

## **7. EXTERNAL AUDIT – 2023/24 AUDIT STRATEGY**

### **1. Purpose**

This report asks Members to consider the 2023/24 External Audit Strategy Memorandum from our External Auditors, Mazars. Daniel Watson, Director at Mazars will be at the Authority meeting to present the Memorandum and to answer any questions

### **2. Context**

2.1 The External Auditor presents the Strategy for auditing the financial statements and value for money arrangements annually in advance of the audit of the financial statements, in this case it is for the 2023/24 financial statements.

2.2 Achieving unqualified opinions from the External Auditor is a critical success factor for the Authority

### **3. Proposals**

3.1 Members are asked to consider the External Audit Strategy Memorandum for 2023/24 (Appendix 1). The Strategy outlines the scope of the work proposed and the External Auditor's assessment of audit risks and key judgement areas for the audit of financial statements and the value for money conclusion for 2023/24.

### **4. Recommendations**

4.1 That the 2023/24 External Audit Strategy Memorandum for the 2023/24 accounts be noted.

### **5. Corporate Implications**

#### **a. Legal**

Pursuant to section 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Authority must appoint a local auditor to audit its accounts for a financial year not later than 31<sup>st</sup> December in the preceding financial year. The Memorandum of Understanding in place with the External Auditor sets out how they will undertake their work.

#### **b. Financial**

The cost of the External Audit Service contract is found from within the overall Finance budget. Fees have increased year on year by 150% and the forecasted cost is estimated at £45k for 2023/24. This increase has been agreed and authorised by the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments).

#### **c. National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan**

The work of the External Auditors is a key part of our governance arrangements and helps us to monitor and improve performance against our ambition in the Authority Plan to be a financially resilient organisation and provide value for money. Achieving an unqualified opinion from the External Auditor is part of the target for Objective D (Financial Resilience)

d. Risk Management

The scrutiny and advice provided by External Audit is part of our governance framework. The External Auditor's work is based on an assessment of audit risk as explained in The External Auditors report at Appendix 1.

e. Net Zero

There is no impact

**6. Background papers (not previously published)**

None.

**7. Appendices**

Appendix 1: 2023/24 External Audit Strategy Memorandum

**Report Author and Responsible Officer, Job Title and Publication Date**

Author: Sinead Butler, Finance Manager & Chief Financial Officer, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Responsible Officer: Emily Fox, Head of Resources