

External Audit Progress Report

Harborough District Council

Audit & Standards Committee March 2022



1. Audit Progress
2. National publications

01

Section 01:
Audit Progress

Audit Progress

Purpose of this report

This report provides the Audit and Standards Committee's March 2022 meeting with:

- an update on progress in delivering the 2020/21 audit;
- the 2021/22 audit planning process; and
- a summary of recent relevant reports and publications for your information (Section 2).

2020/21 Audit

The position on the key elements of the audit are as follows:

- Financial Statements Audit – our work is substantially complete, although we have yet to complete our review of the Annual Governance Statement. Our work has been carried out remotely and we have had the full co-operation of Officers throughout.
- Whole of Government Accounts – we have not yet received instructions from the National Audit Office for the work required on the Whole of Government Accounts return, so this remains outstanding.
- Value for Money – Our Value For Money Commentary will be included in our Auditor's Annual Report. Our work includes an ongoing risk assessment, including any matters raised in the Annual Governance Statement. We expect to finalise the report for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.
- Other auditor responsibilities – we have not needed to take any action in relation to any of our broader auditor responsibilities.

2021/22 Audit

At this stage we do not expect any significant changes to the audit risk profile and the overall audit approach, and we have not identified any significant changes to the financial reporting requirements under the 2021/22 CIPFA Code. The operating and financial environment for Councils continues though to be challenging and its important our audit plan is properly tailored to the risks and issues. We will hold further planning discussions with management in March 2022, including the normal wash up session on the current year's accounts audit to identify any opportunities for improvement or logistical issues.

We will share our formal 2021/22 Audit Strategy Memorandum with the Audit Committee at its next meeting.

02

Section 02:

National publications

National publications

	Publication/update	Key points
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA)		
1.	New Prudential and Treasury Management Codes	These two statutory and professional codes are important regulatory elements of the capital finance framework within which local authorities operate.
2.	CIPFA launches value for money toolkit with the University of Oxford's GO Lab	Based on the UK National Audit Office's standard definition of value for money, the toolkit offers a consistent approach to programme evaluation.
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities		
3.	Consultation on changes to the capital framework: Minimum Revenue Provision	This consultation seeks views on proposed changes to regulations to better enforce the duty of local authorities to make prudent Minimum Revenue Provision each year.
4.	Measures to improve local audit delays and accounts and audit timetable confirmed	DLUHC have announced a new package of measure to support the improved timeliness of local audit. These include additional funds and an extension of the deadline for publishing accounts.
National Audit Office (NAO)		
5.	The Government's preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned for government on risk management	The report sets out central government's risk analysis, planning, and mitigation strategies prior to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of drawing out wider learning for the government's overall approach.
6.	The Local Government finance system in England: Overview and Challenges	This overview looks at what local government in England spends, how this spending is funded and the effect of changes in recent years. It draws on relevant findings from past NAO work.
7.	Departmental Overview 2020-21: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	This provides a summary of the Department's spending in 2020-21, its major areas of activity and performance, and the challenges it is likely to face in the coming year.
8.	Cyber and Information Security: Good practice guide	Audit committees should be scrutinising cyber security arrangements. This guidance complements government advice by setting out high-level questions and issues for audit committees to consider.
9.	Climate change risk: A good practice guide for Audit and Assurance Committees	This guide helps Committees recognise how climate change risks could manifest themselves and support them in challenging senior management on their approach to managing climate change risks.
Financial Reporting Council		
10.	Inspection findings into the quality of major local body audits	The findings show an improvement on the previous year but the timeliness of reporting was a concern.

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

CIPFA

1. CIPFA publishes new Prudential and Treasury Management Codes, December 2021

CIPFA has published the new Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (Prudential Code) and Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes (the Treasury Management Code) following a consultation period. These two statutory and professional codes are important regulatory elements of the capital finance framework within which local authorities operate. Local authorities are required by regulation to 'have regard to' their provisions. Guidance notes will follow shortly in the new year.

The updated **Prudential Code** includes the following as the focus of the substantive changes:

- The provisions in the code, which present the approach to borrowing in advance of need in order to profit from additional sums borrowed, have been strengthened. The relevant parts of the code have augmented to be clear that borrowing for debt-for-yield investment is not permissible under the Prudential Code. This recognises that commercial activity is part of regeneration but underlines that such transactions do not include debt-for yield as the primary purpose of the investment or represent an unnecessary risk to public funds.
- Proportionality has been included as an objective in the Prudential Code. New provisions have been added so that an authority incorporates an assessment of risk to levels of resources used for capital purposes.

The main changes to the updated **Treasury Management Code** and the accompanying guidance for local authorities are as follows:

- Investment management practices and other recommendations relating to non-treasury investments are included within the Treasury Management Practices (TMPs) alongside existing TMPs.
- The guidance will recommend the introduction of the Liability Benchmark as a treasury management indicator for local government bodies (note that CIPFA has issued a toolkit to assist local authorities with the production of this indicator).
- Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) risks are incorporated into TMP1 (Risk Management) rather than a separate TMP 13.
- The purpose and objective of each category of investments should be described within the Treasury Management Strategy.

<https://www.cipfa.org/about-cipfa/press-office/latest-press-releases/cipfa-issues-new-prudential-and-treasury-management-codes>

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

CIPFA (continued)

2. CIPFA launches value for money toolkit with the University of Oxford's GO Lab, August 2021

CIPFA has partnered with the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab) from the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government to develop the innovative GO Lab-CIPFA Value for Money (VfM) Toolkit.

Based on the UK National Audit Office's standard definition of value for money, the toolkit offers a consistent approach to programme evaluation and has been developed in response to recent trends towards the use of outcomes-based contracts (OBCs) and impact bonds.

The toolkit provides public managers with a framework to help assess the economic validity of public programmes, while also serving as a self-assessment instrument. The toolkit promotes thinking about the longer-term effects of interventions, such as outcomes and impacts, during the design and planning stage of public sector programmes.

The GO Lab-CIPFA VfM toolkit is available for free download on the CIPFA website.

<https://www.cipfa.org/services/go-lab-cipfa-value-for-money-toolkit>

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

3. Consultation on changes to the capital framework: Minimum Revenue Provision, December 2021

This consultation seeks views on proposed changes to regulations to better enforce the duty of local authorities to make prudent Minimum Revenue Provision each year.

Local authorities borrow and invest under the Prudential Framework (the Framework), which comprises legislation and 4 statutory codes that authorities must have regard to. Under this system, authorities have wide freedoms to borrow and invest without the need to seek the government's consent, provided that borrowing is affordable. The intent of the Framework is to make sure local decisions are prudent, affordable and sustainable.

The government is aware that some authorities employ practices that are not fully compliant with the duty to make a prudent revenue provision, resulting in underpayment of MRP. This was reported in the NAO's report Local Authority Investment in Commercial Property (February 2020) and the subsequent report by the Public Accounts Committee in July 2020, which recommended the government take steps to address the issue.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-capital-framework-minimum-revenue-provision/consultation-on-changes-to-the-capital-framework-minimum-revenue-provision#excluding-specific-debt-from-mrp-determination>

4. A new package of measures to support the improved timeliness of local audit

This publication sets out a range of measures agreed with key partners to support the timely completion of local government audits and the ongoing stability of the local audit market. The measures include:

- Steps to increase the number of auditors with skills to carry out the work;
- Additional funding to support increases in audit fees; and
- Extension of the audit deadlines to 30 November 2022 and 30 September for 2023 onwards.

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/measures-to-improve-local-audit-delays?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_source=81365e1a-e6b1-4c1b-bce1-b5ef8fafef6f&utm_content=daily#section-4-longer-term-measures-to-help-stabilise-the-market-and-address-long-term-supply-issues

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

National Audit Office

5. The Government's preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned for government on risk management, November 2021

In November 2021

This report sets out the facts on:

- the government's approach to risk management and emergency planning (Part One);
- the actions the government took to identify the risk of a pandemic like COVID-19 (Part Two);
- the actions the government took to prepare for a pandemic like COVID-19 (Part Three); and
- recent developments (Part Four).

The report sets out central government's risk analysis, planning, and mitigation strategies prior to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of drawing out wider learning for the government's overall risk management approach.

The report concludes that this pandemic has exposed a vulnerability to whole-system emergencies – that is, emergencies that are so broad that they engage the entire system. Although the government had plans for an influenza pandemic, it did not have detailed plans for many non-health consequences and some health consequences of a pandemic like COVID-19. There were lessons from previous simulation exercises that were not fully implemented and would have helped prepare for a pandemic like COVID-19. There was limited oversight and assurance of plans in place, and many pre-pandemic plans were not adequate. In addition, there is variation in capacity, capability and maturity of risk management across government departments.

The pandemic also highlighted the need to strengthen the government's end-to-end risk management process to ensure that it addresses all significant risks, including interdependent and systemic risks. This will require collaboration on risk identification and management not only across government departments and local authorities, but also with the private sector and internationally. For whole-system risks NAO states that the government needs to define its risk appetite to make informed decisions and prepare appropriately so that value for money can be protected. NAO state that the pandemic has also highlighted the need to strengthen national resilience to prepare for any future events of this scale, and the challenges the government faces in balancing the need to prepare for future events while dealing with day-to-day issues and current events.

The full report can be seen at this link: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-governments-preparedness-for-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

National Audit Office

6. The Local Government finance system in England: Overview and Challenges, November 2021

This overview looks at what local government in England spends, how this spending is funded and the effect of changes in recent years. It draws on relevant findings from past NAO work.

The overview aims to enhance financial transparency about local government in England. It covers:

- An introduction to local government funding
- Government policy and actions since 2010
- Some results or consequences of these changes.

The report headlines include the following in respect of the impact of the changes implemented by government on councils:

- Rising social care spending has squeezed funds available for non-social care services, yet rising spend has not prevented concerns about social care, and projections suggest continued cost and demand pressures.
- Local authorities have made substantial spending reductions in some services and sought to maximise revenue funding from other sources. Some local authorities have sought to maximise revenue available for services in ways that may reduce financial resilience. Commercial property investment strategies have increased some local authorities' exposure to risk. Local authorities now rely more on sources of income that are dependent on local economic conditions.
- A lack of short-term funding certainty hampers local authorities' ability to plan. Local authorities are also planning and delivering services amid medium-term financial uncertainty. Financial uncertainty does not support value-for-money decision-making.
- The governance mechanisms that support decision-making about financial sustainability are under strain. The financial resilience of the local government sector was being tested, even before the COVID-19 pandemic

The full report can be seen at this link: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-local-government-finance-system-in-england-overview-and-challenges/>

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

National Audit Office

7. Departmental Overview 2020-21: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, November 2021

This provides a summary of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' spending in 2020-21, its major areas of activity and performance, and the challenges it is likely to face in the coming year, based on the insights from NAO's financial audit and value for money work.

The full report can be seen at this link: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/departmental-overview-2020-21-department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities/>

8. Cyber and Information Security: Good practice guide, October 2021

Audit committees should be scrutinising 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 guide provides a checklist of questions and issues covering:

- The overall approach to cyber security and risk management;
- Capability needed to manage cyber security; and
- 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 guidance is based on NAO previous work and our detailed systems audits, which have identified a high incidence of access-control weaknesses. It also provides links to other government guidance and NAO resources.

The full report can be seen at this link: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/cyber-security-and-information-risk-guidance/>

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

National Audit Office

9. Climate change risk: A good practice guide for Audit and Assurance Committees, August 2021

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.

The full report can be seen at this link: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/climate-change-risk-a-good-practice-guide-for-audit-and-risk-assurance-committees/>

NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Financial Reporting Council

10. Inspection findings into the quality of major local body audits, October 2021

The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) published in October 2021 its [inspection findings into the quality of major local body audits](#) in England (which includes large health and local government bodies) for the financial year ended 31 March 2020.

The FRC reviewed 20 major local audits performed by six of the largest audit firms and found 6 (30%) required improvements. This is an improvement on the prior year inspection results where 60% of audits inspected required either improvements or significant improvements.

The FRC found that the firms have taken action in response to previous findings, however, the timeliness of auditor reporting was disappointing.

The key areas requiring action by some of the audit firms included:

- strengthening the audit testing of expenditure;
- improving the evaluation and challenge of assumptions used in concluding over investment property valuations;
- improving the evaluation of assumptions used in property, plant and equipment valuations; and
- providing improved rationale supporting a modified audit opinion.

FRC found that all Value for Money arrangement conclusions inspected by the FRC required no more than limited improvements.

The full report can be seen at this link: <https://www.frc.org.uk/news/october-2021/frc-publishes-latest-major-local-audit-quality-ins>

Contact

Mazars

Director: Mark Surridge

Email: mark.surridge@mazars.co.uk

Manager: Leah Parsons

Email: leah.parsons@mazars.co.uk

Mazars is an internationally integrated partnership, specialising in audit, accountancy, advisory, tax and legal services*. Operating in over 90 countries and territories around the world, we draw on the expertise of 40,400 professionals – 24,400 in Mazars' integrated partnership and 16,000 via the Mazars North America Alliance – to assist clients of all sizes at every stage in their development.

*where permitted under applicable country laws.

www.mazars.com

Follow us:

LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/company/Mazars

Twitter:

www.twitter.com/MazarsGroup

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/MazarsGroup

Instagram:

www.instagram.com/MazarsGroup

WeChat:

ID: Mazars