Certification of Grant Returns 2023-24 and 2024-25 - Monmouthshire County Council

Audit years: 2023-24 and 2024-25

Date issued: August 2026

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Summary of certification work

1 Under Paragraph 20 of Schedule 8 to the Government of Wales Act 2006 the Auditor General shall, if required by a local government or other grant-receiving body, make arrangements for certifying grant returns.

2 We have completed our certification work upon the Council's grant returns for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years and this report summarises the outcomes of this work.

3 This report is being issued later to the Council than would be normally the case and also covers two years of certification work. This is because audit of the Housing Benefit returns for 2023-24 and 2024-25 could not be concluded until recently, and so full and complete details of grant activity for both years could not be presented until now.

4 **Exhibit 1** provides a summary of this certification work.

Exhibit 1 – High Level Summary of our grants certification work for 2023-24 and 2024-25

Grants and returns certified	As appointed auditors of the Council, we were required to certify a number of the Council's grant returns for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years: • 2023-24: we certified 5 grant returns with a total value of £51,098,565. • 2024-25: we certified 5 grant returns with a total value of £54,731,966.

Certification results	The final outcomes of our certification work were as follows: • 2023-24: 3 returns were issued with a qualified certificate and 2 were unqualified. • 2024-25: 3 returns were issued a qualified certificate and 2 were unqualified.
Audit adjustments	Some adjustments were required to the returns as a result of our certification work: • 2023-24: 3 returns were subject to amendment. • 2024-25: 2 returns were subject to amendment.
Fees	The overall fees charged for the certification work was: • 2023-24: £60,474 • 2024-25: £54,673

5 Further detail is provided below on the outcomes of our certification work for both 2023-24 (**Exhibit 2**) and 2024-25 (**Exhibit 4**) for each grant return, highlighting where audit amendments were required and whether the return was qualified.

6 A qualification means that issues were identified concerning the Council's compliance with the scheme's requirements, as set by the grant paying body, that could not be resolved through adjusting the return. In these circumstances, it is possible that the relevant grant paying body will require further information from the Council to satisfy itself that the full amounts of grant claimed are appropriate.

7 A detailed breakdown of the audit fees for each return certified is provided at **Exhibit 6** at page 14.

Exhibit 2: Summary of certification work outcomes for 2023-24

We were required to certify 5 of the Council's returns for the 2023-24 financial year, of these:

- 3 were qualified
- 3 were amended

Grants and returns	Qualified certificate?	Was the return adjusted?	Adjustment value
National Non-Domestic Rates Return	Yes	No	-
Teachers' Pensions Return	Yes	Yes	£1,894
Housing Benefit Subsidy	Yes	Yes	£2,795
Section 33 Pooled Budget	No	Yes	£1,000
Health Act S28a and 28b Money transfer	No	No	-

Exhibit 3 summarises the key issues relating to the reasons for each of the adjustments or qualifications highlighted above.

Exhibit 3: Detailed summary of the outcome of our certification work on each of the 2023-24 returns

Return	Findings	Amendment (£)
National Non-Domestic Rates	For properties claiming empty property relief we are required to obtain evidence that inspections or spot-checks have been undertaken by the Council. We asked for evidence of the empty property inspection for a sample of properties, of which 4 properties had no evidence of a spot-check or inspection by the Council, and instead the Council had relied on the owners' statements that the properties were empty. Our findings were reported to Welsh Government in a qualification letter but no amendment to the claim was required.	Nil
Teachers' Pensions	We made a number of amendments to the claim form for refunds and contribution tiers and these were detailed in the qualification letter accompanying the revised claim form as follows:	A £1,894 classification adjustment was required between lines on the return –

	• Refunds of £1,001 were mis-classified within the claim form. They were included in the current year contributions lines of claim form instead of the line for refunds made in prior years. • Testing found 2 employees who were included within the wrong 'Tier' in the claim form – although the pension contributions had been calculated correctly. The tiers were amended by £893 to correct the misclassification. The above amendments did not affect the overall contributions or overall balance on the claim form.	no overall impact on net position.
Housing Benefit Subsidy	We identified a number of issues from our testing of the 2023-24 housing benefit subsidy claim: • 5 cases where the Bed & Breakfast rate used to calculate subsidy differed to the invoice from the provider of the accommodation, or other supporting documentation. These were all identified as overpayments and as a result extended testing was undertaken on an additional 40 cases, of which 20 further cases where identified. This resulted in overpayments of benefit ranging from £18 to £2,930, at an aggregate total of £10,014. • 1 case where the incorrect number of bedrooms had been used when determining the Local Housing Allowance rate used to classify expenditure for subsidy purposes. Whilst there was no overclaim of subsidy, as this type of error could lead to an overclaim of subsidy additional testing was carried out. No further issues were identified.	Increase in subsidy of £2,795

	• 3 cases where an underpayment of benefit occurred as a result of rent not being uplifted appropriately. We were satisfied that this impacted only a small number of cases where there are multiple entries for one address and that this issue will only result in underpayment of benefit.	
Section 33 Pooled Budget Return	A minor amendment of £1,000 was made to correct the budget figure recorded upon the claim form. This had no impact on the total actual expenditure reported.	£1,000
Health Act S28a and 28b Money Transfer return	There were no amendments or qualifications arising from our certification work.	Nil

Exhibit 4: Summary of certification work outcomes for 2024-25

We were required to certify 5 of the Council's returns for the 2024-25 financial year, of these:

- 3 were qualified
- 2 were amended

Grants and returns	Qualified certificate?	Was the return adjusted?	Adjustment value
National Non-Domestic Rates Return	Yes	Yes	£155,399
Teachers' Pensions Return	No	No	-
Housing Benefit Subsidy	Yes	Yes	£1,323
Section 33 Pooled Budget	Yes	No	-
Health Act S28a and 28b Money transfer	No	No	-

Exhibit 5 provides more information relating to the reasons for each of the adjustments or qualifications highlighted above.

Exhibit 5: Detailed summary of the outcome of our certification work on each of the 2024-25 returns

Return	Findings	Amendment (£)
National Non-Domestic Rates	Following the qualification of the 2023-24 return, we were required to follow up upon on the arrangements that the Council had in place to ensure that properties awarded empty property relief were unoccupied. We found that the Council did not have documented arrangements in place during 2024/25 but did provide evidence of inspection and/or photographic evidence provided by the occupier for all but one of the samples tested. We were also provided with a copy of the empty property relief policy that was introduced during the 2025/26 financial year. Our findings were reported to Welsh Government in a qualification letter but no amendment to the claim was required for this issue. In addition, the claim form was amended to correct a misclassification of expenditure of £155,399 between two lines on the claim form. There was no impact on the overall values reported within the return.	Nil overall effect – the only amendment was to correct a misclassification of £155,399 between different areas of the return
Teachers' Pensions	No issues reported or amendments made.	Nil

Housing Benefit Subsidy	We identified a number of issues from our testing of the 2024-25 housing benefit subsidy claim. The most significant findings are as follows: • 10 cases where the Bed & Breakfast rates used to calculate subsidy differed to the invoices from the provider of the accommodation, or other supporting documentation. These resulted in both under and overpayments and additional testing was carried out. • 1 case where the incorrect number of bedrooms had been used when determining the LHA rate. This resulted in an underclaim of subsidy and additional testing was completed. The subsidy form was subject to amendment and a qualification letter communicating these findings, together with some additional issues, was issued to the DWP. The claim form was also subject to a small amendment as a result of our work.	The claim form was amended by £1,323 but there was no change to the overall level of subsidy received by the Council
Section 33 Pooled Budget	The year-end pooled budget position reported an underspend of £48,995 against the agreed budget. Whilst the Council informed us that the final expenditure/ funding position was confirmed by pooled budget partners at a meeting of the 'Integrated Services Partnership Board' meeting, formal minutes evidencing this approval could not be provided to us. Our findings were reported to Welsh Government and Pool partners in a qualification letter but no amendment to the claim was required.	Nil
Health Act S28a and 28b Money Transfer	There were no amendments or qualifications arising from our work.	Nil

Fees

8 Our certification work is charged on a per diem basis and so reflects the actual cost of completing the work. **Exhibit 6** below provides a breakdown of the fees charged for each return that we reviewed and certified.

Exhibit 6 – Fee Summary

Claim/Return	2023-24 (£)	2024-25 (£)
Housing Benefit	45,711	43,444
Section 33 NHS (Wales) Act 2006 Pooled Budget	1,910	2,120
Health Act S28a and 28b Money transfer	3,797	3,968
National Non-Domestic Rates Return	4,923	3,577
Teachers' Pension Return	4,133	1,564
Total fee	**60,474**	**54,673**

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