any areas of concern within this key compliance report for consideration.

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 23rd March 2023 set out the Financial Governance Framework, and associated references to key documentation, that the Council, its Member and Officers work to. These are (in summary):

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- **The Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.** These set out: The framework for Executive 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 14 of the Constitution. These “operational policies” run to 36 pages and set out how the organisation financially runs its “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.
- 2.2 Audit Committee training was undertaken on the 28th May, and Local Government Finance training was given on the 30th July.
- 2.3 One of the legislative reporting requirements the Council had not achieved is the delivery of the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 Statement of Accounts which resulted in the issuing of a Section 24 Statement for the Council. Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) were also issued with a Section 24 Statement for the same non delivery of these accounts which is understandable given that officers support both Councils via a shared service.
- 2.4 Following the issuing of the original Section 24 Statements and a review of why this happened, which was undertaken by the Bromsgrove Audit Committee, the decision was taken to increase the frequency of Audit Committee meetings to six times a year until the Council rectified the situation.
- 2.5 With the Council having provided its accounts as per “backstop legislation” up to the 2023/24 financial year. it was proposed at the January Committee Meeting that the frequency of Audit Committee meetings reverts to quarterly. This was not approved in the January meeting will be re-considered once the New Director of Resources is in place. It is important though that the processes that were put in place following the issuing of the Section 24 Statement are continued via this quarterly Financial Compliance Report.
- 2.6 The 2024/5 budget was approved at Council on the 26th February 2024.

Legislative Requirements

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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.

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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 revenue expenditure update.	15-Dec-23	26-Jan-24	07-Mar-24	Delivered 19/2/24
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 14/4/24
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	Delivered 30/09/24
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

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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	Delivered 7/5/24
Capital Outturn Return	COR	Final capital outturn figures for 2023-24	26-Apr-24	26-Jul-24	10-Oct-24	Delivered 29/07/24
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	Delivered 19/7/24
Revenue Outturn suite - certified	RO	Local authority revenue expenditure and financing for 2023-24 Outturn (final)	n/a	11-Oct-24	12-Dec-24	Delivered 10/02/24
Exit payments	-	Local authority exit payments 2023-24	03-May-24	07-Jun-24	18-Jul-24	Delivered 30/06/2024
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	Delivered 05/07/24
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	Delivered 2/08/24
Capital Payments & Receipts - Q1	CPR1	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1 2024-25	21-Jun-24	19-Jul-24	08-Aug-24	Delivered 19/07/24
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	Delivered 01/07/24
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	Delivered 21/06/24
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	Delivered 11/10/24
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	Delivered 02/10/24

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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	Delivered 25/10/24
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	Delivered 21/10/24
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	Delivered 11/10/24
Capital Payments & Receipts - Q3	CPR3	Cumulative capital expenditure and receipts for Q1, Q2 and Q3 2024-25	13-Dec-24	24-Jan-25	13-Feb-25	Delivered 24/01/25
Non-Domestic Rates Forecast	NNDR1	Billing authority forecasts of the amount of non-domestic rates to be collected in the 2025-26	13-Dec-24	31-Jan-25	19-Feb-25	Delivered 31/1/25
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	Delivered 25/01/25
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	Delivered 06/01/25
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	17-Jan-25	12-Feb-25	Delivered 02/01/25
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	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	Delivered to date

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		Sector Finance Statistics				
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	

Pooling of Housing Capital Receipts – **23/4 Delivered**

2.9 In wider sets of deliverables (outside the 2024/5 DLUHC Listing) we have the following returns that have been delivered:

Budget

- Delivered by 11th March in preceding financial year – **2025/26 Budget and MTFP delivered 24th Feb 2025**
- Council Tax Base – Yearly – **2025/26 delivered on 14th January 2025**
- Council Tax Resolution – **2025/26 delivered on 24th February 2025**
- Council Tax Billing – Yearly – **Bills distributed in March 2024**
- **Policies**
 - Treasury and Asset Management Strategies
 - 2023/4 Outturn Report **delivered in September 24.**
 - **2025/6 Strategy Approved at Council 24th February 2025.**
 - **24/25 Q1 and Q2 reports delivered 3rd Sept and 26th Nov 2024. Q3 delivered on 18th March 2025.**
 - Council Tax Support Scheme – **25/6 Approved at Executive in January 2025.**
 - Minimum Revenue Provision – yearly – **Approved as part of the MTFP, with 2025/6 included in the 25/26 Treasury and Asset Management Strategy.**
 - Financial Monitoring – **Q1 24/5 in Sept 2024. Q2 in Nov 24, Q3 in March 25.**
 - Risk Management – **Q1 24/5 delivered July 24, Q2 delivered Dec 24, Q3 delivered in March 25.**
 - Savings Report – **Q1 24/5 delivered in September, Q2 delivered in December, Q3 delivered in March 25**
 - Financial Controls (still in development)
 - Clearance of suspense accounts – now part of the closure of accounts process.
 - Bank Reconciliation - **linked to above point although a separate stream assessing/clearing 2023/4 and prior year items.**
 - Over £500 spending.
 - **Updated to January 2025.**

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

- Government Returns
 - VAT – Monthly
 - **discussions ongoing with HMRC since mid-summer 2024, final versions provided to get transactions up to date on the 19th December**

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2024. Conversations are ongoing. Submissions from December 2024 onwards are now being made on a monthly basis.

- Revenue Outturn Reports
 - **Delivered for all years up to and including 2023/24**
- Whole of Government Accounts Returns
 - **Still to be delivered**

2.10 The key returns that have still not been delivered are the VAT returns. Significant work has been undertaken by the Council's Tax advisors PS Tax in liaison with HMRC in order for the Council to return to normal VAT reporting and final version working papers have been provided to HMRC on the 19th December 2024. Monthly returns are being made from December 2024 onwards.

Update on the Statement of Accounts

2.11 Following the General Election in July 2024, the New Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Jim McMahon OBE MP wrote to Councils noting the significant and unacceptable backlog of unaudited accounts. This situation undermines trust and transparency in the way taxpayers' money is being spent and auditors cannot focus on up-to-date accounts, where assurance is most valuable.

2.12 To tackle the backlog, The Minister has laid secondary legislation, and this legislation was approved on the 9th September to provide for an initial backstop date of 13 December 2024 for financial years (FYs) up to and including 2022/23 and five subsequent backstop dates: 2015/16 through to 2019/20 must be signed off by the 30th December 2023.

Financial Year	Backstop date
2023/24	28 February 2025
2024/25	27 February 2026
2025/26	31 January 2027
2026/27	30 November 2027
2027/28	30 November 2028

2.13 The Council, as set out at the meeting on the 10th December has received "Disclaimer Opinions" for the 2020/21, 2021/22, and 2022/23. The Council will not have an opinion from its new External Auditors until the onboarding process is complete. An update on this is onboarding is given in a later Section of this report.

2.14 The Council's position on these key Closure deliverables are as follows:

- Closure 2020/21
 - Reported as per the 10th December Audit Committee and Disclaimer Opinion received and approved.

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- Closure 2021/22
 - Reported as per the 10th December Audit Committee and Disclaimer Opinion received and approved.
- Closure 2022/23
 - Reported as per the 10th December Audit Committee and “Disclaimer Opinion” received and approved following the completion of the public consultation period on the 22nd January 2025.
- Closure 2023/24
 - Draft Accounts have been available for public consultation since the 17th January. This will close on the 3rd March.
 - Accounting Opinion cannot be made until Ernst & Young have been onboarded.

- 2.15 As per the requirement of the Draft External Auditors Report 21/22 and 22/23 on the 27th November 2023, the External Auditors made a further written recommendation of the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in relation to its financial systems and governance arrangements. They recommended that the authority should produce “true and fair” draft accounts for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 signed off by the S151 Officer and supported by high quality working papers. This has now been complied with although given the instigation by the Government of the backstop date and the requirement of “disclaimer opinion” audits across the Country it is not clear how the new Auditors will frame their 2023/4 External Audit Report in respect of this matter
- 2.16 As has been reported previously the combined 2021/21 & 2022/23 Draft External Audit Report set out that:
- The 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.
 - There was one new Key Recommendation – linked to Workforce Strategy.
 - There were ten updated Improvement Recommendations.
- 2.17 In terms of those Draft External Audit Reports the following progress has been made against recommendations (Key and Improvement):
- The Accounting Policies Report goes to every Audit Committee.
 - The key closure deliverables for each financial year are clearly set out. The owners of these deliverables are the S151 and Deputy S151 Officers.
 - Progress on key financial and compliance indicators are reported monthly to CMT and to both Audit Committees by the S151/Deputy 151 Officers. There is a requirement to report all finance deliverables as per the Recommendations of the Audit Task Group.
 - Delivery of Financial training detailed in this document will move staff to right level of skills.
 - TechOne has been upgraded to version 23A in July 2023.
 - Quarterly combined financial and performance monitoring started in the 2022/23 financial year and has continued in 2024/5 with Q1 and Q2 delivered.

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- The 2024/5 MTFP process has been completed in both Councils and the 2025/6 process started.
- Risk workshops are still to be run to assess Risk Appetite of Executive and Audit Committees. This will happen across both Council now the Redditch elections have been completed.
- A Treasury Management strategy, half yearly report, and outturn report are now part of the work programme. 2024/5 Half Yearly Reports have been delivered.
- To address staffing issues, additional posts have been recruited to as the team looks to start to move any from its reliance on external agency/consultants.

In terms of more specific items:

- More Budget Consultation has been addressed in Tranche 1 of the budget through a targeted consultation process which finished in January 2025.
- Wider savings monitoring is being undertaken by this Committee quarterly.
- Capital and its deliverability has been reviewed as part of the 2025/6 Budget Tranche 2.
- Benchmarking is now incorporated into the budget process (using LG Futures data).
- The Internal Audit Service has been externally assessed in early 2024 and passed that assessment.
- The Council is seeking an independent Audit Committee member and ensures the Committee remains apolitical in nature.
- The whistleblowing policy has been updated.
- Procurement and contract rules will be updated by the end of the financial year (to reflect changes to legislation happening in February 2025).
- Performance Indicators have been reviewed and updated following the Strategic Priority and business plan sessions.

2.18 It was confirmed by the PSAA that Ernst and Young would become the Councils External Auditors on the 24th October, and that the onboarding process has now starting. All Members have now returned their forms.

2.19 Ernst and Young note that the challenging part of the onboarding process, and where they have had difficulties elsewhere, will be the need to obtain returns from all elected members. The typical time taken to obtain responses from all members elsewhere has ranged from 6-12 months, we have delivered in 4 months.

2.23 In terms of the 2024/5 Closure position, planning is already underway with the plan for draft accounts to be ready for Public Consultation at the end of June 2025 as per existing Government legislation. Auditing of these accounts will depend on Ernst and Young and their onboarding and planning process.

Update on the Budget and ongoing Monitoring.

2.24 The Councils 2025/26 Budget was approved on the 24th February 2025 at Council. Budgets will be loaded onto TechOne in March.

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2.25 Quarter One and Two 2024/25 Financial and Performance monitoring reports went to Executive in September and November 2024. Q3 will come to Executive in March.

Compliance Items

2.26 There are a number of areas where compliance will be measured going forwards. Compliance to process and timetable is a key underlying theme of both 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

Treasury Management

- The 2023/4 Outturn Report was approved by Council in September.
- The 2025/6 Strategies were approved by Council in February.
- The Q1, Q2 and Q3 2024/5 positions have been reported in the Finance and Performance Reports.

Errors:

- Non delivery of GPC Card Data (monthly basis) – still to be started.
- Miscoding on TechOne per month – by Service Area – work is ongoing to clear the miscoding on a monthly basis in conjunction with work going on to reconcile previous years.

Procurement:

- The new 'No Compliance No Order' process has been live since April 2023.
- The number of contracts in place is growing regularly. 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 approved an increase of the Key Decision Level from £50k to £200k. Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports now set out:

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- 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 Bromsgrove over this period that relate to Redditch Services.

2.27 The issues with cash receipting Work is ongoing but the closure of 2020/21 through to 2023/4 has reallocated over £125m of income wrongly allocated to suspense accounts.

Summary

2.28 This report sets out the policies (local and national) that underpins the Council finances and the key deliverables. The 2020/21 to 2023/24 draft Accounts have now been submitted for Public Inspection and Audit and the report sets out the Plan for the delivery of other years accounts. This report is now up to date as at the middle of February 2025 and delivered to each Audit, Governance and Standards Committee at Redditch to update 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. The Closure of accounts process and the associated audit process confirms the overall financial position of the Council

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 Borough 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.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

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

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Operational Implications

- 6.2 Operational implications have been dealt with as part of the 2025/26 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.

- 7.2 The Impact of the government imposed "backstop position", which has led to "disclaimer opinions here and also at numerous other Councils is still to be understood and remains a significant risk.

- 7.3 Deliver of financial data to government is important in their allocation of resources process. It is key that the Council deliver this information to timetable and the required standards

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

Section 24 Report to Audit and Council – November 2022, November 2023.

Accounting Policies Report – March, June, July, September, November 2023 and January, March, May, July and December 2024, January 2025 Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

Finance Recovery Report – June 2023 and October 2023, January and September 2024 – Executive

Programme Management Office Requirements – July 2023 – Executive

Approvals to Spend Report - July 2023 – Executive

9. Appendices

None