

Somerset County Council and Pension Fund Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

Year ending 31 March 2021

12 January 2022



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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 as a local authority; and
- includes a number of challenge questions in respect of these emerging issues which the Committee may wish to consider (these are a tool to use, if helpful, rather than formal questions requiring responses for audit purposes)

Members of the Audit Committee can find further useful material on our website, where we have a section dedicated to our work in the public sector. Here you can download copies of our publications www.grantthornton.co.uk.

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 Engagement Manager.

Progress at January 2022

Financial Statements Audit

We undertook our initial planning in March 2021 to inform the Audit Plan.

In June 2021 we issued a detailed audit plan, setting out our proposed approach to the audit of the Council and Pension Fund's 2020/21 financial statements.

The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2021 pushed back the date by which principal authorities needed to publish their draft financial statements to the first working day of August. In 2020 this date was pushed back to 31 August. The Council published their accounts ahead of the deadline.

The date by which authorities were required to publish audited financial statements was 30 September. In 2020 this date was pushed back to 30 November.

We began our work on your draft financial statements in August 2021.

We reported the findings from our work in the Audit Findings Report (AFR) to the Committee in November 2021 and provided an unqualified opinion on the financial statements on 30th November 2021.

Value for Money

The new Code of Audit Practice (the “Code”) came into force on 1 April 2020 for audit years 2020/21 and onwards. The most significant change under the new Code is the introduction of an Auditor’s Annual Report, containing a commentary on arrangements to secure value for money and any associated recommendations, if required.

The new approach is more complex, more involved and is planned to make more impact.

Under the 2020 Code of Audit Practice, for relevant authorities other than local NHS bodies auditors are required to issue our Auditor’s Annual Report no later than 30 September or, where this is not possible, issue an audit letter setting out the reasons for delay.

As a result of the ongoing pandemic, and the impact it has had on both preparers and auditors of accounts to complete their work as quickly as would normally be expected, the National Audit Office (NAO) has updated its guidance to auditors to allow us to postpone completion of our work on arrangements to secure value for money and focus our resources firstly on the delivery of our opinions on the financial statements. This is intended to help ensure as many as possible could be issued in line with national timetables and legislation. The extended deadline for the issue of the Auditor's Annual Report is now no more than three months after the date of the opinion on the financial statements.

For Somerset County Council the deadline for completion of this work is 28th February 2022.

Our VFM work is in progress and we will issue our Auditors Annual Report prior to the 3 month deadline.

Progress at January 2022 (cont.)

Other areas

Certification of claims and returns

We also certify the Authority's Teachers Pensions' Return in accordance with procedures agreed with the Teachers' Pension Agency. The certification work for the 2020/21 return was reported on 30th November 2021, in advance of the deadline.

No amendments or significant issues were reported as part of our work.

IAS19 Assurance Letters to Admitted Bodies auditors

We have provided written assurances to the auditors of admitted bodies to the Pension Fund in accordance with the agreed timescales.

Meetings

We continue to meet regularly with senior Finance Officers as part of our regular liaison meetings and continue to be in discussions with finance staff regarding emerging developments and to ensure the audit process is smooth and effective.

Events

We provide a range of workshops, along with network events for members and publications to support the Council. Your officers will be invited to attend our Financial Reporting Workshop in January and February 2022, which will help to ensure that members of your Finance Team are up to date with the latest financial reporting requirements for local authority accounts.

Further details of the publications that may be of interest to the Council are set out in our Sector Update section of this report.

Audit Fees

During 2017, PSAA awarded contracts for audit for a five year period beginning on 1 April 2018. 2020/21 is the third year of that contract. Since that time, there have been a number of developments within the accounting and audit profession. Across all sectors and firms, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge and to undertake additional and more robust testing.

Our work in the Local Government sector in 2018/19 and 2019/20 has highlighted areas where financial reporting, in particular, property, plant and equipment and pensions, needs to improve. There is also an increase in the complexity of Local Government financial transactions and financial reporting. This combined with the FRC requirement that all Local Government audits are at or above the "few improvements needed" (2A) rating means that additional audit work is required.

We have reviewed the impact of these changes on both the cost and timing of audits. We have discussed this with your s151 Officer including any proposed variations to the Scale Fee set by PSAA Limited, and have communicated fully with the Audit Committee. The final proposed fees for the 2020/21 audit are included within the Progress Report.

As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and local government financial reporting.

Audit Deliverables

2020/21 Deliverables	Planned Date	Status
<p>Audit Plan</p> <p>We are required to issue a detailed audit plan to the Corporate Governance Committee setting out our proposed approach in order to give an opinion on the Council's 2020/21 financial statements and the Auditor's Annual Report on the Council's Value for Money arrangements.</p>	July 2021	Complete
<p>Audit Findings Report</p> <p>The Audit Findings Report was reported to the December Committee.</p>	November 2021	Complete
<p>Auditors Report</p> <p>This includes the opinion on your financial statements.</p>	November 2021	Complete
<p>Auditor's Annual Report</p> <p>This Report communicates the key issues arising from our Value for Money work.</p>	February 2022	In Progress
2020/21 Audit-related Deliverables	Planned Date	Status
<p>Teachers' Pension Return – certification</p> <p>This is the report we submit to the Teachers' Pension Agency based upon the mandated agreed upon procedures we are required to perform.</p>	30 November 2021	Complete
<p>IAS19 Assurance Letters to Admitted Body Auditors</p> <p>These are the letters that we provide to the auditors of admitted bodies to the Pension Fund, on request, to provide assurance over the controls in place with the administration of the Pension Fund and the valuations of investments.</p>	Various – depending on specific requests	Complete

Financial Reporting Council annual report

On 29 October, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) published its annual report setting out the findings of its review of the work of local auditors. The report summarises the results of the FRC's inspections of twenty audit files for the last financial year. A link to the report is here:

[FRC AQR Major Local Audits October 2021](#)

Grant Thornton are one of seven firms which currently delivers local audit work. Of our 330 local government and NHS audits, 87 are currently defined as 'major audits' which fall within the scope of the AQR. This year, the FRC looked at nine of our audits.

Our file review results

The FRC reviewed nine of our audits this year. It graded six files (67%) as 'Good' and requiring no more than limited improvements. No files were graded as requiring significant improvement, representing an impressive year-on-year improvement. The FRC described the improvement in our audit quality as an 'encouraging response by the firm to the quality findings reported in the prior year.' Our Value for Money work continues to be delivered to a high standard, with all of the files reviewed requiring no more than limited improvement. We welcome the FRC findings and conclusions which demonstrate the impressive improvement we have made in audit quality over the past year.

The FRC also identified a number of good practices including effective challenge of management's valuer, use of an auditor's expert to assist with the audit of a highly specialised property valuation, and the extent and timing of involvement by the audit partner on the VFM conclusion.

Our "Opinion" results over the past three years are shown in the table below:

Grade	Number 2020/21	Number 2019/20	Number 2018/19
Good with limited improvements (Grade 1 or 2)	6	1	1
Improvements required (Grade 3)	3	5	2
Significant improvements required (Grade 4)	0	0	1
Total	9	6	4

Our "VFM" results over the past two years are shown in the table below. The FRC did not review VFM in 2018/19:

Grade	Number 2020/21	Number 2019/20
Good with limited improvements (Grade 1 or 2)	6	6
Improvements required (Grade 3)	0	0
Significant improvements required (Grade 4)	0	0
Total	6	6

Financial Reporting Council annual report (cont.)

Quality Assurance Department (QAD) Reviews

In addition to the reviews undertaken by the FRC on major local audits, the QAD team from the ICAEW undertake annual reviews of non-major local audits as well as reviews of Foundation Trusts on behalf of NHSE&I.

The QAD reviewed five of our audits this year and graded all of them (100%) as 'Satisfactory / generally acceptable' for both the financial statements and VFM elements of the audit, which is the highest grading.

Grade	Number 2020/21	Number 2019/20	Number 2018/19
Satisfactory / generally acceptable	5	6	2
Improvement required	0	1	0
Significant improvement required	0	0	0
Total	5	7	2

Our continued commitment to Audit quality and continuous improvement

Our work over the past year has been undertaken during the backdrop of COVID-19, when the public sector has faced the huge challenge of providing essential services and helping safeguard the public during the pandemic. Local government, in particular, have been at the forefront of supporting local communities and businesses.

As auditors we have had to recognise the competing priorities and challenges facing the finance teams and the whole local government sector whilst staying focused on the principles of good governance and financial management, things which are more important than ever. We are very proud of the way we have worked effectively with audited bodies, demonstrating empathy in our work whilst still upholding the highest audit quality.

Over the coming year we will make further investments in audit quality including strengthening our quality and technical support functions, and increasing the level of training, support and guidance for our audit teams. We will address the specific improvement recommendations raised by the FRC, including:

- Enhanced training for local auditors on key assumptions within property valuations, and how to demonstrate an increased level of challenge
- Formalising our arrangements for the consideration of complex technical issues by Partner Panels.

As part of our enhanced Value for Money programme, we will focus on identifying the scope for better use of public money, as well as highlighting weaknesses in governance or financial stewardship where we see them.

Conclusion

Local audit plays a critical role in the way public sector audits and society interact, and it depends on the trust and confidence of all those who rely on it. As a firm we're proud to be doing our part to promote good governance, effective stewardship and appropriate use of public funds.

Final Audit Fees for 2020-21

We confirm below our final fees charged for the audit and provision of non-audit services.

Audit fees for Somerset County Council Audit	**2019-20 Final Fee	2020-21 Planned fee	* 2020-21 Final fee	Non-audit fees for other services	Proposed fee	Final fee
Scale Fee published by PSAA	76,902	76,902	76,902	Certification of Teachers' Pension Fund return	5,000	5,000
Raising the bar / regulatory factors / local VFM issues	9,500	9,500	9,500	IAS 19 Procedures for admitted bodies	7,000	7,000
Enhanced audit procedures for Property, Plant and Equipment	4,850	7,350	7,350	Total non-audit fees (excluding VAT)	£12,000	£12,000
Enhanced audit procedures for Pensions	3,000	2,500	2,500			
Increased audit requirements of revised ISA's and Accounting Standards	2,000	11,500	11,500			
Additional work on Value for Money (VFM) under new NAO Code	-	19,000	19,000			
Additional work due to Covid-19 and client issues	43,420	-	-			
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	£139,672	£126,752	£126,752			
Audit fees for Somerset Pension Fund Audit	** 2019-20 Final Fee	2020-21 Planned fee	* 2020-21 Final fee			
Scale Fee published by PSAA	18,371	18,371	18,371			
Raising the bar / regulatory factors	2,000	2,000	2,000			
Enhanced audit procedures for Level 3 Investment Valuations	1,750	1,750	1,750			
Increased audit requirements of revised ISA's (540 / 240 / 700)	-	8,000	8,000			
Additional work due to Covid-19 and client delays		-	-			
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	£28,521	£30,121	£30,121			

• The final fee variation is subject to approval by PSAA.

** As approved by PSAA in respect of the 2019-20 audit

Sector Update

Authorities continue to try to achieve greater efficiency in the delivery of public services, whilst facing the challenges to address rising demand, ongoing budget pressures and social inequality.

Our sector update provides you with an up to date summary of emerging national issues and developments to support you. We cover areas which may have an impact on your organisation, the wider local government sector and the public sector as a whole. Links are provided to the detailed report/briefing to allow you to delve further and find out more.

Our public sector team at Grant Thornton also undertake research on service and technical issues. We will bring you the latest research publications in this update. We also include areas of potential interest to start conversations within the organisation and with audit committee members, as well as any accounting and regulatory updates.

- [Grant Thornton Publications](#)
- [Insights from local government sector specialists](#)
- [Reports of interest](#)
- [Accounting and regulatory updates](#)

More information can be found on our dedicated public sector and local government sections on the Grant Thornton website by clicking on the logos below:

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Public Sector

A purple rectangular button with the text "Local government" in white, sans-serif font, centered within the button.

Local
government

What can be learned from Public Interest Reports? – Grant Thornton

2020 will be remembered as a tumultuous year in local government, with the pandemic creating unprecedented pressure on the sector. It also saw the appearance of two Public Interest Reports (PIRs), followed by another in January this year – the first to be issued in the sector since 2016. PIR's can be issued by local auditors if there are significant concerns around council activity, such as major failings in finance and governance.

The recent PIRs have made headlines because, up to this point, very few have ever been issued. But, as our latest report “Lessons from recent Public Interest Reports” explores, all three illustrate some of the fundamental issues facing the wider sector and provide a lesson for all local authorities around: weaknesses in financial management; governance and scrutiny practices; and council culture and leadership; which, when combined, can provide fertile ground for the kind of significant issues we might see in a PIR.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted four essential factors we probably always knew about local government, have often said, but which are now much better evidenced:

- 1) Local government has provided fantastic support to its communities in working with the NHS and other partners to deal with the multifaceted challenges of the pandemic.
- 2) Britain's long centralised approach to government has been exposed to some degree in terms of its agility to tailor pandemic responses to regional and local bodies. This is recognised by the current government who continue to pursue the options for devolution of powers to local bodies. Track and Trace delivered centrally has not been as successful as anticipated and, according to government figures, local interventions have had more impact.

- 3) Years of reduced funding from central government have exposed the underlying flaws in the local authority business model, with too much reliance on generating additional income.
- 4) Not all authorities exercise appropriate care with public money; not all authorities exercise appropriate governance; and not all authorities have the capability of managing risk, both short and long term. Optimism bias has been baked into too many councils' medium-term plans.

The PIRs at Nottingham City Council (August 2020), the London Borough of Croydon (October 2020), and Northampton Borough Council (January 2021) are clear illustrations of some of the local government issues identified above. The audit reports are comprehensive and wide-ranging and a lesson for all local authorities. Local authorities have a variety of different governance models. These range from elected mayor to the cabinet and a scrutiny system approach, while others have moved back to committee systems. Arguments can be made both for and against all of these models. However, in the recent PIR cases, and for many other local authorities, it's less about the system of governance and more about how it operates, who operates it and how willing they are to accept scrutiny and challenge.

There are a number of lessons to be learned from the recent PIR reports and these can be broken down into three key areas which are explored further in our report:

- 1) The context of local government in a COVID-19 world
- 2) Governance, scrutiny, and culture
- 3) Local authority leadership.

The full report is available here:

<https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/lessons-from-recent-public-interest-reports/>

Annual Transparency Report – Grant Thornton

As auditors of several listed entities as well as nearly one hundred major local audits, we are required as a firm to publish an annual transparency report.

The report contains a variety of information which we believe is helpful to audit committees as well as wider stakeholders. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) in their thematic review of transparency reporting noted that they are keen to see more Audit Committee Chairs actively engaging and challenging their auditors on audit quality based on the information produced in Transparency reports on a regular basis. We agree with the FRC and are keen to share our transparency report and discuss audit quality with you more widely.

The transparency report provides details of our:

- Leadership and governance structures
- Principal risks and Key Performance Indicators
- Quality, risk management and internal control structure
- Independence and ethics processes
- People and culture
- Compliance with the Audit Firm Governance code and EU Audit directive requirements

We have made significant developments in the year as part of our Local Audit Investment Plan to improve our audit quality. We welcome an opportunity to discuss these developments and our transparency report should you wish.



The full report is available here:

[Transparency report 2020 \[grantthornton.co.uk\]](https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/transparency-report-2020)

Local authority Covid-19 pressures – MHCLG

Outturn figures from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) show that local authorities in England reported additional cost pressures of £12.8bn relating to COVID-19 in 2020-21. Overall, local authorities spent £7.2bn responding to the pandemic last year, with the largest share of additional expenditure going on adult social care services at £3.2bn.

Additional expenditure due to COVID-19 by class and service area (£ millions) (2020-21)

	Shire District	Shire County	Unitary Authority	Metropolitan District	London Borough	Total
Adult Social Care – total	0.473	1,254.880	848.656	663.404	413.842	3,181.254
Children's social care - total (excluding SEND)	0.000	94.933	131.127	89.799	62.987	378.846
Housing - total (including homelessness services) excluding HRA	63.129	5.254	74.949	42.281	112.971	298.584
Environmental and regulatory services - total	33.564	68.097	67.512	66.704	63.556	299.433
Finance & corporate services - total	48.222	53.445	83.984	76.923	78.284	340.858
All other service areas not listed in rows above	184.550	634.578	584.924	564.737	395.137	2,363.926
Total	329.937	2,111.187	1,791.153	1,503.848	1,126.777	6,862.902



The figures are available in full here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-covid-19-financial-impact-monitoring-information>

Income losses due to COVID-19 by class and source of income (£ millions) (2020-21)

	Shire District	Shire County	Unitary Authority	Metropolitan District	London Borough	Total
Business rates	276.498	0.000	194.192	207.351	537.667	1,215.708
Council tax	399.037	0.000	217.633	191.219	232.727	1,040.616
Sales fees and charges	516.426	194.923	553.907	396.745	475.728	2,137.728
Commercial income	82.448	24.159	120.629	204.211	52.154	483.600
Other	33.494	39.947	27.163	53.664	45.166	199.435
Total	1,307.903	259.029	1,113.524	1,053.190	1,343.441	5,077.087

Government response to MHCLG Select Committee report on Local Authority financial sustainability & the section 114 regime – MHCLG

Government has published a response to the Housing, Communities & Local Government (HCLG) Committee report on local authority financial sustainability and the section 114 regime, published in July.

The HCLG report states “In recent years, the financial sustainability of local government has faced successive challenges, including increased demand for services, especially social care, changes to the level of funding equalisation between councils and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. In some instances, councils have been in such acute financial trouble that they have approached the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for financial assistance; three of these—Northamptonshire in 2018, Croydon in late 2020 and Slough in July 2021—issued section 114 notices, essentially declaring they had run out of money. Our inquiry has sought to identify the most serious threats facing local councils’ finances. In light of the various factors we consider in the report, including the somewhat delayed Fairer Funding Review, renewed discussion about property taxes and the need to reform funding for social care, the time is right to consider a more radical review of local government finances—and our report makes various recommendations about how this should be done. We also consider what happened at Croydon—which prompted us to look at the section 114 regime—in the annex to our report.”

The report includes sections on:

- Social Care
- Funding
- COVID-19
- Local authority commercial investment
- Audit and control

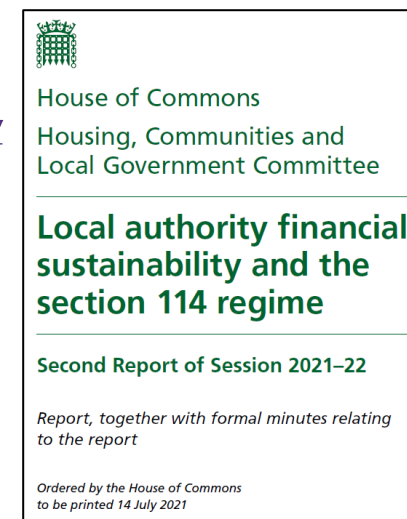
The report made 13 recommendations, and the Government response to these was published in October. The response notes “Moving forward, we will work to provide the sector with a sustainable financial footing, enabling it to deliver vital frontline service and support other government priorities. We will also take stock, including of the impact of the pandemic on local authority resources and service pressures, to determine any future reforms.”

The initial report can be found here:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6777/documents/72117/default/>

Government response can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-financial-sustainability-and-the-section-114-regime>



Government response to Redmond review – MHCLG

Government has published an update on the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government response to Sir Tony Redmond’s independent review into the effectiveness of external audit and transparency of financial reporting in local authorities.

The MHCLG press release states “The Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA) – the new regulator being established to replace the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) – will be strengthened with new powers over local government audit, protecting public funds and ensuring councils are best serving taxpayers.

The new regulator, which will contain a standalone local audit unit, will bring all regulatory functions into one place, to better coordinate a new, simplified local audit framework.

ARGA will continue to act as regulator and carry out audit quality reviews as the FRC does now. It will now also provide annual reports on the state of local audit and take over responsibility for the updated Code of Local Audit Practice – the guidelines councils are required to follow.

The government has confirmed that the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) will continue as the appointing body for local audit, in charge of procurement and contract management for local government auditors.

In the immediate term, MHCLG will set up and chair a Liaison Committee, which will comprise senior stakeholders across the sector that will oversee the governance of the new audit arrangements and ensure they are operating effectively.”

The press release goes on to state the “measures finalise the government’s response to Sir Tony Redmond’s independent review into local audit, carried out last year.

The government has already announced £15 million to support councils with additional costs in audit fees, and recently consulted on the distribution of this funding. Government is also consulting on improving flexibility on audit fee setting and has extended the deadline for when councils must publish their audited accounts.



The press release can be found here:

[Government publishes update to audit review response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-publishes-update-to-audit-review-response)

Public Accounts Committee (PAC) – Local auditor reporting on local government in England & government response

The PAC inquiry examined the timeliness of auditor reporting on English local public bodies' financial statements covering 2019-20. The National Audit Office (NAO) report, on which this inquiry is based, found that “delays in the delivery of audit opinions beyond the deadlines for publishing local authority accounts, alongside concerns about audit quality and doubts over audit firms' willingness to continue to audit local public bodies, highlight that the situation needs urgent attention.”

The PAC report found “Without urgent action from government, the audit system for local authorities in England may soon reach breaking point. With approximately £100 billion of local government spending requiring audit each year, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (the Department) has become increasingly complacent in its oversight of a local audit market now entirely reliant upon only eight firms, two of which are responsible for up to 70% of local authority audits. This has not been helped by the growing complexity of local authority accounts, with audit firms now asked to carry out more work in each audit, comply with new regulatory demands and adapt to the new multifaceted landscape in which local authorities operate, while also struggling to hire and retain experienced auditors.”

Key conclusions were:

- The marked decline in the timeliness of external audit undermines accountability and hampers effective decision-making.
- There is a pressing risk of market collapse due to an over reliance on a small number of audit firms and significant barriers to entry.
- The commercial attractiveness to audit firms of auditing local authorities has declined.

- The rapidly diminishing pool of suitably qualified and experienced staff increases the risks to the timely completion of quality audits.
- We are not convinced that the recently announced new local audit arrangements will meet the pressing need for effective system leadership now.
- Unless local authority accounts are useful, relevant and understandable they will not aid accountability.

The report made recommendations in each of these areas. The government response was published on 28 October.

The PAC report and response can be found here:

[Timeliness of local auditor reporting on local government in England - Committees - UK Parliament](#)



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Local auditor reporting on local government in England

Eleventh Report of Session 2021–22

2020/21 audited accounts – Public Sector Audit Appointments

Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) has reported that only 9% of local government audits for 2020/21 were completed by the end of September. This is a sharp contraction on the 45% filed on time for 2019-20, and is the third successive year where the number of accounts produced on schedule has reduced.

PSAA state “The challenges posed by COVID-19 have contributed to the current position. However, a range of further pressures documented in the Redmond Report are also continuing to impact performance. In particular there is a shortage of auditors with the knowledge and experience to deliver the required higher quality audits of statements of accounts, which increasingly reflect complex structures and transactions, within the timeframe expected. The growing backlog of audits is also a concern, with 70 of the 2019/20 audits still incomplete.”

Grant Thornton commented “Audit quality remains a priority for our firm and we continue to work hard with local audit stakeholders to ensure the delivery of high quality audits in as timely a fashion as is practicable. Unfortunately, much of this work will be delivered past the 30 September target date, owing to ongoing constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the backlog this has caused. We remain committed to public sector audit and are now focused on delivering the majority of our local audits by December 2021.”



The news article can be found here:

<https://www.psaa.co.uk/2021/10/news-release-2020-21-audited-accounts-psaa/>

2023-24 audit appointments – Public Sector Audit Appointments

Following a consultation exercise Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) has invited all principal local government including police and fire bodies to become opted-in authorities. At the same time it published its procurement strategy and prospectus for the national scheme from April 2023. Both documents have evolved in response to the feedback provided by the market engagement exercise and consultation on the draft prospectus undertaken during June 2021.

PSAA state “Our primary aim is to secure the delivery of an audit service of the required quality for every opted-in body at a realistic market price and to support the drive towards a long term competitive and more sustainable market for local public audit services.

The objectives of the procurement are to maximise value for local public bodies by:

- securing the delivery of independent audit services of the required quality;
- awarding long term contracts to a sufficient number of firms to enable the deployment of an appropriately qualified auditing team to every participating body;
- encouraging existing suppliers to remain active participants in local audit and creating opportunities for new suppliers to enter the market;
- encouraging audit suppliers to submit prices which are realistic in the context of the current market;
- enabling auditor appointments which facilitate the efficient use of audit resources;
- supporting and contributing to the efforts of audited bodies and auditors to improve the timeliness of audit opinion delivery; and

- establishing arrangements that are able to evolve in response to changes to the local audit framework.

PSAA set out the proposed timeline, which anticipates contracts being awarded in August 2022.



The news article can be found here:

<https://www.psa.co.uk/2021/09/psaa-publishes-its-prospectus-and-procurement-strategy-and-invites-eligible-bodies-to-opt-in-from-april-2023/>

The procurement strategy can be found here:

<https://www.psa.co.uk/about-us/appointing-person-information/appointing-period-2023-24-2027-28/procurement-strategy/>

Guide to support Value for Money (VfM) analysis for public managers – CIPFA

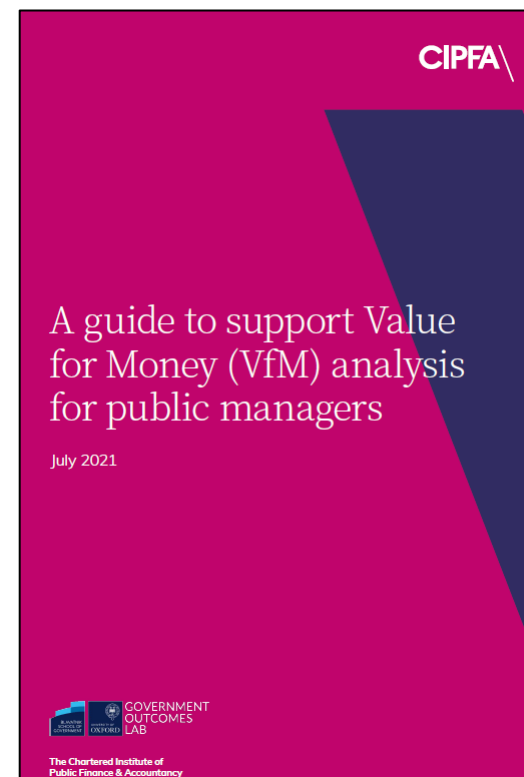
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has published this guide which complements a VfM toolkit which has been published separately. Both were developed under a collaborative project between Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab) and CIPFA.

CIPFA state “The guide is aimed at public managers planning to assess Value for Money (VfM) of outcomes-based contract (OBC) programmes, or any other type of programme with an outcome-focus, using prospective information. This involves assessing economic validity of the programme with respect to ‘doing nothing’ as well as the closest comparator.”

CIPFA explain that the guide:

- Describes what VfM represents in public provision of social services with a special focus on outcome-based contracts (OBCs). In particular the guide emphasises the link between economy and effectiveness criteria.
- Promotes thinking about longer-term effects of interventions, such as outcomes and impact, at the design/ planning stage of programmes. This means that having a good appreciation for efficiency is helpful but not necessary, especially when outcomes are both identifiable and measurable.
- Explain how it could be used to appraise public programmes with respect to anticipated costs and value of them using prospective information.

The guide is available to CIPFA members through the website.



Climate change risk: A good practice guide for Audit and Risk Assurance Committees – NAO

The National Audit Office (NAO) has published this guide to help Audit Committees recognise how climate change risks could manifest themselves and support them in challenging senior management on their approach to managing climate change risks.

The NAO comment “Audit and Risk Assurance Committees (ARACs) play a key role in supporting and advising the board and Accounting Officer in their responsibilities over risk management.

This guide will help ARACs recognise how climate change risks could manifest themselves and support them in challenging senior management on their approach to managing climate change risks. We have outlined specific reporting requirements that currently apply.

Our primary audience is ARAC chairs of bodies that we audit, but the principles of the guide will be relevant for bodies across the wider public sector. It promotes good practice and should not be viewed as mandatory guidance.

Climate change and the nature of its impacts on organisations globally is changing rapidly. This guide acknowledges the evolving nature of climate change and its associated risks and opportunities and will be refreshed in the future to reflect those changes.”

The guide includes sections on “How to support and challenge management”. This includes sections on governance and leadership; collaboration; risk identification and assessment; risk treatment, monitoring and reporting and continual improvement. There is also a “Complete list of questions that Audit and Risk Assurance Committees can ask” for each of these areas. The guide also includes “Key guidance and good practice materials” with links.



The report can be found here:

[Climate change risk: A good practice guide for Audit and Risk Assurance Committees - National Audit Office \(NAO\) Report](#)

Local government and net zero in England – NAO

The National Audit Office (NAO) report responds to a request from the Environmental Audit Committee to examine local government and net zero. It considers how effectively central government and local authorities in England are collaborating on net zero, in particular to:

- clarify the role of local authorities in contributing to the UK's statutory net zero target; and
- ensure local authorities have the right resources and skills for net zero.

The NAO comment “While the exact scale and nature of local authorities’ roles and responsibilities in reaching the UK’s national net zero target are to be decided, it is already clear that they have an important part to play, as a result of the sector’s powers and responsibilities for waste, local transport and social housing, and through their influence in local communities. Government departments have supported local authority work related to net zero through targeted support and funding. However, there are serious weaknesses in central government’s approach to working with local authorities on decarbonisation, stemming from a lack of clarity over local authorities’ overall roles, piecemeal funding, and diffuse accountabilities. This hampers local authorities’ ability to plan effectively for the long-term, build skills and capacity, and prioritise effort. It creates significant risks to value for money as spending is likely to increase quickly.

MHCLG, BEIS and other departments recognise these challenges and are taking steps to improve their approach. Their progress has understandably been slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is now great urgency to the development of a more coherent approach.”

Key findings include:

- Central government has not yet developed with local authorities any overall expectations about their roles in achieving the national net zero target.
- There is little consistency in local authorities’ reporting on net zero, which makes it difficult to get an overall picture of what local authorities have achieved.
- Neither MHCLG nor HM Treasury has assessed the totality of funding that central government provides to local government that is linked with net zero.

The report can be found here:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/local-government-and-net-zero-in-england/>



Cyber and information security: Good practice guide – NAO

The National Audit Office (NAO) has published this guide to help Audit Committees scrutinise cyber security arrangements. To aid them, this guidance complements government advice by setting out high-level questions and issues for audit committees to consider.

The NAO state “Audit committees should gain the appropriate assurance for the critical management and control of cyber security and information risk.

Cyber security is the activity required to protect an organisation’s data, devices, networks and software from unintended or unauthorised access, change or destruction via the internet or other communications systems or technologies. Effective cyber security relies on people and management of processes as well as technical controls.

Our guide supports audit committees to work through this complexity, being able to understand and question the management of cyber security and information risk.

It takes into account several changes which affect the way in which we interact with and manage our information and can drive increased risk. These include changes to the way we work and live due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing demand to digitise and move to cloud-based services.

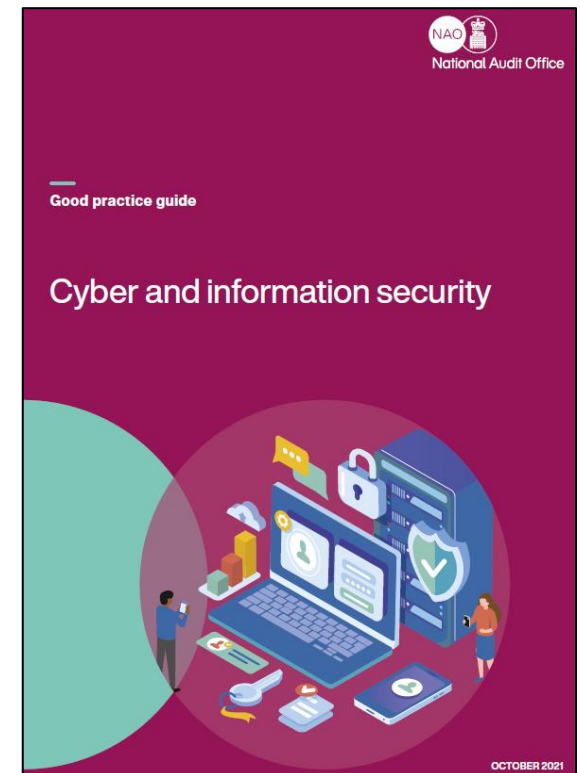
The strategic advice, guidance and support provided by government has also been updated to keep pace with these changes, detailing the impact and risks on the management of cyber security and information risk.

The guide provides a checklist of questions and issues covering:

- The overall approach to cyber security and risk management
- Capability needed to manage cyber security
- Specific aspects, such as information risk management, engagement and training, asset management, architecture and configuration, vulnerability management, identity and access management, data security, logging and monitoring and incident management.”

The report can be found here:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/cyber-security-and-information-risk-guidance/>





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