

Independent auditor's report to the Members of Sevenoaks District Council

In our auditor's report issued on 27 February 2025, we explained that we could not formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate for Sevenoaks District Council ('the Authority') for the year ended 31 March 2024 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice, until we had:

- completed the work necessary in relation to consolidation returns, including Whole of Government Accounts (WGA), and the National Audit Office (NAO) had concluded their work in respect of WGA for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The NAO has now concluded their work in respect of WGA for the year ended 31 March 2024 and confirmed that audit certificates that are open in relation to this can be issued. We are therefore satisfied all audit work necessary has been completed.

Disclaimer of opinion

In our auditor's report for the year ended 31 March 2024 issued on 27 February 2025 we reported that, we do not express an opinion on the accompanying financial statements of the Authority. Because of the significant matters described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion of our auditor's report, we were unable to obtain sufficient and appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion on the financial statements.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

In our auditor's report for the year ended 31 March 2024 issued on 27 February 2025 we reported that we have nothing to report in respect of whether the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2024 except on:

- On the 18 February 2025 we identified a significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements for governance. The Council's internal audit service has experienced ongoing delays in planned coverage since year ended 31 March 2023, attributed to several vacancies within the internal audit team despite active recruitment efforts. This prolonged shortfall in delivering original audit plans and resourcing challenges poses significant weakness in the Council arrangements.

We therefore issued the following key recommendations:

- The Council needs to place an urgent and significant focus on taking action to address the resourcing issues within the internal audit service to satisfy itself that there is adequate capacity to fulfil planned internal audit activity to a sufficient level that an internal audit opinion can be provided for 2024/25.
- The Council should undertake a full evaluation of its current internal audit service to ensure that arrangements are optimal in the medium to long term.
- On the 18 February 2025 we identified a second significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements for governance. Suspected irregularities were identified by the Council within a specific area of Council expenditure. Upon discovery, the Council took appropriate actions and directed its internal audit service to investigate, which finalised recommendations for Council to enhance its control environment. However, the Council have not fully implemented these recommendations within a timely period during the year ended 31 March 2024. Additionally, it has been identified that officers of the Council have not received the required formal training for counter fraud awareness. We have therefore concluded that there is a significant weakness in arrangements.

We therefore issued the following key recommendations:

- The Council should prioritise the implementation of all recommendations from the internal audit services. Evidence of their implementation should be provided to internal audit, and a report should be submitted to the appropriate governance function.
- The Council should secure external specialist resource to provide a further assessment into the control environment (assessed by Internal Audit) to identify whether they are adequate, and to provide assurance of the control environment to members.
- The Council's should embed and strengthen a fraud prevention culture within the organisation by a programme of officer training.

No other matters have come to our attention since that date that would have resulted in any additional exception reporting on the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Responsibilities of the Authority

The Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Auditor's responsibilities for the review of the Authority'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 Authority 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 Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

We undertake our review in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2024. This guidance sets out the arrangements that fall within the scope of 'proper arrangements'. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code of Audit Practice requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability: how the Authority plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance: how the Authority ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the Authority uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

We document our understanding of the arrangements the Authority has in place for each of these three specified reporting criteria, gathering sufficient evidence to support our risk assessment and commentary in our Auditor's Annual Report. In undertaking our work, we consider whether there is evidence to suggest that there are significant weaknesses in arrangements.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – Audit certificate

We certify that we have completed the audit of Sevenoaks District Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 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 Members of the Authority, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and as set out in paragraph 44 of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies published by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Authority's Members those matters we are required to state to them 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 Authority and the Authority's Members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Parris Williams

Parris Williams, Key Audit Partner

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

London

3 November 2025