

The Annual Audit Letter for Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority

Year ended 31 March 2019

August 2019



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Executive Summary

Purpose

Our Annual Audit Letter (Letter) summarises the key findings arising from the work that we have carried out at Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) for the year ended 31 March 2019.

This Letter is intended to provide a commentary on the results of our work to the Authority and external stakeholders, and to highlight issues that we wish to draw to the attention of the public. In preparing this Letter, we have followed the National Audit Office (NAO)'s Code of Audit Practice and Auditor Guidance Note (AGN) 07 – 'Auditor Reporting'. We reported the detailed findings from our audit work to the Authority's Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel (ETAP) as those charged with governance in our Audit Findings Report on 24/07/2019

Our work

Materiality	We determined materiality for the audit of the Authority's financial statements to be £975,000, which is 2% of the Authority's gross revenue expenditure.
Financial Statements opinion	We gave an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements on 26 July 2019.
Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)	We completed work on the Authority's consolidation return following guidance issued by the NAO.
Use of statutory powers	We did not identify any matters which required us to exercise our additional statutory powers.

Respective responsibilities

We have carried out our audit in accordance with the NAO's Code of Audit Practice, which reflects the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act). Our key responsibilities are to:

- give an opinion on the Authority's financial statements (section two)
- assess the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (the value for money conclusion) (section three).

In our audit of the Authority's financial statements, we comply with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs) and other guidance issued by the NAO.

Executive Summary

Value for Money arrangements	We were satisfied that the Authority put in place proper arrangements to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We reflected this in our audit report to the Authority on 24 July 2019.
Certificate	We certified that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice on 26 July 2019.

Working with the Authority

During the year we have delivered a number of successful outcomes with you:

- An efficient audit – we delivered an efficient audit with you in July, delivering the financial statements 5 days before the deadline, releasing your finance team for other work.
- Understanding your operational health – through the value for money conclusion we provided you with assurance on your operational effectiveness.

- Sharing our insight – we provided regular audit committee updates covering best practice. We also shared our thought leadership reports
- Providing training – we provided your teams with training on financial statements

We would like to record our appreciation for the assistance and co-operation provided to us during our audit by the Authority's staff.

Grant Thornton UK LLP
August 2019

Audit of the Financial Statements

Our audit approach

Materiality

In our audit of the Authority's financial statements, we use the concept of materiality to determine the nature, timing and extent of our work, and in evaluating the results of our work. We define materiality as the size of the misstatement in the financial statements that would lead a reasonably knowledgeable person to change or influence their economic decisions.

We determined materiality for the audit of the Authority's financial statements to be £975,000, which is 2% of the Authority's gross revenue expenditure. We used this benchmark as, in our view, users of Authority's financial statements are most interested in where the Authority has spent its revenue in the year.

We also set a lower level of specific materiality for of £100,000 for remuneration disclosures due to its sensitive nature and public interest.

We set a lower threshold of £49,000, above which we reported errors to the Ethics Transparency and Audit Panel in our Audit Findings Report.

The scope of our audit

Our audit involves obtaining sufficient evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements to give reasonable assurance that they are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. This includes assessing whether:

- the accounting policies are appropriate, have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed;
- the significant accounting estimates made by management are reasonable; and
- the overall presentation of the financial statements gives a true and fair view.

We also read the remainder of the financial statements and the narrative report, annual governance statement and Annual Report published in the financial statements to check it is consistent with our understanding of the Authority and with the financial statements included in the Annual Report on which we gave our opinion.

We carry out our audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) and the NAO Code of Audit Practice. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Our audit approach was based on a thorough understanding of the Authority's business and is risk based.

We identified key risks and set out overleaf the work we performed in response to these risks and the results of this work.

Audit of the Financial Statements

Significant Audit Risks

These are the significant risks which had the greatest impact on our overall strategy and where we focused more of our work.

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions
Valuation of land and buildings Other land and buildings comprises of Fire Stations and workshops which are classed as specialised assets, which are required to be valued at depreciated replacement cost (DRC) at year end, reflecting the cost of a modern equivalent asset necessary to deliver the same service provision. The remainder of other land and buildings are not specialised in nature and are required to be valued at existing use in value (EUV) at year end.	As part of our audit work we have: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work• evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert• written to the valuers to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out• challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding• tested revaluations made during the year to see if they had been input correctly into the Authority's asset register	Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of valuation of land and buildings

Audit of the Financial Statements

Significant Audit Risks

These are the significant risks which had the greatest impact on our overall strategy and where we focused more of our work.

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions
Valuation of net pension liability Given the significant value of the net pension fund liability, small changes in assumptions can result in significant valuation movements. There has been a £40m net actuarial loss during 2018/19 this includes the additional pension liability arising from the McCloud judgement.	As part of our audit work we have: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undertaken an assessment of management's expert• Reviewed and assessed the actuary's roll forward approach taken,• Used an auditors expert (PWC) to assess the actuary and assumptions made by the actuary	Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of net pension liability
Management override of internal controls Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management override of controls is present in all entities.	As part of our audit work we completed; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluated the design effectiveness of management controls over journals• analysed the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals;• tested unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration;• gained an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and considered their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence; and• evaluated the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.	Our audit work has not identified any issues in respect of management override of controls.

Audit of the Financial Statements

Audit opinion

We gave an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements on 26 July 2019.

Preparation of the financial statements

The Authority presented us with draft financial statements in accordance with the national deadline, and provided a good set of working papers to support them. The finance team responded promptly and efficiently to our queries during the course of the audit.

Issues arising from the audit of the financial statements

We reported the key issues from our audit to the Authority's ETAP on 24 July 2019.

Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report

We are required to review the Authority's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report. It published them on its website in the Statement of Accounts in line with the national deadlines.

Both documents were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant supporting guidance. We confirmed that both documents were consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Authority and with our knowledge of the Authority.

Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)

We carried out work on the Authority's Data Collection Tool in line with instructions provided by the NAO. We issued an assurance statement which confirmed the Authority was below the audit threshold on 26 July 2019.

Other statutory powers

We also have additional powers and duties under the Act, including powers to issue a public interest report, make written recommendations, apply to the Court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law, and to give electors the opportunity to raise questions about the Authority's accounts and to raise objections received in relation to the accounts.

Certificate of closure of the audit

We certified that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice on 26 July 2019.

Value for Money conclusion

Background

We carried out our review in accordance with the NAO Code of Audit Practice, following the guidance issued by the NAO in November 2017 which specified the criterion for auditors to evaluate:

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.

Key findings

Our first step in carrying out our work was to perform a risk assessment and identify the risks where we concentrated our work.

The risks we identified and the work we performed are set out overleaf.

As part of our Audit Findings report agreed with the Authority in July 2019, we agreed recommendations to address our findings.

Overall Value for Money conclusion

We are satisfied that in all significant respects the Authority put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2019.

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Value for Money conclusion

Value for Money Risks

Risks identified in our audit plan	Findings	Conclusion
<p>Informed Decision Making</p> <p>Acting in the Public Interest, through demonstrating and applying the principles and values of sound governance</p> <p>Staffordshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority was created by statute on 1 August 2018. Governance has now transferred to the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner.</p> <p>This change in governance represents a risk under the sub-criteria of Informed decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Authority was abolished on 1 August 2018 and a new body sole was created as from the 1 August 2018 the authority became Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority.• The major change is that the governance of the authority now falls to the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner who is 'Those charged with Governance'.• Plans to merge some support functions are in place to achieve savings and produce efficient processes across the police and fire authorities. However as the governance role has changed mid year and changes are being made this represented a risk to informed decision making.• We have reviewed and evaluated the governance arrangements that have been put in place since the transfer to ensure it results in comprehensive reporting and decision making. In particular in relation to communication to the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner to ensure he is fully informed as the chief decision maker and Those Charged with Governance.• Work undertaken via panel attendance and review of minutes has not shown any reduction in the level of governance or an increase in poor or inappropriate decision making.• The FRA performance continues as previously with no noticeable reduction or impact being identified following the new governance structure implementation.	<p>Work undertaken has given us assurance that a newly formed committee structure is in place. The resulting effectiveness will only be seen as the organisation and structure embeds and results can be evaluated. Some Terms of Reference are still being developed, as are required new policies and procedures.</p> <p>The Authority will need to continue to monitor the changes to the revised governance model to ensure it is delivering as planned and in line with legislation. This is an ongoing task.</p> <p>On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2017, we are satisfied that the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2019.</p>

A. Reports issued and fees

We confirm below our final reports issued and fees charged for the audit and confirm there were no fees for the provision of non audit services.

Reports issued

Report	Date issued
Audit Plan	February 2019
Audit Findings Report	July 2019
Annual Audit Letter	August 219

Fees

	Planned £	Actual fees £	2017/18 fees ££
Statutory audit	23,646	28,146	31,000
Total fees	23,646	28,146	31,000

Audit fee variation

As outlined in our audit plan, the 2018-19 scale fee published by PSAA of £23,646 assumes that the scope of the audit does not significantly change. There are a number of areas where the scope of the audit has changed, which has led to additional work. These are set out in the following table.

Area	Reason	Fee proposed
Assessing the impact of the McCloud ruling	The Government's transitional arrangements for pensions were ruled discriminatory by the Court of Appeal last December. The Supreme Court refused the Government's application for permission to appeal this ruling. As part of our audit we have reviewed the revised actuarial assessment of the impact on the financial statements along with any audit reporting requirements.	1,500
Pensions – IAS 19	The Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that the depth of work by audit firms in respect of IAS 19 needs to be strengthened. Accordingly, we have increased the level of scope and coverage in respect of IAS 19 this year.	1,500
PPE Valuation – work of experts	As above, the Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that auditors need to increase the depth of work on PPE Valuations across the sector. We have increased the volume and scope of our audit work to reflect this.	1,500
Total		4,500

Fee variations are subject to PSAA approval.

A. Reports issued and fees continued

We confirm below our final reports issued and fees charged for the audit and confirm there were no fees for the provision of non audit services.

Fees for non-audit services

Service	Fees £
Audit related services - None	Nil
Non-Audit related services - None	Nil

Non- audit services

- For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Authority. The table above summarises all non-audit services which were identified.
- We have considered whether non-audit services might be perceived as a threat to our independence as the Authority's auditor and have ensured that appropriate safeguards are put in place.

The above non-audit services are consistent with the Authority's policy on the allotment of non-audit work to your auditor.

Our commitment to our local government clients

- Senior level investment
- Local presence enhancing our responsiveness, agility and flexibility.
- High quality audit delivery
- Collaborative working across the public sector
- Wider connections across the public sector economy, including with health and other local government bodies
- Investment in Health and Wellbeing, Social Value and the Vibrant Economy
- Sharing of best practice and our thought leadership.
- Invitations to training events locally and regionally – bespoke training for emerging issues
- Further investment in data analytics and informatics to keep our knowledge of the areas up to date and to assist in designing a fully tailored audit approach

Our relationship with our clients– why are we best placed?

- We work closely with our clients to ensure that we understand their financial challenges, performance and future strategy.
- We deliver robust, pragmatic and timely financial statements and Value for Money audits
- We have an open, two way dialogue with clients that support improvements in arrangements and the audit process
- Feedback meetings tell us that our clients are pleased with the service we deliver. We are not complacent and will continue to improve further
- Our locally based, experienced teams have a commitment to both our clients and the wider public sector
- We are a Firm that specialises in Local Government, Health and Social Care, and Cross Sector working, with over 25 Key Audit Partners, the most public sector specialist Engagement Leads of any firm
- We have strong relationships with CIPFA, SOLCAE, the Society of Treasurers, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Care and others.

New opportunities and challenges for your community

The Local Government economy

Local authorities face unprecedented challenges including:

- Financial Sustainability – addressing funding gaps and balancing needs against resources
- Service Sustainability – Adult Social Care funding gaps and pressure on Education, Housing, Transport
- Transformation – new models of delivery, greater emphasis on partnerships, more focus on economic development
- Technology – cyber security and risk management

At a wider level, the political environment remains complex:

- The government continues its negotiation with the EU over Brexit, and future arrangements remain uncertain.
- We will consider your arrangements for managing and reporting your financial resources as part of our work in reaching our Value for Money conclusion.
- We will keep you informed of changes to the financial reporting requirements for 2018/19 through on-going discussions and invitations to our technical update workshops.

Delivering real value through:

- Early advice on technical accounting issues, providing certainty of accounting treatments, future financial planning implications and resulting in draft statements that are 'right first time'
- Knowledge and expertise in all matters local government, including local objections and challenge, where we have an unrivalled depth of expertise.
- Early engagement on issues, especially on ADMs, housing delivery changes, Children services and Adult Social Care restructuring, partnership working with the NHS, inter authority agreements, governance and financial reporting
- Implementation of our recommendations have resulted in demonstrable improvements in your underlying arrangements, for example accounting for unique assets, financial management, reporting and governance, and tax implications for the Cornwall Council companies
- Robust but pragmatic challenge – seeking early liaison on issues, and having the difficult conversations early to ensure a 'no surprises' approach – always doing the right thing
- Providing regional training and networking opportunities for your teams on technical accounting issues and developments and changes to Annual Reporting requirements
- An efficient audit approach, providing tangible benefits, such as releasing finance staff earlier and prompt resolution of issues.

Grant Thornton in Local Government

Our client base and delivery



- We are the largest supplier of external audit services to local government
- We audit over 150 local government clients
- We signed 95% of our local government opinions in 2017/18 by 31 July
- In our latest independent client service review, we consistently score 9/10 or above. Clients value our strong interaction, our local knowledge and wealth of expertise.

Our connections



- We are well connected to MHCLG, the NAO and key local government networks
- We work with CIPFA, Think Tanks and legal firms to develop workshops and good practice
- We have a strong presence across all parts of local government including blue light services
- We provide thought leadership, seminars and training to support our clients and to provide solutions

Our people



- We have over 25 engagement leads accredited by ICAEW, and over 250 public sector specialists
- We provide technical and personal development training
- We employ over 80 Public Sector trainee accountants

Our quality



- Our audit approach complies with the NAO's Code of Audit Practice, and International Standards on Auditing
- We are fully compliant with ethical standards
- Your audit team has passed all quality inspections including QAD and AQRT

Our technical support



- We have specialist leads for Public Sector Audit quality and technical
- We provide national technical guidance on emerging auditing, financial reporting and ethical areas
- Specialist audit software is used to deliver maximum efficiencies

