

# Audit Committee Update for Torbay Council

**Year ended 31 March 2014**

25 June 2014

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# Introduction

This paper provides the Audit Committee with a report on progress in delivering our responsibilities as your external auditors. The paper also includes:

- a summary of emerging national issues and developments that may be relevant to you; and
- a number of challenge questions in respect of these emerging issues which the Committee may wish to consider.

Members of the Audit Committee can find further useful material on our website [www.grant-thornton.co.uk](http://www.grant-thornton.co.uk), where we have a section dedicated to our work in the public sector (<http://www.grant-thornton.co.uk/en/Services/Public-Sector/>). Here you can download copies of our publications including:

- Working in tandem, local government governance review 2014, our third annual review, assessing local authority governance, highlighting areas for improvement and posing questions to help assess the strength of current arrangements
- 2016 tipping point? Challenging the current, summary findings from our third year of financial health checks of English local authorities
- Local Government Pension Schemes Governance Review, a review of current practice, best case examples and useful questions to assess governance strengths

If you would like further information on any items in this briefing, or would like to register with Grant Thornton to receive regular email updates on issues that are of interest to you, please contact either your Engagement Lead or Audit Manager.

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# Progress at 25 June 2014

Work	Planned date	Complete?	Comments
<p><b>2013-14 Accounts Audit Plan</b> We are required to issue a detailed accounts audit plan to the Council setting out our proposed approach in order to give an opinion on the Council's 2013-14 financial statements.</p>	February/March 2014	Yes	The Audit Plan is included on the agenda of this meeting.
<p><b>Interim accounts audit</b> Our interim fieldwork visit includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• updating our review of the Council's control environment</li> <li>• updating our understanding of financial systems</li> <li>• review of Internal Audit reports on core financial systems</li> <li>• early work on emerging accounting issues</li> <li>• early substantive testing</li> <li>• proposed Value for Money conclusion.</li> </ul>	February/March 2014	Yes	The Interim accounts audit is complete and any findings from the interim audit are included in the Audit Plan.
<p><b>2013-14 final accounts audit</b> Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• audit of the 2013-14 financial statements</li> <li>• proposed opinion on the Council's accounts</li> <li>• proposed Value for Money conclusion.</li> </ul>	June - August 2014	No	Our final accounts audit started on 16 June 2014.

# Progress at 25 June 2014

Work	Planned date	Complete?	Comments
<b>Value for Money (VfM) conclusion</b> The scope of our work to inform the 2013/14 VfM conclusion comprises: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• securing financial resilience; and</li><li>• challenging how it secures economy, efficiency and effectiveness</li></ul>	January to August 2014	No	Like many other public bodies, our initial risk assessment identified the financial resilience of the Council as the only risk. The Audit Plan sets out the key areas we will be covering as part of our VfM work.
<b>Grant claims and certification</b> The only claim requiring certification under the Audit Commission arrangements will be the housing benefit subsidy for 2013/14.	June – November 2014	Not yet due	The Certification work plan is included on the agenda.

# Emerging issues and developments

## Accounting and audit issues

### Guide to local authority accounts

Local authority audit committee members are not expected to be financial experts, but they are responsible for approving and issuing the authority's financial statements. However, local authority financial statements are complex and can be difficult to understand. We have prepared a guide for members to use as part of their review of the financial statements. It explains the key features of the primary statements and notes that make up a set of financial statements. It also includes key challenge questions to help members assess whether the financial statements show a true and fair view of their authority's financial performance and financial position.

The guide considers the :

- explanatory foreword – which should include an explanation of key events and their effect on the financial statements
- annual governance statement – providing a clear sense of the risks facing the authority and the controls in place to manage them
- movement in reserves statement – showing the authority's net worth and spending power
- comprehensive income and expenditure statement – reporting on the year's financial performance and whether operations resulted in surplus or deficit
- balance sheet – a 'snapshot' of the authority's financial position at 31st March; and
- other statements and additional disclosures

Supporting this guide we have produced two further documents to support members in discharging their responsibilities

- helping local authorities prepare clear and concise financial statements
- approving the minimum revenue provision

Copies of these are available from your engagement lead and audit manager

### Area for consideration:

Have Members referred to this guidance?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Accounting and audit issues

### Top 9 issues for the 2013/14 closedown

Based on the queries we have received from practitioners and auditors, here is a list of the top 9 issues to consider for the 2013/14 closedown.

1. Do your accounts tell the overall story of your authority's financial performance and financial position? Are they clear, concise and easy to follow? Is detailed information on the most important information easy to find? Have duplicated text, non-material notes and zero entries been removed?
2. Are your accounts internally consistent? In particular, does the movement in reserves statement agree to the detailed notes?
3. Is your programme of revaluations is sufficiently up to date to ensure that the carrying value of property, plant and equipment does not differ materially from the fair value at 31 March 2014?
4. Have you accounted for provisions in accordance with IAS 37?
  - Have you considered provisions for business rates, equal pay and restoration and aftercare of landfill sites?
  - Are your provisions the best estimate of the liability (rather than a prudent estimate or an amount that is convenient for budget purposes)?
  - Is there a robust evidence based methodology to support the estimate?
  - Are there any instances in which a provision has not been made because a reliable estimate cannot be made? If so, Is their robust evidence to support the judgement that a reliable estimate is not possible? Has a contingent liability been disclosed?
5. Is your PFI accounting model up to date? Do your accounts disclose:
  - the fair value of PFI liabilities?
  - information on the impact of inflation on PFI commitments?
6. Have you addressed the new accounting requirements in 2013/14 for the presentation of IAS 19 pension costs and a new service line for Public Health been addressed? Have comparatives been restated?
7. Have you disclosed the accounting policy for schools? For those schools that are not recognised on the balance sheet, has information about school assets, income and expenditure been disclosed?



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# Emerging issues and developments

## Accounting and audit issues

### Top 9 issues for the 2013/14 closedown (continued)

8. In the pension accounts, have the following disclosures required by the Code been included that are in addition to those set out in the CIPFA example pension fund accounts:

- the relationship between net assets available for benefits and the present value of promised retirement benefits
- an accounting policy for measurement of assets held at amortised cost.

9. Have you agreed a detailed closedown plan with your auditors? Does this include:

- how to deal with known major issues?
- a protocol for dealing with new issues as they arise?
- a date for a post-implementation review?

### Area for consideration:

Has your Executive Head of Finance addressed the closedown issues and assessed the potential impact for your financial statements?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Accounting and audit issues

### LAAP Bulletin 98: Closure of the 2013/14 accounts and related matters

In March, CIPFA's Local Authority Accounting Panel issued LAAP Bulletin 98. The bulletin provides further guidance and clarification to complement CIPFA's 2013/14 Guidance Notes for Practitioners and focuses on those areas that are expected to be significant for most authorities. Topics include:

- public health reform
- non-domestic rates – provision for appeals against the rateable value of business properties
- component accounting
- accounting for pension interest costs in relation to current service cost and pension administration costs
- disclosure requirements for dedicated schools grant.

With regard to future accounting periods, the Bulletin also provides an update on issues affecting 2014/15 and on the measurement of transport infrastructure assets in 2016/17.

#### Area for consideration:

Has your Executive Head of Finance reviewed the guidance and assessed the potential impact for your financial statements?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Local government guidance

### Audit Commission VFM Profiles

Using data from the VFM Profile, the Audit Commission issued a briefing on 27 March 2014, concluding that up to £464 million could be saved overall, if councils spending the most brought down their spending to the average for their authority type and waste responsibilities.

The Audit Commission Chairman, Jeremy Newman said: "It's good news that local authorities have reduced their spending on household waste by £46 million over the past four years and have reduced levels of waste sent to landfill. Councils have achieved these important improvements by working with local people and exercising choice about what works best in their own circumstances."

In the context of considering the hierarchy of waste management options - preventing the creation of waste, preparing waste for re-use, recycling, recovery and disposal to landfill - the Audit Commission Chairman also said

"in 2012/13 local authorities spent a fifth of their total expenditure on the most desirable option for household waste management: minimisation and recycling. They spent the other four-fifths on the collection and disposal of waste – the least desirable options. Councils have the power to influence and encourage residents to do the right thing and they control the levels of spending on the range of waste management options available to them. Their choices ultimately affect how well the environment is protected and the quality of waste services residents receive"

### Areas for consideration:

Has the Council used the Audit Commission briefing paper to consider how their:

- overall spending on household waste management has changed over time?
- spending is divided between waste minimisation, recycling or disposal of waste, and how this has changed over time?;
- spending on different components of waste management compares with authorities that have similar or better performance?

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# Emerging issues and developments

## Local government guidance

### Fraud prevention

The Local Government Association has reported that Blue Badge fraud prosecutions have doubled in three years as councils crackdown on dishonest motorists robbing disabled people of their independence and their right to easier parking.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Plymouth Council and Hull City Council recently secured their first prosecutions against fraudsters while Manchester City Council has a 100 per cent conviction rate with more than 500 prosecutions in the past five years. Councils are also using new powers to seize and confiscate badges suspected of being used illegally and some have set up specific enforcement teams to tackle Blue Badge fraud.

Cllr Peter Box, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Transport Board, said:

"Councils are determined to do everything in their power to protect the quality of life for our disabled and vulnerable residents and will not hesitate to take legal action against anyone caught abusing the scheme. With more of these fraudsters being brought to justice than ever before by councils, this is sending a strong message that we will come down hard on drivers illegally using Blue Badges."

### Area for consideration:

Is the Council actively pursuing measures to prevent Blue Badge abuse, including prosecuting fraudsters?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Local government guidance

The Schools minister David Laws announced (2 May 2014) that the government will spend £2bn on a second phase of its Priority School Building Programme in the six years from 2015.

Under the Priority School Building Programme, which replaced the last government's Building Schools for the Future scheme, the government has announced its commitment to spending £18bn on school buildings over the course of this parliament, including £2.4bn targeted at the schools in worst condition. Overall, this funding is set to build around 300 new schools and provide improvements to nearly 600 others.

In announcing this targeted initiative was on course to improve 261 schools with buildings in the worst condition in England by the end of 2017 and that it would now be extended into a second phase, with a further £2bn allocation over the next spending review period to 2021 the minister stated:

"the original Priority School Building Programme worked on the basis of the condition of the whole school site. We will now refine this to look at targeting individual school buildings, as well as whole school rebuilds where this is appropriate, so that the department can focus much more tightly on addressing specific issues in the estate."

### Area for consideration:

Has the Authority considered the implications of the Priority School Building Programme for its schools building and refurbishment programme?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Local government guidance

The government published its cost benefit analysis guidance for local partnerships on 2 April 2014.

Developed as part of the Greater Manchester 'whole place' Community Budget pilot, it was the first Treasury-approved assessment of the costs and benefits of joining-up and reforming public services in local areas.

The framework was developed by New Economy, the economic strategy unit of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. John Holden, acting director of economic strategy at the agency, led the team that devised the methodology. He said

"this model provides a framework to start thinking about more holistic projects that deliver long-term outcomes but also produce short-term cashability [savings]"

The guidance sets out a standard process to determine the benefit of reforms, based on the unit cost of services, their impact and the savings that result. In providing Treasury backing for the cost benefit analysis framework – it has been included in Whitehall's Green Book for policy appraisal and evaluation – it has been added to the government's assessment process for the latest £320m round of the Transformation Challenge Award, which provides funding to councils to implement reforms.

### Area for consideration:

Has the Authority considered the applicability of the government's cost benefit analysis guidance in considering the cost-benefits of local service delivery options?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Grant Thornton

### Local Government Governance Review

This report is our third annual review into local authority governance. It aims to assist managers and elected members of councils and fire and rescue authorities to assess the strength of their governance arrangements and to prepare for the challenges ahead.

Drawing on a detailed review of the 2012/13 annual governance statements and explanatory forewords of 150 English councils and fire and rescue authorities, as well as responses from 80 senior council officers and members, the report focuses on three particular aspects of governance:

- risk leadership: setting a tone from the top which encourages innovation as well as managing potential pitfalls
- partnerships and alternative delivery models: implementing governance arrangements for new service delivery models that achieve accountability without stifling innovation
- public communication: engaging with stakeholders to inform and assure them about service performance, financial affairs and governance arrangements.

Alongside the research findings, the report also highlights examples of good practice and poses a number of questions for management and members, to help them assess the strength of their current governance arrangements.

#### Areas for consideration:

- Our report includes a number of case studies summarising good practice in risk leadership, partnerships and alternative delivery models and public communication. Has the Authority reviewed these case studies and assessed whether it is meeting good practice in these areas?
- Our report includes key questions for members to ask officers on risk management and alternative delivery models. Are these issues being considered and responded to by officers?

# Emerging issues and developments

## Grant Thornton

### Events

We are involved in organising and supporting various events for our local government clients including the following.

- Following on from our recent national report on welfare reform Reaping the Benefits we are continuing to gather information and examples of good practice from local government and housing around the country. We are presenting our key findings updated information on good practice to CIPFA Benefits and Revenues Network and regional CIPFA events
- We are sponsoring the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) annual Scrutiny Camp Conference in London on 11 June
- We are also sponsoring The Municipal Journal's annual Growth Agenda conference on 4 June where we will be launching our Where Growth Happens report
- For the third year running we are sponsoring the conference drinks reception at CIPFA's Annual Conference, taking place in London on 2 July
- We are hosting an Alternative Delivery Models seminar at our Birmingham office in 16 July where practitioners will share experiences of setting up and operating various alternative delivery models.
- We are holding workshops for Chairs and other members of Local Government Audit Committees. There are events in Bristol (11 July), Taunton (16 July) and Dorchester (23 July). The workshops draw on our publication "a guide to local authority accounts" and aim to:
  - explain the purpose and main features of the financial statements and notes;
  - assist Audit Committee members to understand and challenge the key issues of importance;
  - explain how auditors engage with Audit Committees throughout the ensure audit process;
  - help Audit Committees better understand the structure and principals of an external audit, and
  - enable members to network with members from other councils and share good practice.





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