

Audit Progress Report

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

November 2019

Year Ending 31 March 2020





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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. The paper also seeks to highlight at Section 2 key emerging national issues and developments which may be of interest to Members of the Panel.

If you require any additional information regarding the issues included within this briefing, please contact any member of your engagement team.

Audit completion 2018/19

Since the Committee last met we have:

- Completed our work and agreed the final and amended Statement of Accounts. We issued our Audit Report on 8th November 2019, providing:
 - an unqualified opinion on the Council's 2018/19 financial statements; and
 - an unqualified conclusion on the Council's arrangements during 2018/19 to deliver value for money in its use of resources.
- 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 8th November 2019; and
- Issued our Audit Completion Certificate to certify the closure of the audit.

This concludes our 2018/19 audit. We would like to thank the Council officers for their co-operation and support in assisting us to complete the audit.

We met with Council officers to carry out a comprehensive debrief of the audit, to identify opportunities to improve the process for 2019/20 in particular around the arrangements in place for the valuation of the Council's Property, Plant, and Equipment and the associated accounting, together with other aspects of the accounts closedown and audit process.

Audit progress 2019/20

The 2019/20 audit is now due to start.

In the next few weeks we will:

- hold internal planning meetings;
- hold update meetings with the finance team to agree the arrangements for the interim and final audit visits;
- discuss emerging technical issues with your team; and
- review minutes from Council meetings to inform our financial audit and value for money conclusion risk assessment.

We plan to carry out interim testing during mid November which will include updating our core financial systems documentation and carrying out substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions for the first six months of the year.

Our detailed Audit Strategy Memorandum will be presented to the Audit Panel in early 2020.

There are no matters to bring to your attention at this stage.

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
Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA)			
2	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)			
3	A practical guide for Local Authorities on Income Generation (2019 edition)	Guidance to assist Councils	7
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)			
4	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

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. NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS – PUBLIC SECTOR AUDIT APPOINTMENTS LTD

2. 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

3. 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

4. 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. The deadline for responses has recently been extended to 20 December.

<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>

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