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External audit progress report and technical update

London Borough of Islington

June 2014



This report provides the audit committee with an overview on progress in delivering our responsibilities as your external auditors.

The report also highlights the main technical issues which are currently having an impact in local government.

If you require any additional information regarding the issues included within this report, please contact a member of the audit team.

We have flagged the articles that we believe will have an impact at the Council and given our perspective on the issue:

- High impact
- Medium impact
- Low impact
- For info

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Progress report



External audit progress report – May 2014

This document provides the audit committee with a high level overview on progress in delivering our responsibilities as your external auditors.

At the end of each stage of the audit we issue certain deliverables, including reports and opinions. A summary of progress against these deliverable is provided in Appendix 1 of this report

Area of responsibility	Commentary	
Summary of work performed	<p>Since the April 2014 Audit Committee meeting we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed our interim audit visit looking at the 2013/14 financial statements audit and begun early discussions with officers to agree a way forward on a number of disclosures within the financial statements. There are no significant issues we wish to draw to your attention; and Continued correspondence with and investigation of matters raised by local government electors. We present a brief summary of this work below. 	
Summary of upcoming work	<p>Our work over the coming quarter will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of the financial statements audit in July and August; Completion of our VFM conclusion audit in July and August; Commencement of the audit of grant claims; and Continuing to correspond with local electors. 	
Correspondence with electors	<p>Under section 15 of the Audit Commission Act 1998 local electors have a right to contact the auditor and ask him or her to consider exercise of the statutory powers set out in the act. These powers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying to court to have an item in the accounts ruled illegal; Issuing a report in the public interest; and Making a statutory recommendation to which the Council must respond. <p>Since the last audit committee we have written to one objector to confirm that we would not be taking the matter they raised further. A second objector has withdrawn his objection upon receipt of information from the Council. There are two objections where work is ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One elector who has corresponded concerning retention of parking fines in Drayton Park; and One elector who has raised matters concerning the Council's housing repairs PFI. <p>We will be unable to certify the affected audit years closed until we have reached a conclusion. We will continue to update the Committee of progress through these reports.</p>	
Contacts	Philip Johnstone Director 020 7311 2091	Paul Cuttle Manager 020 7311 2302
	philip.johnstone@kpmg.co.uk	paul.cuttle@kpmg.co.uk



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Technical update

Area	Level of Impact	Comments	KPMG perspective
Final local government finance settlement 2014/15	● High	<p>On 5 February 2014 the Government published the final local government finance settlement for 2014/15. In addition, the Government has proposed that any council tax increases made by billing or precepting authorities of 2 per cent or more will be subject to a referendum.</p> <p>For more information, visit https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/final-local-government-finance-settlement-2014-to-2015</p>	<i>The committee may wish to consider the progress the Council has made on addressing the funding cuts and the impact this has on services</i>
Draft order published reflecting changes to council tax calculations	● High	<p>The draft Localism Act 2011 (Consequential Amendments) Order 2014 was published on 9 January 2014. It proposes changes to sections 73 to 79 of the Localism Act 2011 that require billing authorities, major precepting authorities and local precepting authorities in England to calculate a council tax requirement for a financial year. Previously, such authorities were obliged to calculate a budget requirement for a financial year.</p> <p>The draft Order makes amendments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • section 31A(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA 1992) to exclude sums that have been or are transferred from an authority's general fund to its collection fund; • section 42A of the LGFA 1992 to ensure that grant repayments are taken into account as expenditure under section 85(4)(a) of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (GLA 1999); and • schedule 6 of the GLA 1999 to provide that, if the approved consolidated budget or council tax requirement is found to be excessive, the GLA must agree a substitute consolidated budget or council tax requirement before (or after) the end of the financial year, if it has not already done so. <p>The draft Order will have effect in relation to financial years beginning 1 April 2014.</p>	<i>The committee may wish to consider whether the Council has considered the impacts of the proposed changes when assessing their council tax requirement for 2014/15 and beyond</i>

Area	Level of Impact	Comments	KPMG perspective
<p>Department of Health publishes directions and an explanatory note for the 2014 transfer of funds from the NHS to local authorities</p>	<p>● High</p>	<p>On 4 April, the Department of Health (DH) issued the National Health Service Commissioning Board (Payments to Local Authorities) Directions 2014. The 2014 directions, which apply in respect of NHS England's (NHSE's) payment of £1.1 billion to local authorities in respect of their social care functions for the financial year 2014/15, came into force on 1 April.</p> <p>Each local authority and NHS England should enter into an agreement in relation to the payments to be made and the conditions that apply. The 2014 Directions, and the updated National Health Service (Conditions relating to Payments by NHS Bodies to Local Authorities) Directions 2013, impose certain conditions that must be met in relation to each payment. These include conditions that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the funding must be used to support adult social care services which also have a health benefit; ▪ the local authority and its local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) agree how the funding is best used within social care and the outcomes that are expected from the investment; ▪ local authorities and CCGs have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for their local population and existing commissioning plans for both health and social care in deciding how the funding is to be used; and ▪ local authorities must be able to demonstrate how the funding transfer will improve social care services and outcomes for their users. <p>NHSE must not place any other conditions on the funding transfers without the written agreement of the DH and must ensure that it has access to timely information on how the funding is being used locally.</p>	<p><i>The committee may wish to seek assurances that the Council has complied with the DH Directions</i></p>
<p>Housing Revenue Account Borrowing Programme</p>	<p>● High</p>	<p>On 7 April the government launched the Housing Revenue Account Borrowing Programme which makes £300 million of borrowing available to provide 10,000 new affordable homes in 2015/16 and 2016/17. This funding will form part of the Local Growth Fund, available to local authorities who have a proposal agreed by their Local Enterprise Partnership.</p> <p>The government also published a revised set of General Consents under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 1988 which allows councils to dispose of vacant housing land to private registered providers and non-registered providers at less than market value.</p> <p>For more information visit https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-borrowing-powers-for-councils-to-build-10000-affordable-homes</p> <p>&</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-consents-for-privately-let-housing</p>	<p><i>The committee may wish to seek further information as to how this affects the Council</i></p>

Area	Level of Impact	Comments	KPMG perspective
<p>LAAP Bulletin 98: Closure of the 2013/14 Accounts and Related Matters</p>	<p>● Medium</p>	<p>CIPFA has issued LAAP Bulletin 98: Closure of the 2013/14 Accounts and Related Matters which clarifies a number of issues regarding the preparation of 2013/14 financial statements in response to FAQs in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ public health reform; ▪ Non-Domestic Rates – provision for appeals against the rateable value of business properties; ▪ component accounting; ▪ accounting for pension interest costs in relation to current service cost and pension administration costs; and ▪ disclosure requirements for dedicated schools grant. <p>The bulletin also highlights a number of other issues affecting the closure of the 2013/14 accounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ accounting standards that have been issued but have not yet been adopted; ▪ use of example financial statements for preparation of the 2013/14 accounts; ▪ minor amendment to Code 2013/14 guidance notes on the use of indices; ▪ technical alerts; and ▪ notification of the discontinuance of Icelandic and capital interest rates bulletins. <p>With regard to future accounting periods, the Bulletin also provides an update on issues affecting 2014/15 and on the measurement of transport infrastructure assets in 2016/17.</p>	<p><i>The committee may wish to enquire when reviewing the financial statements that all relevant guidance has been considered.</i></p>

Area	Level of Impact	Comments	KPMG perspective
CIPFA Technical Accounting Alert – Frequency of Valuations for Property, Plant and Equipment	<p style="text-align: center;">● Low</p>	<p>CIPFA has issued a Technical Accounting Alert on the Frequency of Valuations for Property, Plant and Equipment. The Alert provides guidance to local authorities in interpreting the requirements for the revaluation of property, plant and equipment, but confirms that there are no changes to the requirements of the <i>CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2013/14</i> which is still based on the underlying requirement to comply with IAS 16: Property, Plant and Equipment.</p> <p>For more information visit: http://www.cipfa.org/-/media/Files/Policy%20and%20Guidance/Panels/Local%20Authority%20Accounting%20Panel/Technical%20Alert%20Frequency%20of%20Valuations%20Final%20for%20publication.pdf</p>	<p><i>The Council should ensure that revaluation programmes are compliant with the Code.</i></p>
Whole of government accounts (WGA) timetable	<p style="text-align: center;">● Low</p>	<p>HM Treasury has now published a corrected timetable for the submission of draft and audited Whole Government Accounts returns following the release of the WGA Newsletter – March 2014, which contained incorrect information.</p> <p>The revised timetable is on their website alongside various templates that audited bodies will be required to complete during the WGA process.</p> <p>For more information visit https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whole-of-government-accounts-2013-to-2014-guidance-for-preparers</p>	<p><i>The Council should ensure it is working to the correct WGA submission deadlines</i></p>

Area	Level of Impact	Comments
Audit Commission 14/15 Scale Fees confirmed	● For information	The 2014/15 work programme and scales of fees are now available, alongside the lists of fees for individual bodies. A summary of the responses to the Audit Commission consultation on the work programme and fees is also available. For more information visit http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/audit-regime/1415WPSF
Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014	● For information	The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 received Royal Assent on 30 January. The Act makes it possible for the Audit Commission to close, in line with the Government's expectations, on 31 March 2015. In its place there will be a new framework for local public audit, due to start after the Commission's current contracts with audit suppliers end in 2016/17, or in 2019/20 if they are extended. A transitional body, which is being set up by the Local Government Association, will oversee the contracts in the intervening period. In the statement the Commission's Chairman explains the main aims of the organisation in its final 14 months. Jeremy Newman also confirms plans are already in place for many of the residual responsibilities that will transfer to new organisations and highlights those for which a new owner has not yet been agreed. The Audit Commission's press release is available to view on its website: http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/2014/01/finish-line-in-sight-for-audit-commission/
Are other local authorities making more money? (CIPFA article)	● For information	"In this period of prolonged austerity, it is essential for local authorities to take advantage of the various income generation streams available to them if they wish to raise additional revenue as a means of providing funding for services." Read the full article at: http://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/articles/are-other-local-authorities-making-more-money

Area	Level of Impact	Comments
Value for money data briefing on waste collection	<p style="text-align: center;">●</p> For information	<p>The Audit Commission has published Local authority waste management, the latest in a series of value for money (VFM) data briefings analysing data in the VFM profiles tool. The briefing examines spending and performance on household waste management.</p> <p>In 2012/13 the average spending on household waste management varied between local authorities with similar responsibilities. For example most authorities that both collect and dispose of waste (58 per cent) spent between £125 and £175 per household in 2012/13 but thirteen per cent spent more than £200 per household.</p> <p>In 2012/13, the amount of waste recycled varied from 12 per cent up to 67 per cent, with 40 authorities recycling less than 30 per cent of their household waste. And while landfill has reduced everywhere some regions are still more reliant than others.</p> <p>The variation in performance and spending suggests there may be opportunities to reduce expenditure. If councils were able to reduce their spending to the average for their authority type and waste responsibilities potentially up to £464 million could be saved overall. Any savings could be used to support more sustainable forms of waste management or be reinvested in other services.</p> <p>Previous briefings on councils' expenditure on benefits administration, council tax collection, social care for older people, income from charging and business rates are also available on the Commission's website.</p> <p>For more information visit http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/information-and-analysis/value-for-money-briefings-2/</p>
Financial ratios tool	<p style="text-align: center;">●</p> For information	<p>On 4 April, the Audit Commission published its updated financial ratios analysis tool.</p> <p>The ratios tool has been updated to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ data for the 2012/13 financial year; and ▪ the restatement of the 2011/12 data where relevant. <p>The ratio tool continues to include data from 2007/08 for district, unitary and county councils, data from 2008/09 for Greater London Authority bodies and data from 2009/10 for standalone fire authorities.</p> <p>Information is included for police and crime commissioners for 2011/12 and 2012/13 reflecting the data available for these new bodies.</p>

Area	Level of Impact	Comments
<p>Value for money data briefing on benefits administration</p>	<p>● For information</p>	<p>The Commission has published Councils' expenditure on benefits administration, the latest in its series of value for money (VFM) data briefings analysing data in the VFM profiles tool. The briefing compares the cost of benefits administration to councils with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) funding received. The briefing reports that costs exceeded funding by £361 million in 2012/13, but identifies significant variations in the amount each council spends when compared with other councils of similar size and caseload.</p> <p>To read the report, visit: http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/2014/01/administration-and-overpayment-of-benefits-cost-councils-829-million/</p> <p>Visit the VFM profiles tool website at: http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/information-and-analysis/</p> <p>The briefing also reports that in 2012/13 councils paid £468 million more in benefits than they received in subsidy from DWP. Councils are encouraged to use the national and local data to get a better understanding of their performance and costs and consider the scope to reduce their costs by improving their efficiency and reducing errors, overpayments and fraud.</p> <p>Previous briefings on council tax collection, social care for older people, income from charging and business rates are also available on the at http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/information-and-analysis/value-for-money-briefings-2/</p>
<p>Judicial review over lost waste credits</p>	<p>● For information</p>	<p>Two local authorities have withdrawn their application for a judicial review against Defra's decision to remove £65 million in waste infrastructure credits. North Yorkshire County Council and City of York Council said continuing with the judicial review, which was due to be heard at the end of the month, "would not be in the public interest".</p> <p>Their grounds of challenge included that the Secretary of State did not make the decision to withdraw the credits after the councils had approved the plans for the £1.4 billion Allerton Waste Recovery Park in a proper manner and Defra failed to follow its own published criteria. In a statement, North Yorkshire and City of York said: "If the councils proceeded with the judicial review, and were successful, Defra would be required to repeat the decision making process but it is now clear that the likely outcome would be that Defra would reach the same conclusions and the funding support for the project would not be reinstated."</p> <p>North Yorkshire County Council and York City Council have spent more than £7million over eight years on expert advice over plans for the site near Harrogate. If the scheme does not go ahead the councils could be liable for a termination payment to contractors AmeyCespa of up to £5m.</p> <p>Bradford and Calderdale councils, who also had a judicial review claim against Defra over the withdrawal of waste infrastructure credits, have settled their claim.</p>

Area	Level of Impact	Comments
Administration of Benefits, including overpayments, cost councils £829m (Audit Commission article)	● For information	<p>Councils administer housing benefit on behalf of central government. They also administered council tax benefit until it was replaced in April 2013 by local council tax support schemes. Councils' local arrangements, such as how quickly, accurately and efficiently they process claims, affect the amount they spend administering benefits and the amount of subsidy they receive from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). By improving their performance, councils can reduce their costs, which are in excess of £800 million per year.</p> <p>Read the full article http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/2014/01/administration-and-overpayment-of-benefits-cost-councils-829-million/</p>
High central costs in some councils need greater scrutiny (Audit Commission article)	● For information	<p>The Audit Commission has published new analysis of data on English councils' central management costs in its briefing, Councils' Centrally Managed Spending: Using Data From the Value for Money Profiles. Overall spending on corporate and democratic management reduced by 13 per cent from 2003/04 to 2012/13, while spending on central management support to services increased by 10 per cent. However, gaps and inconsistencies in councils' recorded spending in these areas will, the Commission says, hinder councils' attempts to identify savings and undermines accountability to taxpayers. As a result, the Commission is calling for greater local scrutiny and more consistent reporting by councils of their central management spending.</p> <p>Read the full article http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/2014/02/high-central-costs-in-some-councils-need-greater-scrutiny-2/</p>
Children's social care: the case for early intervention (CIPFA article)	● For information	<p>"Children's social care is a politically sensitive and emotive area. Yet under the austerity measures, it has seen increased demand, to be met by a smaller pool of funding. Department for Education (DfE) Statistics show over the past three years, referrals to children's social care have risen steadily, a growth of 12.43 per cent from 2008/09 to 2010/11. The reasons why demand is increasing needs to be examined – and, if possible, the causes addressed – in order to stem the rising tide."</p> <p>Read the full article http://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/articles/childrens-social-care-the-case-for-early-intervention</p>



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Appendix



Appendix 1 – 2013/14 Audit deliverables

At the end of each stage of our audit we issue certain deliverables, including reports and opinions.

Our key deliverables will be delivered to a high standard and on time.

We discuss and agree each report with the Council's officers prior to publication.

Deliverable	Purpose	Timing	Status
Planning			
Fee letter	Communicate indicative fee for the audit year	April 2013	Complete
External audit plan	Outline our audit strategy and planned approach Identify areas of audit focus and planned procedures	April 2014	Complete
Substantive procedures			
Report to those charged with governance (ISA+260 report)	Details the resolution of key audit issues. Communication of adjusted and unadjusted audit differences. Performance improvement recommendations identified during our audit. Commentary on the Council's value for money arrangements.	September 2014	TBC
Completion			
Auditor's report	Providing an opinion on your accounts (including the Annual Governance Statement). Concluding on the arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources (the VFM conclusion).	September 2014	TBC
WGA	Concluding on the Whole of Government Accounts consolidation pack in accordance with guidance issued by the National Audit Office.	September 2014	TBC
Annual audit letter	Summarise the outcomes and the key issues arising from our audit work for the year.	November 2014	TBC
Certification of claims and returns			
Certification of claims and returns report	Summarise the outcomes of certification work on your claims and returns for Government departments.	December 2014	TBC



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