

Independent auditor's report to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex Group and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) for Essex (the 'Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner') and its subsidiary the Chief Constable for Essex (the 'group') for the year ended 31 March 2020 which comprise the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex Group, the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex, the Balance Sheet for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex Group and the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex, the Cash Flow Statement for the PFCC for Essex Group, the Cash Flow Statement for the PFCC, the Movement in Reserves Statement for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex Group, the Movement in Reserves Statement for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and include the Police Officer Pension Fund financial statements comprising the Police Officer Pension Fund Account. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20.

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the group and of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner as at 31 March 2020 and of the group's expenditure and income and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements' section of our report. We are independent of the group and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

The impact of macro-economic uncertainties on our audit

Our audit of the financial statements requires us to obtain an understanding of all relevant uncertainties, including those arising as a consequence of the effects of macro-economic uncertainties such as Covid-19 and Brexit. All audits assess and challenge the reasonableness of estimates made by the Head of Finance and the related disclosures and the appropriateness of the going concern basis of preparation of the financial statements. All of these depend on assessments of the future economic environment and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and group's future operational arrangements.

Covid-19 and Brexit are amongst the most significant economic events currently faced by the UK, and at the date of this report their effects are subject to unprecedented levels of uncertainty, with the full range of possible outcomes and their impacts unknown. We applied a standardised firm-wide approach in response to these uncertainties when assessing the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and group's future operational arrangements. However, no audit should be expected to predict the unknowable factors or all possible future implications for an authority associated with these particular events.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the Head of Finance's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the Head of Finance has not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the group's or the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

In our evaluation of the Head of Finance's conclusions, and in accordance with the expectation set out within the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20 that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's financial statements shall be prepared on a going concern basis, we considered the risks associated with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's and group's operating activities, including effects arising from macro-economic uncertainties such as Covid-19 and Brexit. We analysed how those risks might affect the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's and group's financial resources or ability to continue operations over the period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue. In accordance with the above, we have nothing to report in these respects.

However, as we cannot predict all future events or conditions and as subsequent events may result in outcomes that are inconsistent with judgements that were reasonable at the time they were made, the absence of reference to a material uncertainty in this auditor's report is not a guarantee that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner or group will continue in operation.

Emphasis of Matter – effects of Covid-19 on the valuation of land and buildings and the local government pension scheme

We draw attention to Note 6 of the financial statements, which describes the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the valuation of the group land and buildings as at 31 March 2020. As disclosed in Note 6 to the financial statements, the outbreak of Covid-19 has impacted both global finances and market activity. The PFCC's valuers have stated that the valuations completed in 2019/20 have been undertaken on the basis of 'material valuation uncertainty' as per VPS3 and VPGA10 of the RICS Red Book Global. Consequently, less certainty – and a higher degree of caution – should be attached to the 2019/20 valuations than would normally be the case. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

We further draw attention to Note 6 of the financial statements, which also describes the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the valuation of the local government pension scheme's direct property investments as at 31 March 2020. As disclosed in Note 6 to the financial statements, the outbreak of Covid-19 has impacted both global finances and market activity. The actuary's valuer has stated that the 2019/20 year end valuations of scheme assets have been reported on the basis of 'material valuation uncertainty' per VPGA10 of the RICS Red Book Global. Consequently, less certainty – and a higher degree of caution – should be attached to the 2019/20 valuations than would normally be the case. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Other information

The Head of Finance is responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the Statement of Accounts, other than the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and group financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge of the group and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Other information we are required to report on by exception under the Code of Audit Practice

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the Code of Audit Practice) we are required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with the 'delivering good governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition' published by CIPFA and SOLACE or is misleading or inconsistent with the information of which we are aware from our audit. We are not required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement addresses all risks and controls or that risks are satisfactorily addressed by internal controls.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matter required by the Code of Audit Practice

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit of the financial statements and our knowledge of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner gained through our work in relation to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, the other information published together with the financial statements in the Statement of Accounts for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to report to you if:

- we issue a report in the public interest under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make a written recommendation to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit.

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matters.

Responsibilities of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex and the Head of Finance to the PFCC for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. That officer is the Head of Finance to the PFCC. The Head of Finance to the PFCC is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which includes the financial statements, in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Head of Finance to the PFCC determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the Head of Finance to the PFCC is responsible for assessing the group's and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner'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 there is an intention by government that the services provided by the group or the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner will no longer be provided.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is Those Charged with Governance. Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the financial reporting process.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our 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 our 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.

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

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

Conclusion

On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in April 2020, we are satisfied that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020.

Responsibilities of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner 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 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner'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 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner 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 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner'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, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in April 2020, as to whether in all significant respects the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner 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 in satisfying ourselves whether the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020.

We planned our work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice. Based on our risk assessment, we undertook such work as we considered necessary to be satisfied that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner 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 the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex Group and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner those matters we are required to state to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner 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 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Paul Grady

Paul Grady
Key Audit Partner

for and on behalf of Grant Thornton UK LLP, Local Auditor

London

17 November 2020