

Audit of Accounts Report – North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Audit year: 2022-23

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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.

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We intend to issue an unqualified audit report on your Accounts. There are some issues to report to you prior to their approval.

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Audit of Accounts Report

Introduction

- 1 We summarise the main findings from our audit of your 2022-23 accounts in this report.
- 2 We have already discussed these issues with the Section 151 officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Finance and Resources) and her team.
- 3 Auditors can never give complete assurance that accounts are correctly stated. Instead, we work to a level of 'materiality'. This level of materiality is set to try to identify and correct misstatements that might otherwise cause a user of the accounts into being misled.
- 4 We set this level at £955,000 for this year's audit of the main financial statements and at £222,000 for the Fire Fighters Pension Fund.
- 5 There are some areas of the accounts that may be of more importance to the reader and we have set a lower materiality level for these, as follows:
 - Related Party Disclosures £10,000
 - Senior Officer Remuneration £1,000
- 6 We have now substantially completed this year's audit.
- 7 In our professional view, we have complied with the ethical standards that apply to our work; remain independent of yourselves; and our objectivity has not been compromised in any way. There are no relationships between ourselves and yourselves that we believe could undermine our objectivity and independence.

Proposed audit opinion

- 8 We intend to issue an unqualified audit opinion on this year's accounts once you have provided us with a Letter of Representation based on that set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 9 We issue a 'qualified' audit opinion where we have material concerns about some aspects of your accounts; otherwise we issue an unqualified opinion.
- 10 The Letter of Representation contains certain confirmations we are required to obtain from you under auditing standards.
- 11 Our proposed audit report is set out in **Appendix 2**.

Significant issues arising from the audit

Uncorrected misstatements

- 12 We set out below the misstatements we identified in the accounts, which have been discussed with management but remain uncorrected. We request that these are corrected. If you decide not to correct these misstatements, we ask that you provide us with the reasons in writing for not correcting them:
- Land and Building asset values are overstated by £153,000. This is due to the Fire and Rescue Authority's external valuers using incorrect location factors in some of the asset valuations completed. The revaluation reserve is also overstated by the same amount.

Corrected misstatements

- 13 There were initially misstatements in the accounts that have now been corrected by management. However, we believe that these should be drawn to your attention, and they are set out with explanations in Appendix 3.

Other significant issues arising from the audit

- 14 In the course of the audit, we consider a number of matters relating to the accounts and report any significant issues arising to you. There were no issues arising in these areas this year.

Appendix 1

Final Letter of Representation

[Audited body's letterhead]

Auditor General for Wales
Wales Audit Office
1 Capital Quarter
Tyndall St
Cardiff
CF10 4BZ

16 October 2023

Representations regarding the 2022-23 financial statements

This letter is provided in connection with your audit of the financial statements (including that part of the Remuneration Report that is subject to audit) of North Wales Fire and Resue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund for the year ended 31 March 2023, for the purpose of expressing an opinion on their truth and fairness and their proper preparation.

We confirm that to the best of our knowledge and belief, having made enquiries as we consider sufficient, we can make the following representations to you.

Management representations

Responsibilities

We have fulfilled our responsibilities for:

- the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with legislative requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022-23; in particular the financial statements give a true and fair view in accordance therewith;
- the design, implementation, maintenance and review of internal control to prevent and detect fraud and error.

Information provided

We have provided you with:

- full access to:
 - all information of which we are aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as books of account and supporting documentation, minutes of meetings and other matters;
 - additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of the audit; and
 - unrestricted access to staff from whom you determined it necessary to obtain audit evidence;
- the results of our assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud;
- our knowledge of fraud or suspected fraud that we are aware of and that affects North Wales Fire and Resue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund and involves:
 - management;
 - employees who have significant roles in internal control; or
 - others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements;
- our knowledge of any allegations of fraud, or suspected fraud, affecting the financial statements communicated by employees, former employees, regulators or others;
- our knowledge of all known instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements;
- the identity of all related parties and all the related party relationships and transactions of which we are aware;

Financial statement representations

All transactions, assets and liabilities have been recorded in the accounting records and are reflected in the financial statements.

The methods, the data and the significant assumptions used in making accounting estimates, and their related disclosures are appropriate to achieve recognition, measurement or disclosure that is reasonable in the context of the applicable financial reporting framework.

Related party relationships and transactions have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed.

All events occurring subsequent to the reporting date which require adjustment or disclosure have been adjusted for or disclosed.

All known actual or possible litigation and claims whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements have been disclosed to the auditor and accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework.

The financial statements are free of material misstatements, including omissions. The effects of uncorrected misstatements identified during the audit are immaterial, both individually and in the aggregate, to the financial statements taken as a whole. A summary of these items is set out below:

- Land and Building asset values are overstated by £153,000 due to the Authority's external valuers using incorrect location factors in some of the asset valuations completed.

It has been decided not to adjust for the errors on the basis that they are immaterial.

Representations by North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

We acknowledge that the representations made by management, above, have been discussed with us.

We acknowledge our responsibility for the preparation of true and fair financial statements in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework. The financial statements were approved by the Fire and Rescue Authority on 16 October 2023.

We confirm that we have taken all the steps that we ought to have taken in order to make ourselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that it has been communicated to you. We confirm that, as far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which you are unaware.

Signed by:

Signed by:

Dafydd Edwards
Treasurer
16 October 2023

Councillor Dylan Rees
Chair of the Authority
16 October 2023

Appendix 2

Proposed Audit Report

The report of the Auditor General for Wales to the members of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Opinion on financial statements

I have audited the financial statements of:

- North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
- North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund

for the year ended 31 March 2023 under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority's financial statements comprise the Expenditure and Funding Analysis, the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Movement in Reserves Statement, the Cash Flow Statement and the related notes, including the significant accounting policies.

The Firefighters Pension Fund Accounts comprise the Fund Account and Net Assets Statement and related notes.

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and UK adopted international accounting standards as interpreted and adapted by the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022-23.

In my opinion, in all material respects, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund as at 31 March 2023 and of its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with legislative requirements and UK adopted international accounting standards as interpreted and adapted by the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022-23.

Basis for opinion

I conducted my audit in accordance with applicable law and International Standards on Auditing in the UK (ISAs (UK)) and Practice Note 10 'Audit of Financial Statements of Public Sector Entities in the United Kingdom'. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of my report.

My staff and I are independent of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to my audit of the financial statements in the UK including the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard, and I have fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, I have concluded that the use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work I have performed, I have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

My responsibilities and the responsibilities of the responsible financial officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other Information

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report other than the financial statements and my auditor's report thereon. The Responsible Financial Officer is responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in my report, I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

My responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If I identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, I am required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

I have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of my audit:

- the information contained in the Narrative Report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements and is in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022-23;
- The information given in the Annual Governance Statement for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements and is in accordance with guidance.

Matters on which I report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighter Pension Fund and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, I have not identified material misstatements in the Narrative Report or the Annual Governance Statement.

I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters, which I report to you, if, in my opinion:

- I have not received all the information and explanations I require for my audit.
- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for my audit have not been received from branches not visited by my team;
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns.

Responsibilities of the responsible financial officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts, the responsible financial officer is responsible for:

- the preparation of the statement of accounts, which give a true and fair view and comply with proper practices;
- maintaining proper accounting records;
- internal controls as the responsible financial officer determines is necessary to enable the preparation of statements of accounts that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; and
- assessing North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the responsible financial officer anticipates that the services provided by North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund's will not continue to be provided in the future.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My responsibility is to audit the financial statements in accordance with section 13(2) of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. I design procedures in line with my responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud.

My procedures included the following:

- Enquiring of management, the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority head of internal audit and those charged with governance, including obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation relating to North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund's policies and procedures concerned with:
 - identifying, evaluating and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud; and
 - the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- Considering as an audit team how and where fraud might occur in the financial statements and any potential indicators of fraud. As part of this discussion, I identified potential for fraud by posting of unusual journals;
- Obtaining an understanding of North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund's framework of authority as well as other legal and regulatory frameworks that North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund; and
- Obtaining an understanding of related party relationships.

In addition to the above, my procedures to respond to identified risks included the following:

- reviewing the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with relevant laws and regulations discussed above;
- enquiring of management and the Fire and Rescue Authority about actual and potential litigation and claims;
- reading minutes of meetings of those charged with governance;
- in addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business.

I also communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential fraud risks to all audit team members and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

The extent to which my procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is affected by the inherent difficulty in detecting irregularities, the effectiveness of North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund's controls, and the nature, timing and extent of the audit procedures performed.

A further description of the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of my auditor's report.

Other auditor's responsibilities

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that I identify during my audit.

Certificate of completion of audit

I certify that I have completed the audit of the accounts of North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's Firefighters Pension Fund in accordance with the requirements of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and the Auditor General for Wales' Code of Audit Practice.

Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales
October 2023

1 Capital Quarter
Tyndall Street
Cardiff, CF10 4BZ

Appendix 3

Summary of Corrections Made

During our audit, we identified the following misstatements that have been corrected by management, but which we consider should be drawn to your attention due to their relevance to your responsibilities over the financial reporting process.

Exhibit 3: summary of corrections made

Value of correction	Nature of correction	Reason for correction
£194,000	Accrued interest Short term creditors reduced by £194,000 and short term borrowings increased by £194,000. This amendment also impacts the cash flow statement and notes.	To correct the classification of accrued interest
Disclosure only	Note 4 – Material items of income & expense Amend the disclosed movement in pension fund net liability from £10,380,000 to £100,360,000.	To correctly disclose the movement in the pensions liability
£60,000	Note 12 – Capital Commitments Building works to be increased from £729,000 to £789,000. Total Capital Commitments to increase from £882,000 to £942,000.	To correctly disclose the capital commitments as at 31/3/2023.

£525,000	<p>Note 19b - Capital Adjustment Account (CAA)</p> <p>Capital grants & contributions credited to the CIES that have been applied to capital financing: Reduced from (£741,000) to (£216,000)</p> <p>Capital expenditure charged against the general fund/earmarked reserves: Increase from £0 to (£525,000)</p>	To ensure movements in the CAA are correctly analysed in the note
£2,146	<p>Note 24 – Officers remuneration</p> <p>Assistant Chief Officer (left 28 February 2023) – benefits in kind: increased from £3,048 to £5,194</p>	To correct the value of benefit in kind disclosed
Disclosure only	<p>Note 24 – Officers remuneration: remuneration band table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £60,000 - £64,999: Amend number officers from 5 to 9. - £65,000 - £69,999: Amend number officers from 6 to 7. - £70,000 - £74,999 Amend number officers from 3 to 0. - £75,000 - £79,999: Amend number officers from 2 to 4. 	To correct the numbers of officers in the salary bandings over £60,000
£6,742	<p>Note 24 – Officers remuneration: Remuneration ratio</p> <p>Amend the Chief Fire Officer salary from</p>	To correct the chief officer salary used in the remuneration ratio calculation

	£145,494 to £138,685 which reduces the remuneration ratio from 4.22 to 4.02.	
Disclosure only	Note 28 – Related parties Include additional context regarding related parties and, including amounts payable to / receivable by related parties	To comply with CIPFA's requirements regarding related party disclosures.
Disclosure only	Note 31 - Defined Benefit pension schemes Provide narrative regarding the McCloud immediate detriment position	To provide the reader of the accounts with understanding of the Authority's position regarding immediate detriment cases.
Disclosure only	Note 32 - Financial instruments Quantitative data included to disclose sensitivity analysis of the Authority's exposure market risk.	To ensure disclosure complies with the CIPFA Code of Practice
Various: other presentational changes to supporting notes	A number of other narrative, presentational and minor amendments were made to supporting disclosure notes.	To ensure that all disclosures are accurately presented.



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