

ITEM No ...2(c).....

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17 NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT ON: RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT TO MEMBERS OF DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL AND THE CONTROLLER OF AUDIT FOR THE YEAR TO 31 MARCH 2021

REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

REPORT NO: 308-2021

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is a response to the report prepared by the Council's external auditor on the audit of Dundee City Council for the year to 31 March 2021. A copy of the draft external auditor's report (Report No 307-2021), the draft 2020/2021 Audited Annual Accounts for the City Council (Report No 303-2021), the draft 2020/2021 Audited Dundee City Council Charitable Trusts Annual Accounts (Report No 304-2021), the draft 2020/2021 Audited Lord Provost of Dundee Charity Fund Annual Accounts (Report No 305-2021) and the draft 2020/2021 Audited Dundee Trust Annual Accounts (Report No 306-2021) are also included on the agenda as separate items.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- i notes the contents of the draft external auditor's report including the completed action plan at Appendix 1, and in particular that Audit Scotland have indicated they will issue an unqualified audit opinion on each of the 2020/2021 Annual Accounts noted above.
- ii endorses this report as the Council's formal response to the external auditor's report
- iii instructs the Executive Director of Corporate Services to arrange for each of the Audited Annual Accounts noted above to be signed and then returned to the external auditor
- v instructs the Executive Director of Corporate Services thereafter to arrange for the above Annual Accounts, including copies of all audit certificates and accounts of the Council's subsidiary bodies to be published on the Council's website
- vi notes that the external auditor's report will also be considered by the Policy & Resources Committee in due course, together with each of the Audited Annual Accounts noted above

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Council's draft 2020/2021 Audited Annual Accounts show that there was a net underspend on services of £32.377m and an overall net underspend of £36.423m. The main components of the net underspend are shown on page 5 of the accounts, with a more detailed analysis of the main areas of budget variance shown on pages 6 and 7. The table on page 9 of the accounts shows that cash-backed reserves increased by £35.136m over the year, with a closing balance of £64.901m. Within this total, General Fund balances increased by £34.054m to £50.574m at 31 March 2021. The various ear-marked components of the General Fund balance, totalling £42.508m, are shown in note 10 on page 90 of the accounts. The uncommitted element of the closing General Fund balance is estimated at £8.066m. This equates to 2.1% of annual budgeted net expenditure. These figures are unchanged from the

position reported in the 2020/2021 Unaudited Annual Accounts, as submitted to Scrutiny Committee on 20 July 2021.

- 3.2 In addition to the closing cash-backed reserves referred to in paragraph 3.1 above, £3.529m of capital receipts have been set aside to fund costs associated with future transformation projects.
- 3.3 Capital expenditure in 2020/2021 totalled £46.853m. The key projects in the capital programme are shown in the table on page 12 of the accounts. The Balance Sheet on page 68 of the accounts shows that the Council's overall net assets have increased by £29.042m, to £774.321m at 31 March 2021.
- 3.4 The Council's pensions liability, as measured under International Accounting Standard 19 (Employee Benefits) decreased by £33.526m, to £135.076m at 31 March 2021.

4 **MAIN TEXT**

4.1 Introduction

External audit is one of the key methods by which the activities and performance of local government are independently scrutinised and reported upon. The external audit of Dundee City Council for the financial year 2020/2021 was carried out by Mrs Fiona Mitchell-Knight, Assistant Director (Audit Services), Audit Scotland. Local authority external auditors are normally appointed for a five-year period and the financial year 2020/2021 marked the fifth year of Audit Scotland's current appointment. In October 2020 the Accounts Commission approved the extension of current audit appointments for a year, to include the 2021/22 financial year. This extension reflects the need for stability and continuity given the longer-term impact of Covid-19 on audited bodies and the difficulty of running the necessary audit procurement exercise during the pandemic.

- 4.2 The 2020/2021 unaudited Annual Accounts were submitted to Scrutiny Committee earlier this year, (Article II of the Minute of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee 20 July 2021, Report No: 213-2021 refers). The accounts were submitted to Audit Scotland on 1 July 2021. The accounts have since been subject to a three-week statutory public inspection period and no objections were received.

4.3 External Auditor's Report

Audit Scotland have now completed their audit work and, in accordance with auditing standards (ISA 260: Communication with those charged with governance), are required to report the outcome of their work in relation to their review of the financial statements, prior to formally issuing their audit opinions. This requirement has been addressed in the External Auditor's report.

- 4.4 The report summarises the findings in relation to the overall audit of the Council for the year ended 31 March 2021. The attached report describes the scope of audit work undertaken during 2020/2021 and the issues arising from that work are divided into five key areas looking at:

- audit of 2020/21 annual accounts
- financial management
- financial sustainability
- governance and transparency
- best value (including a review of progress in implementing the recommendations from the September 2020 Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR))

- 4.5 In addition to the elected members of Dundee City Council, the external auditor's report is also addressed to the Controller of Audit at the Accounts Commission for Scotland. Given this wider audience, and the extent of the external auditor's responsibilities and scope of work, the

report is by necessity both fulsome and extensive. It contains much information that has already been reported to the relevant committees of Dundee City Council. Further to this, external audit reports issued previously already include agreed management action plans that are the subject of separate consideration by the Scrutiny Committee. Accordingly, it is not the intention in this report to provide a detailed response or commentary on all of the external auditor's findings.

4.6 Audit Adjustments

Through the audit process, two technical adjustments to the figures in the financial statements were identified. Further details are provided in Exhibit 2 on pages 10 to 13 of the external auditor's report (items 3 and 4). It is emphasised that neither of the technical adjustments impacted on the Council's General Fund balance or on the Council's usable reserves generally.

4.7 Action Plan

The external auditor has made six recommendations arising from the 2020/2021 audit that require further action by the Council, including one recommendation relating to the future of The Dundee Trust. These recommendations have been considered carefully by the Chief Executive and Executive Director of Corporate Services and the completed action plan, incorporating the "agreed management action / timing", is included at Appendix 1 to the external auditor's report. The progress on implementing these agreed action points will be monitored through the Council's established procedures for dealing with external audit reports and reviewing previously agreed action plans.

4.8 Conclusions

The external auditor has undertaken a thorough and wide-ranging review of the financial statements and the processes and procedures around their preparation. The report identified no unadjusted misstatements that exceeded the reporting threshold. In addition to the audit of the accounts, the external auditor examined a number of areas covering a wide range of activities during 2020/2021 and has also reviewed progress in implementing the recommendations from the September 2020 Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR).

Whilst a small number of adjustments were required to the unaudited accounts and some areas for improvement have been identified, it is pleasing to note that the overall findings and conclusions are satisfactory. In particular, the Council can take encouragement from the following key findings:

- the Council has made good progress in implementing many of the actions to deliver the recommendations for improvement from the Best Value Assurance Report
- the Council has adapted well to delivering services in the Covid-19 environment
- financial management is effective
- financial systems of internal control operated effectively during the year
- revised governance arrangements are appropriate and continue to support good governance and transparency
- the Council conducts its business in an open and transparent manner
- the accounts were submitted in line with the original audit timetable and unqualified audit opinions will be issued

4.9 The Way Ahead

Following the approval of the accounts for signature, the relevant statements of the Annual Accounts will be signed and dated by the appropriate officers and then returned to the external auditor. In line with statutory requirements, copies of the Annual Accounts together with the audit certificate and accounts of the Council's subsidiary bodies will then be published on the Council's website. A copy of the final external audit report together with the Audited Annual Accounts will be also be submitted to the Policy & Resources Committee in due course.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report has been subject to an assessment of any impacts on Equality and Diversity, Fairness and Poverty, Environment and Corporate Risk. There are no major issues.

6 CONSULTATIONS

The Council Management Team were consulted in the preparation of this report.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Audit Scotland: Proposed 2020/21 Annual Audit Report to Members of Dundee City Council and the Controller of Audit

**ROBERT EMMOTT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES**

11 NOVEMBER 2021