

Report to Audit Committee

Audit Progress Report

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Purpose of Report

Attached to this report is the Audit Progress Report produced by our external auditors.

Executive Summary

This report is a summary of progress on external audit matters and national publications.

Recommendations

That Members of the Audit Committee note the Audit Progress Report.

Audit Progress Report

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

November 2019





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1. AUDIT PROGRESS

Purpose of this report

This report provides the Audit Committee with an update on progress in delivering our responsibilities as your external auditors.

Audit progress

Since the Committee last met we have completed our work on the Council's Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) return as required by the National Audit Office. We issued our unqualified conclusion on the Council's WGA submission on 13 September 2019.

This work has completed our 2018/19 audit work, and we would like to thank the Council officers for their co-operation and support in assisting us to complete the audit. The Committee should note that we have also now issued our Audit Certificate, formally closing the 2018/19 audit.

We have had routine liaison meetings with Council officers, and carried out a comprehensive debrief of the 2018/19 audit, to ensure that both we and the Council continually improve the process to deliver an even more smooth audit in 2019/20.

Our audit planning for the 2019/20 audit has commenced with planning discussions with senior officers to identify key significant risks for that audit. We will issue our Audit Strategy Memorandum in time for the January 2020 Audit Committee.

2. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

	Publication/update	Key points	Page
National Audit Office (NAO)			
1	New Code of Audit Practice 2020/21 – Consultation	Consultation process underway for the new Code of Audit Practice that will apply for 2020/21 audits	5
2	Whole of Government Accounts 2017/18	NAO has provided a qualified opinion on the 2017/18 Whole of Government Accounts	5
Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA)			
3	Local audit quality forum June 2019 slides	Slides from PSAA event	6
4	Local Government audit opinions issued by 31 July 2019	Press release relating to the increase in delays in issuing audit opinions	6
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)			
5	A practical guide for Local Authorities on Income Generation (2019 edition)	Guidance to assist Councils	7
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)			
6	Review of local authority financial reporting and external audit	Announcement of a wide ranging review of financial reporting and external audit in the sector	8
7	The government's response to the report on Local Government Finance and the 2019 Spending Review	Includes consideration of the to review local government audit (which is due to report by the end of 2019).	
Mazars			
8	Rethinking Social Value: Unlocking Resources to Improve Lives	Sector-leading think piece on Social Value	9

2. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS – NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

1. New Code of Audit Practice 2020/21 – Consultation, September 2019

Schedule 6 of the Act requires that the Code be reviewed, and revisions considered at least every five years. The current Code came into force on 1 April 2015, and the maximum five-year lifespan of the Code means it now needs to be reviewed and a new Code laid in Parliament in time for it to come in to force no later than 1 April 2020.

The consultation is taking place in two stages. The first has concluded and the second is currently underway with a deadline for responses of 22 November 2019. The NAO plans to finalise the Code by the end of 2019, ready to be laid in Parliament early in 2020. The new Code will apply from audits of local bodies' 2020/21 financial statements onwards.

The first stage of the consultation showed broad support for maintaining the principles-based nature of the Code, being the wider scope of public audit, independence and public reporting. However the responses highlighted that this should be supported by more detailed sector-specific guidance.

The second stage of the consultation is focusing on the text of the draft Code. In particular there are proposed changes to the way auditors report on arrangements to deliver value for money in the use of resources.

The Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014 places a specific duty on the local auditor to be satisfied whether the body they are auditing has proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. In the current Code, this is referred to as work on arrangements to secure value for money.

Currently, the local auditor reports against a single overall criterion as to whether: "In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people." This is known as the value for money conclusion and is included in the Auditor Report included in Council's financial statements.

The consultation draft Code proposes changes to this reporting, with a more detailed commentary on the value for money arrangements being included in a new 'Auditor's Annual Report'.

Should the Council wish to respond to the consultation, the details are provided in the link below.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/code-of-audit-practice-consultation/#>

2. Whole of Government Accounts 2017/18, May 2019

The Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) consolidates the accounts of over 8,000 bodies across the public sector, including central and local government and public corporations such as the Bank of England, to produce an accounts-based picture of the UK's public finances. It sets out what the government receives, pays, owns and owes.

The headline results in WGA 2017/18 show income of £760.9 billion (2016/17 £720.8 billion), expenditure of £814.8 billion (2016/17 £760.7 billion). After financing costs are taken into account, the net expenditure for WGA is £212.4 billion (2016/17 £97.8 billion). On the Statement of Financial Position, WGA shows total assets of £2,013.8 billion (2016/17 £1,903.0 billion), and liabilities of £4,579.2 billion (2016/17 £4,323.7 billion).

The National Audit Office issued their Audit Report on the 2017/18 WGA, and have qualified their opinion as a result of qualifications in underlying accounts, and as a result of issues relating to the boundary, non-coterminous year ends, and accounting policies applied by the Treasury when carrying out the WGA consolidation.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/whole-of-government-accounts-2017-18/>

2. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS – PUBLIC SECTOR AUDIT APPOINTMENTS LTD

3. Local audit quality forum June 2019 slides, June 2019

The local audit quality forum meeting place in which all of the parties which share a responsibility for audit quality can share experiences and good practice. The June 2019 slides are now available. The forum addressed 'practical help for Audit Committees', including the following:

- what should the Audit Committee look for in the financial statements?
- what is it like being an Audit Committee Chair;
- support for Audit Committees from CIPFA;
- how can Internal Audit help the Audit Committee to deliver its remit;
- support from the Local Government Association for Audit Committees; and
- new Code of Audit Practice consultation.

The next Forum meeting is in November 2019. Local bodies, including Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, who have opted into PSAA's national scheme are entitled to attend LAQF events free of charge (up to two delegates per body).

<https://www.psa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/10-07-19-LAQF-Presentation-Slides.pdf>

4. Local Government audit opinions issued by 31 July 2019, August 2019

PSAA issued a press release after the end of the 2018/19 audit deadline to highlight the increase in the number of audit opinions that were not available by 31 July 2019. Reporting an increase in the number of opinions not available, the press release highlights the factors that have driven the increase in delays.

<https://www.psa.co.uk/2019/08/news-release-local-government-audit-opinions-delivered-by-31-july-2019/>

2. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS – CIPFA

5. A practical guide for Local Authorities on Income Generation (2019 edition), CIPFA, July 2019

CIPFA's revised income generation guide reflects on the income generation issues of 2019 and the changes that are being made.

The issues that are examined in this publication include:

- the need for thorough testing and business cases to robustly assess income proposals;
- the impact of the 2018 MHCLG Statutory Investment Guidance; and
- how the pattern of local authority income is changing.

The guide will allow councils to maximise their income potential against a backdrop of Brexit uncertainties and other economic changes. With more authorities relying on income generation to balance their budgets, the guide can help finance staff stand at arms-length to ensure councils act prudently.

The publication also has practical guidance on income generation for different service areas and there is a full coverage of discretionary charging rules.

<https://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/publications/a/a-practical-guide-for-local-authorities-on-income-generation-2019-edition>

2. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS – MHCLG

6. Review of local authority financial reporting and external audit, September 2019

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced in September that they had appointed Sir Tony Redmond to conduct a review of the arrangements in place to support the transparency and quality of local authority financial reporting and external audit including those introduced by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. The review will not look at broader issues of local authority finances and sustainability.

The review will examine the existing purpose, scope and quality of statutory audits of local authorities in England and the supporting regulatory framework to in order to determine:

- Whether the audit and related regulatory framework for local authorities in England is operating in line with the policy intent set out in the Act and the related impact assessment;
- Whether the reforms have improved the effectiveness of the control and governance framework along with the transparency of financial information presented by councils;
- Whether the current statutory framework for local authority financial reporting supports the transparent disclosure of financial performance and enables users of the accounts to hold local authorities to account; and
- To make recommendations on how far the process, products and framework may need to improve and evolve to meet the needs of local residents and local taxpayers, and the wider public interest.

As part of the review, MHCLG have issued a “Call for Views” which is linked below, along with the review’s terms of reference.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-local-authority-financial-reporting-and-external-audit-terms-of-reference>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-local-authority-financial-reporting-and-external-audit-call-for-views>

7. The government’s response to the report on Local Government Finance and the 2019 Spending Review, October 2019

The government has responded to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee report on Local Government Finance and the 2019 Spending Review. In the report, the government covers the decision to undertake a review of local government audit. The government also responds to several other recommendations from the Select Committee’s original report, including:

- developing a more consistent approach to the collection and monitoring of comparative data about councils’ performance, efficiency and financial sustainability;
- the need for MHCLG, working with HM Treasury and other departments, to clearly set out what tasks are expected of local government and how much funding it requires;
- the need for increased adult social care funding;
- the need for MHCLG and HM Treasury to provide a multi-year settlement for local government which runs for one year beyond the Spending Review period – similar to the approach that is currently used for Departmental capital budgets; and
- the need for reforms and substantial changes to the business rate retention system.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-finance-and-the-2019-spending-review-response-to-the-select-committee-report>

2. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS – MAZARS

8. Rethinking Social Value: Unlocking Resources to Improve Lives, June 2019

Mazars have issued a sector leading think piece on Social Value.

This report utilises the knowledge and understanding we have access to as one of the largest auditors of the wider public sector, with involvement across the public sector.

The report reflects views from our clients in the public and not-for-profit sectors on how social value is defined, delivered and its impact on communities. We are pleased to share the results of this research in our brand new report: *'Rethinking social value: unlocking resources to improve lives'*.

The report focuses on:

- the opportunities around social value;
- leadership, communication, and building support;
- case studies highlighting innovative approaches in charities, not-for-profits and private sector partnerships; and
- how to measure the impact of social value.

<https://www.mazars.co.uk/Home/Industries/Public-Services/Public-Services-Insights/Rethinking-Social-Value>

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