

# STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTING POLICIES

## 1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Statement of Accounts has been prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in Great Britain 2004. The Code of Practice has been developed by the CIPFA/LASAAC Joint Committee in accordance with the Accounting Standards Board's code of practice for the development of Statements of Recommended Accounting Practice (SORPs).

The Code of Practice is based on approved accounting standards and the Urgent Issue Task Force's Abstracts extant at 30 September 2002, except where these are inconsistent with specific statutory requirements, and supersedes previous Codes of Practice. The Code of Practice constitutes a 'proper accounting practice' under the terms of section 66(4) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

This excludes expenditure on routine repairs and maintenance of fixed assets, which is charged direct to service revenue accounts.

## 2. FIXED ASSETS

All expenditure on the acquisition, creation or enhancement of fixed assets is capitalised on an accruals basis in the accounts. Expenditure on fixed assets is capitalised, provided that the fixed asset yields benefits to the authority and the services it provides for more than one year. This excludes expenditure on routine repairs and maintenance of fixed assets, which is charged direct to service revenue accounts.

Fixed assets were originally valued and recorded in the accounts as at 1 April 1994. These valuations were based upon certificates issued by the Council's Chief Valuer and Estates Surveyor. Additions since that date are included in the accounts at cost. Capitalised expenditure that does not add value to the asset has been debited to the fixed asset restatement reserve. The Council has a rolling programme of revaluations under which all assets will be revalued over five years. Where a loss in value occurs as a result of physical damage or similar impairment, this is reflected in an increased charge to the service revenue account. A loss in value from other impairments, such as obsolescence or decline in Market value, is taken to the fixed asset restatement reserve.

Land, operational properties and other operational assets are included in the balance sheet at the lower of net current replacement cost and net realisable value in existing use. Investment properties are included in the balance sheet at the lower of net current replacement cost and net realisable value (open market value). Infrastructure assets, community assets and assets that are surplus to requirements are included in the balance sheet at written down historical cost. Council dwellings have been included in the balance sheet at their open market value in existing use.

Where assets are acquired under leases, the leasing rentals payable are charged to revenue. The cost of assets and the related liability for future rentals payable are not shown in the balance sheet but are disclosed in the notes. (See Note 4, Page 14).

Where a fixed asset has been disposed of, income derived is credited to the usable capital receipts reserve, and accounted for on an accruals basis. Where applicable, the proportion reserved for the repayment of external loans is credited to the capital financing reserve. Upon disposal, the net book value of the asset is written off against the fixed asset restatement account. (See Note 10, Page 25).

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### **3. DEPRECIATION**

In accordance with the provisions of FRS15, assets are depreciated on a straight-line basis over their useful economic life. The only general exceptions to this are freehold land and non-operational investment properties. Subsequent expenditure on a fixed asset that maintains or enhances the previously assessed standard of performance of the asset does not negate the need to charge depreciation.

### **4. INTANGIBLE ASSETS**

Intangible Assets are payments of a capital nature where no fixed asset is created but which are expected to yield future economic benefits to the council. Previously improvement and reinstatement grants were included as deferred charges however they do not fall into the category of intangible assets and therefore they have been written out of the accounts. A prior period adjustment has been made to reflect this change of accounting treatment.

### **5. BASIS OF CHARGES FOR CAPITAL**

Asset charges are made to users at the minimum level required under the Accounting Code of Practice. Such charges cover the annual provision for depreciation, where appropriate, plus a capital financing charge determined by applying a specified notional rate of interest to the net amount at which the asset is included in the balance sheet. Currently this rate is 3.5%. The charge met by the Housing Revenue Account is an amount determined by statutory provision.

External interest payable and the provision for depreciation are charged to the asset management revenue account. This account is also credited with the capital charges charged to services. Capital charges therefore have no impact on the amounts the Council needs to raise from local taxation or tenants rents.

Amounts set aside from revenue:

- to repay external loans
- to finance capital spending, or
- as transfers to other earmarked reserves

are disclosed as appropriations, within the Consolidated Revenue Account, after net operating expenditure.

### **6. CAPITAL EXPENDITURE CHARGED TO REVENUE**

The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 allows local authorities to finance an unlimited amount of capital expenditure through its revenue accounts. The Council's policy has been to finance a significant amount of Housing Revenue Account capital expenditure in this way.

### **7. INVESTMENTS**

Investments are shown in the Consolidated Balance Sheet at cost.

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### **8. STOCKS AND STORES**

Separate stores are maintained in the Fleet Operations and Building Maintenance Services and Leisure Centres. Stores are valued in the accounts at the lower of cost or net realisable value.

### **9. DEBTORS AND CREDITORS**

The revenue and capital accounts of the Council are maintained on an accruals basis in accordance with the Code of Practice and SSAP 2. That is, sums due to or from the Council during the year are included whether or not the cash has actually been received or paid in the year. An exception to this principle relates to electricity and similar periodic receipts and payments which are charged at the date or meter reading rather than being apportioned between financial years. This policy is consistently applied each year and therefore does not have a material effect on the year's accounts.

The recoverability of the Authority's General Fund debts is considered each year through an analysis by age and type of debts outstanding at 31 March. An appropriate provision is made for any bad debts / losses that are anticipated. An analysis of size and type of debts outstanding at 31 March on the Housing Revenue Account has also been undertaken in accordance with the Housing Revenue Accounts (Arrears of Rent and Charges) Directions 1990.

### **10. GOVERNMENT GRANTS**

Where the acquisition of a fixed asset is financed either wholly or in part by a government grant or other capital contribution, the amount of the grant or contribution is credited initially to the Government Grants Deferred Account. Amounts are released to the Asset Management Revenue Account over the useful life of the asset, to match the depreciation of the asset to which it relates. (See Note 8, Page 24.) Grants and contributions towards deferred charges are written out directly against the relevant deferred charge within the revenue account. Grants and subsidies have been credited to the appropriate revenue and capital accounts and accruals have been made for balances known to be receivable for the year to 31 March 2005.

### **11. COST OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND SERVICE ADMINISTRATION**

Administrative expenses are allocated over all services and to all users including services to the public, trading undertakings, capital accounts and services provided for other bodies and other support services, on a consistent basis applicable to the service provided, i.e. actual time spent by staff, area occupied, per capita, actual use etc.

### **12. PROVISIONS**

The Council sets aside provisions for specific future expenses or losses, which are likely or certain to be incurred, but uncertain as to the amount or the dates on which they will arise. There are two provisions currently charged to the Council's revenue accounts. These being the provision for bad and doubtful debts (See also Note 4, Page 23), and a provision for the settlement of the Loughton Leisure Centre contract.

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### **13. RESERVES**

The Council has set aside certain revenue and capital amounts as earmarked reserves. They include reserves for the District Development Fund, pensions deficit, debenture, insurance, housing repairs, on-street parking, building control and future museum acquisitions. All other fund balances represent working balances for the purpose of the specific fund and are made up of accumulated surpluses and deficits derived over a period of time. All fund balances and reserves are reviewed periodically as to their size and appropriateness.

From 1 April 1994, the introduction of the system of capital accounting has required the establishment of two new capital reserve accounts in the consolidated balance sheet: the fixed assets restatement reserve, which represents the balance of the surplus or deficits arising on the periodic revaluation of fixed assets; and the capital financing reserve, which represents amounts set aside from revenue resources or capital receipts and grants to finance expenditure on fixed assets or for the repayment of external loans. (See also Notes 10/11/14/15, Pages 25/26/28/29)

### **14. PENSION COSTS**

From 1 April 2003 accounting policies relating to pensions represent a change to those applied in previous years. Previous policy was to recognise liabilities in relation to retirement benefits only when employer's contributions became payable to the pension fund or payments fell due to the pensioners for which the council was directly responsible. The new policies better reflect the commitment in the long term to increase contributions to make up any shortfall in attributable net assets in the pension fund.

The change has had the following effects on the results of the prior and current periods.

- The overall amount to be met from Government grants and local taxation has remained unchanged, but the costs disclosed for individual services are 2.24% lower after the replacement of employer's contributions by current service costs and Net Operating Expenditure is 2.65% lower than it would otherwise have been.
- The requirement to recognise the net pensions liability in the balance sheet has reduced the reported net worth of the authority by 5.21%

### **15. INTERNAL INTEREST**

Interest is credited to the Housing Revenue Account based in the level of its fund balances. The amounts are calculated using the average rate of interest on approved investments, as prescribed in the Housing Revenue Account Item 8 Credit and Item 8 Debit (general) Determinations 2004/05.