

Subject:	External Audit Progress Report	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Audit and Accounts Committee	Date:	15 March 2016
Report of:	Grant Thornton, (External Audit)	Portfolio Holder:	Resources and Performance
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Heather Green (Grant Thornton)	Telephone:	0161 234 6381
Email:	heather.green@uk.gt.com		
1.	RECOMMENDATION(S)		
1.1	Members are asked to note the Audit Committee Progress Report.		

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 This paper provides the Audit and Accounts 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.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 This is a report of the External Auditor - The matters discussed in this report do not impact directly on the Council's corporate priorities.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This is a report of the External Auditor - There are no direct risk implications.

5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

5.1 This paper provides the Audit and Accounts 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.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

6.1 N/A - This is a report of the External Auditor

7. MONITORING OFFICER

7.1 N/A - This is a report of the External Auditor

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

8.1 N/A - This is a report of the External Auditor

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Members are asked to note the Audit Progress as set on pages 5-6 of the report.

No background papers (*delete where applicable*)

Audit Committee Update

Rossendale Borough Council

Year ended 31 March 2016

March 2016

Karen Murray

Director

T 0161 234 6364

E karen.l.murray@uk.gt.com

Heather Green

Senior Manager

T 0161 234 6381

E heather.green@uk.gt.com

Sophia Iqbal

Executive

T 0161 234 6372

E sophia.s.iqbal@uk.gt.com



The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect your business or any weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	4
Progress at March 2016	5
Emerging issues and developments	
Local government issues	7
Accounting and audit issues	9
Grant Thornton	11

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, 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:

- Making devolution work: A practical guide for local leaders
- Spreading their wings: Building a successful local authority trading company
- Easing the burden, our report on the impact of welfare reform on local government and social housing organisations
- All aboard? our local government governance review 2015
- Knowing the ropes: Audit Committee effectiveness review
- Reforging local Government: financial health and governance review 2015.

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.

Karen Murray	Engagement Lead	T 0161 234 6364	karen.l.murray@uk.gt.com
Heather Green	Audit Manager	T 0161 234 6381	heather.green@uk.gt.com

Progress at March 2016

2014/15	Planned date	Complete?	Comments
<p>2014/15 Accounts audit and VfM Conclusion 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 2014-15 financial statements.</p>	June 2015	In progress	<p>Much of the work on the Council's 2014-15 accounts is complete. However, we have yet to finalise our work in respect of the transactions relating to the Council's Empty Homes Programme and associated HCA grant.</p> <p>We are awaiting the conclusion of the HCA's work on the scheme which is currently in progress. Once the HCA have concluded and reported on their work, we will be able to complete the outstanding work on the 2014-15 accounts.</p>
2015/16	Planned date	Complete?	Comments
<p>2015-16 Accounts Audit Plan 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 2015-16 financial statements.</p>	February 2016	On track	Our audit plan is included on the agenda of the meeting of the Audit Committee in March 2016.
<p>Interim accounts audit Our interim fieldwork visit including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updated review of the control environment • updated understanding of financial systems • review of Internal Audit reports • early work on emerging accounting issues • early substantive testing. 	March 2016	On track	We commenced our planning discussions with management in December 2015. Our interim accounts audit will be completed during March 2016.
<p>2015-16 final accounts audit Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • audit of the 2015-16 financial statements • proposed opinion on the Council's accounts. 	July to August 2016	On track	The Council is planning to prepare the draft financial statements by the end of June 2016.

Progress at March 2016

Work	Planned date	Complete ?	Comments
<p>Value for Money (VfM) conclusion</p> <p>The Code requires us to conclude whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This is known as the Value for Money (VfM) conclusion.</p> <p>The National Audit Office (NAO) recently consulted on a revised approach to the VfM conclusion and issued its guidance for auditors on value for money work in November 2015.</p> <p>The guidance identifies one single criterion for auditors to evaluate:</p> <p><i>In all significant respects, the audited body takes properly informed decisions and deploys resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.</i></p> <p>In reaching our overall judgements, auditors will have regard to the following sub criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informed decision making • sustainable resource deployment • working with partners and other third parties. 	<p>January to June 2016</p>	<p>On track</p>	<p>We have completed an initial risk assessment to determine our approach, which is included within our audit plan.</p>

CIPFA and NAO reports and publications

Local Government Issues – For information

Audit Panels

In December 2015 the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) published its guidance on the establishment of auditor panels. Under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 'relevant authorities' are able to appoint their own local auditors via an auditor panel. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has decided to implement a phased introduction of the new local audit framework, with all health bodies and smaller local government bodies moving to the new framework as planned on 1st April 2017 and larger local government bodies a year later, on 1st April 2018. In practice, this means that smaller local authorities must have appointed their local auditors by 31st December 2016 and larger principal authorities by 31st December 2017.

The guidance sets out the options available to local authorities in England for establishing an auditor panel, what form such a panel can take, the operation and functions of the panel and the main task of the panel – that is, advising the authority in connection with the appointment of the local auditor.

Council accounts: a guide to your rights

The NAO has published an updated version of Council accounts: a guide to your rights on its website. The guide has been updated to reflect the new requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, and applies to 2015-16 accounts. The document provides information on how people can ask questions and raise objections about the accounts of their local authority.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/council-accounts-a-guide-to-your-rights/>

Arrangements for the exercise of public rights:

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 set out new arrangements for the exercise of public rights from 2015/16 onwards. A key implication of the Act is that the final approval of the statement of the accounts by an authority prior to publication cannot take place *until after the conclusion of the period for the exercise of public rights*. As the thirty working day period for the exercise of public rights must include the first ten working days of July, authorities will not be able to approve their audited accounts or publish before 15th July 2016.

Smaller authorities must also wait until the conclusion of the thirty working day period for the exercise of public rights before publishing their accounts and the auditor's report.

Results of auditors' work 2014/15

Public Sector Audit Appointments – For information

Following the closure of the Audit Commission on 31st March 2015, Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) became responsible for appointing auditors to local government bodies and for overseeing the delivery of consistent, high-quality and effective external audit services. The Audit Commission previously published Auditing the Accounts reports for local government bodies covering the 2012/13 and 2013/14 financial years. The reports summarised the results of the work of auditors appointed by the Commission for local bodies. This is the first such report published by PSAA, and it summarises the results of auditors' work at 509 principal bodies and 9,755 small bodies. The report covers the timeliness and quality of financial reporting, auditors' local value for money work and the extent to which auditors utilised their statutory reporting powers.

The timeliness and quality of financial reporting for 2014/15 remained broadly consistent with the previous year for both principal and small bodies, according to Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited's *Report on the results of auditors' work 2014/15: local government bodies*.

- For principal bodies, auditors at 345 of 356 councils (97 per cent) were able to issue the opinion on the accounts by the statutory accounts publication date of 30th September 2015
- 97 per cent of police bodies and fire and rescue authorities also received the audit opinion by 30th September 2015
- for the second year in a row there have been no qualified opinions issued to date to principal bodies
- the number of qualified conclusions on value for money arrangements has remained consistent with the previous year at 4 per cent (17 councils, one police body and one fire and rescue authority).

IFRS 13 'Fair value measurement'

Accounting and audit issues

The 2015/16 Accounting Code applies IFRS 13 'Fair Value Measurement' for the first time. The standard is set out in a single framework for measuring fair value. It defines fair value as the price that would be received to sell an asset or paid to transfer a liability (exit price) in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date.

There is no public sector adaptation to IFRS 13 but the Treasury and therefore the Code has adapted IAS 16 'Property, Plant and Equipment' so that operational assets (providing service potential) are no longer held at fair value but at current value. As such IFRS 13 does not apply to operational assets. This new definition of current value means that the measurement requirements for operational property, plant and equipment providing service potential have not changed from the prior year.

However, surplus assets will need to be measured under the new definition of fair value, reflecting the highest and best use from the market participant perspective.

Other areas affected by the new standard include investment property, available for sale financial assets and those items where fair values are disclosed - for example, long term loans and PFI liabilities. IFRS 13 also introduces extensive disclosure requirements.

Local authorities need to:

- identify/ review their classification of surplus assets and investment properties
- discuss IFRS 13 with their property valuers and treasury advisers to ensure that fair values provided are produced in line with the new standard
- update accounting policies and disclosures to reflect the new standard.

Challenge question

- Has your Finance team reviewed the surplus assets and investment property categories to ensure what is included is correctly classified?
- Has your Finance team ensured property valuers and treasury advisers are aware of the fair value definitions under IFRS 13?
- Have the accounting policies and disclosures in your accounts been updated to reflect the IFRS 13 requirements?

Unlodged non-domestic rate appeals

Accounting and audit issues

Last year, there were primarily no provisions for unlodged non-domestic rates appeals as appeals received on or after 1 April 2015 were only backdated to 1 April 2015. The effect of last year's announcement was supposed to put authorities in the position as if the revaluation had been done in 2015 as initially intended, before the extension to 2017. This was only a one-year reprieve and so any unlodged appeals at 31 March 2016 will be backdated to 1 April 2015 and therefore may not be material.

However, this year, local authorities will need to estimate a provision for unlodged appeals but as above it may not be material.

Under IAS 37 'Provisions, Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets' and the Code it is only in extremely rare cases that a reliable estimate cannot be made. Therefore, if your local authority does have such an instance, the rationale needs backing up - both in terms of disclosures (as a contingent liability) and in providing evidence to those charged with governance as to why a reliable estimate for the provision cannot be made.

Challenge question

- Has your CFO made plans to assess the need for an unlodged non-domestic rates appeal provision?

Reforging local government: Summary findings of financial health checks and governance reviews

Grant Thornton market insight

The recent Autumn statement represents the biggest change in local government finance in 35 years. The Chancellor announced that in 2019/20, councils will spend the same in cash terms as they do today and that "better financial management and further efficiency" will be required to achieve the projected 29% savings. Based on our latest review of financial resilience within English local authorities, this presents a serious challenge to many councils that have already become lean.

Our research suggests that:

- the majority of councils will continue to weather the financial storm, but to do so will now require difficult decisions to be made about services
- most councils project significant funding gaps over the next three to five years, but the lack of detailed plans to address these deficits in the medium-term represents a key risk
- Whitehall needs to go further and faster in allowing localities to drive growth and public service reform including proper fiscal devolution that supports businesses and communities
- local government needs a deeper understanding of their local partners to deliver the transformational changes that are needed and do more to break down silos
- elected members have an increasingly important role in ensuring good governance is not just about compliance with regulations, but also about effective management of change and risk
- councils need to improve the level of consultation with the public when prioritising services and make sure that their views help shape council development plans.



Our report is available at <http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/reforging-local-government/>, or in hard copy from your Engagement Lead or Engagement Manager.

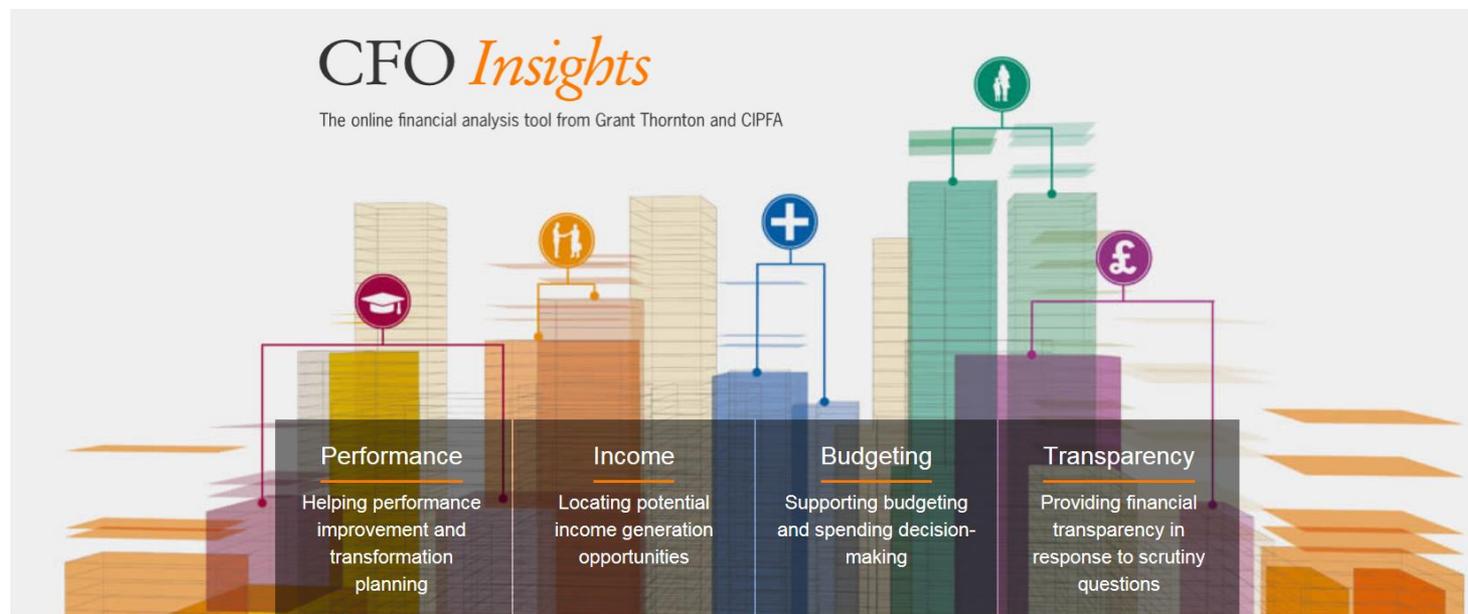
CFO Insights– driving performance improvement

Grant Thornton and CIPFA Market insight

CFO insights is an online analysis tool that gives those aspiring to improve the financial position of their local authority instant access to insight on the financial performance, socio-economy context and service outcomes of every council in England, Scotland and Wales.

The tool provides a three-dimensional lens through which to understand council income and spend by category, the outcomes for that spend and the socio-economic context within which a council operates. This enables comparison against others, not only nationally, but in the context of their geographical and statistical neighbours. CFO Insights is an invaluable tool providing focused insight to develop, and the evidence to support, financial decisions.

We are happy to organise a demonstration of the tool if you want to know more.



Innovation in public financial management

Grant Thornton Insight

In December 2015 we issued our report *'Innovation in public financial management'* which can be found on our website at:

<http://www.grantthornton.global/en/insights/articles/innovation-in-public-financial-management/>

This report draws on a survey of almost 300 practitioners worldwide and includes insights from experts at the International Consortium on Governmental Financial Management (ICGFM) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Centre for Finance and Policy.

The report is the latest in a decade-long series jointly published by Grant Thornton and the ICGFM. It covers four major topics that, globally, will impact on the future of public financial management:

Changing practices. Our research showed that the biggest issue ahead will be finding the political commitment to support more difficult innovations on the agenda – such as increasing public engagement.

The right PPP formula. 90% of respondents felt that substantial investment in infrastructure was required to drive economic growth. In this age of austerity, most governments are also seeking ways to attract outside investment – with the majority using some form of public-private partnership (PPP). Many countries remain inexperienced with such arrangements and the results of their application have been mixed. There has been little improvement since our 2011 survey, which shows that it takes a long time to develop the requisite skills and experience to make PPPs work.

Transparency with technology. Public financial managers are convinced of the importance of enhancing transparency and most are trying to be innovative in this area. However, most are using outdated digital tools, with fewer than half using social media to enhance openness. Even among the best, most transparency efforts are focused on releasing data sets than data insights.

The new normal. Public financial management remains weighed down by the effects of the global financial crisis. However respondents also focused on important developments since 2008, such as the Eurozone problems and the collapse of commodity prices. This suggests that public financial management is having to come to terms with not just the lessons of one major financial crisis, but with how governments can live with less over the long term.



Website re-launch

Grant Thornton

We have recently launched our new-look website. Our new homepage has been optimised for viewing across mobile devices, reflecting the increasing trend for how people choose to access information online. We wanted to make it easier to learn about us and the services we offer.

You can access the page using the link below -
<http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/?tags=local-gov&q=sustainable+communities>





© 2016 Grant Thornton UK LLP. All rights reserved.

'Grant Thornton' means Grant Thornton UK LLP, a limited liability partnership.

Grant Thornton is a member firm of Grant Thornton International Ltd (Grant Thornton International). References to 'Grant Thornton' are to the brand under which the Grant Thornton member firms operate and refer to one or more member firms, as the context requires. Grant Thornton International and the member firms are not a worldwide partnership. Services are delivered independently by member firms, which are not responsible for the services or activities of one another. Grant Thornton International does not provide services to clients.

grant-thornton.co.uk

© 2016 Grant Thornton UK LLP All rights reserved.