

Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

Surrey County Council

Year ending 31 March 2019

12 December 2018



Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	03
Progress on 2017/18 at 26 November 2018	04
Progress on 2018/19 at 26 November 2018	06
Audit Deliverables	07
Sector Update	08
Links	14

Introduction



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This paper provides the Audit & Governance 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 as a local authority.

Members of the Audit & Governance Committee can find further useful material on our website, where we have a section dedicated to our work in the public sector. Here you can download copies of our publications www.grantthornton.co.uk ..

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 Engagement Manager.



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Progress on 2017/18 at 26 November 2018

Financial Statements Audit

We issued our 2017/18 audit report on 31 July 2018.

We are due to commence our interim audit in March 2019. At our interim fieldwork visit we will carry out early substantive testing.

We reported the findings from the audit to you at the July Audit & Governance Committee and in our Annual Audit Letter in August 2018.

Value for Money

The scope of our work is set out in the guidance issued by the National Audit Office. The Code requires auditors to satisfy themselves that; "the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources".

We issued our 2017/18 Value for Money opinion on 28 September 2018.

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 not satisfied that, in all significant respects, the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2018.

In considering the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources we identified the following matters:

Children's Services

In June 2015 Ofsted published a report on services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Surrey, based on their inspection visit in November 2014. The overall judgement was that children's services were inadequate.

Ofsted subsequently issued a follow-up report in May 2018 based on their February 2018 inspection visit, in which the inadequate rating remained in place. Ofsted stated in the report that "Senior leaders and elected members in Surrey have been far too slow to accept and act on the findings and recommendations of the 2014 inspection, and to respond with the required urgency to the findings of several subsequent monitoring visits. Too many of the most vulnerable children in the county are being left exposed to continuing harm for long periods of time before decisive protective actions are taken".

This matter is evidence of weaknesses in proper arrangement for understanding and using appropriate and reliable financial and performance information to support informed decision making and performance management and planning, organising and developing the workforce effectively to deliver strategic priorities.

Sustainable resource deployment

The Authority is drawing heavily on its reserves to balance its annual budgets and cannot set a sustainable budget with sufficient capacity to absorb emerging cost pressures with its current levels of income and funding.

The Authority used £11 million of its usable reserves to balance its budget in 2017/18 and, at 31 March 2018 usable reserves, stood at £102 million. The Authority managed its financial position in year by implementing short term spending cuts, which allowed it to deliver a £1.3 million underspend for the year against budget.

Progress on 2017/18 at 26 November 2018

The Authority engaged the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to review the financial resilience of the Council and the effectiveness of its finance function. CIPFA reported in July 2018 that the Authority will not have sufficient reserves to meet its expected budget gap in 2019/20 unless it acts now. The report also stated that unexpected increases in demand and a failure to deliver a significant proportion of the planned savings in 2017/18 undermined the credibility of the financial estimates reported in-year and necessitated short term spending cuts that can adversely impact on services.

The Authority's current medium term financial plan for 2018 to 2021 requires it to deliver £250 million of savings over three years, with £66 million required in 2018/19. The Council also plans to use a further £21 million of reserves to balance the budget. The CIPFA report highlighted a lack of granularity in some of the estimated pressures and changes facing the Authority, and considerable uncertainties over the delivery of a number of the planned savings.

These matters are evidence of weaknesses in proper arrangements for securing sustainable resource deployment in planning finances effectively to support the sustainable delivery of strategic priorities and maintain statutory functions.

A report setting out the findings from our work will be produced and shared with management. We will continue to monitor the Council's financial resilience.

Other areas

Pension Fund Annual Report

We issued our consistent with opinion on the Surrey Pension Fund Annual Report on 8 November, confirming that it was consistent with the information in the Council's financial statements

Certification of claims and returns

We are required to certify the Council's Teachers' Pensions Return.

The results of the certification work are reported to you in our certification letter.

Completion Certificate

Having completed our audit in respect of 2017/18 we issued our completion certificate on 26 November 2018.

Progress on 2018/19 at 26 November 2018

Financial Statements Audit

We have started planning for the 2018/19 financial statements audit and will be onsite w/c 3 December 2018.

Our risk assessment fieldwork visit will include:

- Updated review of the your control environment
- Updated understanding of your financial systems
- Review of Internal Audit reports on core financial systems
- Early work on emerging accounting issues

We will compile our Audit Plan once our risk assessment is complete and report the plan to you in February 2019.

We are due to commence our interim audit in March 2019. At our interim fieldwork visit we will carry out early substantive testing.

We will also request and review a working paper from management setting out how the financial statements will be affected by the two new accounting standards, IFRS 9 and IFRS 15.

We will report any findings from the interim audit to you at the May 2019 Audit & Governance Committee (or immediately if a significant matter and / or fraud related).

Value for Money

The scope of our work is set out in the guidance issued by the National Audit Office. The Code requires auditors to satisfy themselves that; "the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources".

The guidance confirmed the overall criterion as: "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".

The three sub criteria for assessment to be able to give a conclusion overall are:

- Informed decision making
- Sustainable resource deployment
- Working with partners and other third parties.

We have begun our initial risk assessment to determine our approach and will report any areas we consider to be risks to achieving the three sub criteria in our Audit Plan.

We will summarise the work we carry out against these risks in our Audit Findings Report and give our Value For Money Conclusion in July 2019.

Other areas

Certification of claims and returns

We are required to certify the Council's Teachers' Pensions Return.

The results of the certification work are reported to you in our certification letter.

Meetings

We met with Finance Officers in October as part of our regular liaison meetings and continue to be in discussions with finance staff regarding emerging developments and to ensure the audit process is smooth and effective. We also met with your Chief Executive in November to discuss the Council's strategic priorities and plans.

Events

We provide a range of workshops, along with network events for members and publications to support the Council. Our next event is the LG Chief Accountant Workshops which take place over various dates in early 2019. Your finance team have been invited to these workshops. Further details of the publications that may be of interest to the Council are set out in our Sector Update section of this report.

Audit Deliverables

2018/19 Deliverables	Planned Date	Status
Fee Letter Confirming audit fee for 2018/19.	April 2018	Complete
Accounts Audit Plan We are required to issue an audit plan to the Audit & Governance Committee setting out our proposed approach in order to give an opinion on your 2018-19 financial statements.	February 2019	Not yet due
Interim Audit Findings We will report to you the findings from our interim audit and our initial value for money risk assessment within our Progress Report.	May 2019	Not yet due
Audit Findings Report The Audit Findings Report will be reported to the July Audit & Governance Committee.	July 2019	Not yet due
Auditors Report This is the opinion on your financial statement, annual governance statement and value for money conclusion.	July 2019	Not yet due
Annual Audit Letter This letter communicates the key issues arising from our work.	August 2019	Not yet due



Sector Update

Local government finances are at a tipping point. Councils are tackling a continuing drive to achieve greater efficiency in the delivery of public services, whilst facing the challenges to address rising demand, ongoing budget pressures and social inequality.

Our sector update provides you with an up to date summary of emerging national issues and developments to support you. We cover areas which may have an impact on your organisation, the wider NHS and the public sector as a whole. Links are provided to the detailed report/briefing to allow you to delve further and find out more.

Our public sector team at Grant Thornton also undertake research on service and technical issues. We will bring you the latest research publications in this update. We also include areas of potential interest to start conversations within the organisation and with Audit & Governance Committee members, as well as any accounting and regulatory updates.

- **Grant Thornton Publications**
- **Insights from local government sector specialists**
- **Reports of interest**
- **Accounting and regulatory updates**

More information can be found on our dedicated public sector and local government sections on the Grant Thornton website

Institute of Fiscal Studies: Impact of ‘Fair Funding Review’

The IFS has published a paper that focuses on the issues arising in assessing the spending needs of different councils. The government’s ‘Fair Funding Review’ is aimed at designing a new system for allocating funding between councils. It will update and improve methods for estimating councils’ differing abilities to raise revenues and their differing spending needs. The government is looking for the new system to be simple and transparent, but at the same time robust and evidence based.

Accounting for councils’ spending needs

The IFS note that the Review is seeking a less subjective and more transparent approach which is focused on the relationship between spending and needs indicators. However, like any funding system, there will be limitations, for example, any attempt to assess needs will be affected by the MHCLG’s funding policies adopted in the year of data used to estimate the spending needs formula. A key consideration will be the inherently subjective nature of ‘spending needs’ and ‘needs indicators’, and how this will be dealt with under any new funding approach. Whilst no assessment of spending needs can be truly objective, the IFS state it can and should be evidence based.

The IFS also note that transparency will be critical, particularly in relation to the impact that different choices will have for different councils, such as the year of data used and the needs indicators selected. These differentiating factors and their consequences will need to be understood and debated.

Accounting for councils’ revenues

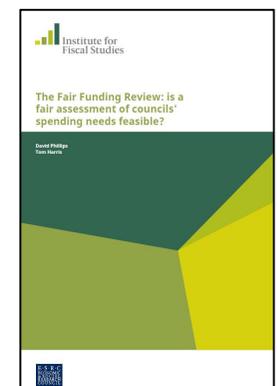
The biggest source of locally-raised revenue for councils is and will continue to be council tax. However, there is significant variation between councils in the amount of council tax raised per person. The IFS identify that a key decision for the Fair Funding Review is the extent to which tax bases or actual revenues should be used for determining funding levels going forward.

Councils also raise significant sums of money from levying fees and charges, although this varies dramatically across the country. The IFS note that it is difficult to take account of these differences in a new funding system as there is no well-defined measure of revenue raising capacity from sales, fees and charges, unlike council tax where the tax base can be used.

The overall system: redistribution, incentives and transparency

The IFS also identify that an important policy decision for the new system is the extent to which it prioritises redistribution between councils, compared to financial incentives for councils to improve their own socio-economic lot. A system that fully and immediately equalises for differences in assessed spending needs and revenue-raising capacity will help ensure different councils can provide similar standards of public services. However, it would provide little financial incentive for councils to tackle the drivers of spending needs and boost local economics and tax bases.

Further detail on the impact of the fair funding review can be found in the full report <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R148.pdf>.



National Audit Office – The health and social care interface

The NAO has published its latest ‘think piece on the barriers that prevent health and social care services working together effectively, examples of joint working in a ‘whole system’ sense and the move towards services centred on the needs of the individual. The report aims to inform the ongoing debate about the future of health and social care in England. It anticipates the upcoming green paper on the future funding of adult social care, and the planned 2019 Spending Review, which will set out the funding needs of both local government and the NHS.

The report discusses 16 challenges to improved joint working. It also highlights some of the work being carried out nationally and locally to overcome these challenges and the progress that has been made. The NAO draw out the risks presented by inherent differences between the health and social care systems and how national and local bodies are managing these.

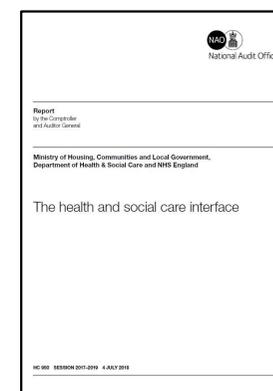
Financial challenges – include financial pressures, future funding uncertainties, focus on short-term funding issues in the acute sector, the accountability of individual organisations to balance the books, and differing eligibility criteria for access to health and social care services.

Culture and structure – include organisational boundaries impacting on service management and regulation, poor understanding between the NHS and local government of their respective decision-making frameworks, complex governance arrangements hindering decision-making, problems with local leadership holding back improvements or de-stabilising joint working, a lack of co-terminus geographic areas over which health and local government services are planned and delivered, problems with sharing data across health and social care, and difficulties developing person-centred care.

Strategic issues – include differences in national influence and status contributing to social care not being as well represented as the NHS, strategic misalignment of organisations across local systems inhibiting joint local planning, and central government’s unrealistic expectations of the pace at which the required change in working practices can progress..

This ‘think piece’ draws on the NAO’s past work and draws on recent research and reviews by other organisations, most notably the Care Quality Commission’s review of health and social care systems in 20 local authority areas, which it carried out between August 2017 and May 2018. The NAO note that there is a lot of good work being done nationally and locally to overcome the barriers to joint working, but often this is not happening at the scale and pace needed.

The report is available to download from the NAO’s website at:
<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-health-and-social-care-interface/>



A Caring Society – bringing together innovative thinking, people and practice

The Adult Social Care sector is at a crossroads. We have yet to find a sustainable system of care that is truly fit for purpose and for people. Our Caring Society programme takes a step back and creates a space to think, explore new ideas and draw on the most powerful and fresh influences we can find, as well as accelerate the innovative social care work already taking place.

We are bringing together a community of influencers, academics, investors, private care providers, charities and social housing providers and individuals who are committed to shaping the future of adult social care.

At the heart of the community are adult social care directors and this programme aims to provide them with space to think about, and design, a care system that meets the needs of the 21st Century, taking into account ethics, technology, governance and funding.

We are doing this by:

- hosting a 'scoping sprint' to determine the specific themes we should focus on
- running three sprints focused on the themes affecting the future of care provision
- publishing a series of articles drawing on opinion, innovative best practices and research to stimulate fresh thinking.

Our aim is to reach a consensus, that transcends party politics, about what future care should be for the good of society and for the individual. This will be presented to directors of adult social care in Spring 2019, to decide how to take forward the resulting recommendations and policy changes.

Scoping Sprint

This took place in October. Following opening remarks by Hilary Cottam (social entrepreneur and author of Radical Help) and Cllr Georgia Gould (Leader of Camden Council), the subsequent discussion brought many perspectives but there was a strong agreement about the need to do things differently that would create and support a caring society. Grant Thornton will now take forward further discussions around three particular themes:

1. Ethics and philosophy: What is meant by care? Should the state love?
2. Care in a place: Where should the power lie? How are local power relationships different in a local place?
3. Promoting and upscaling effective programmes and innovation

Sprint 1 – What do we really mean by 'care'?

This will take place on 4 December. Julia Unwin, Chair of the Civil Societies Futures Project, former CEO of the Joseph Rowntree Association and author on kindness will provide her insight to spark the debate on what we really mean by 'care'

Find out more and get involved

- To read the sprint write-ups and opinion pieces visit: grantthornton.co.uk/acaringsociety
- Join the conversation at #acaringsociety



Supply Chain Insights tool helps support supply chain assurance in public services

Grant Thornton UK LLP has launched a new insights and benchmarking platform to support supply chain assurance and competitor intelligence in public services.

The Supply Chain Insights service is designed for use by financial directors and procurement professionals in the public sector, and market leaders in private sector suppliers to the public sector. It provides users with a detailed picture of contract value and spend with their supply chain members across the public sector. The analysis also provides a robust and granular view on the viability, sustainability, market position and coverage of their key suppliers and competitors.

The platform is built on aggregated data from 96 million invoices and covers £0.5 trillion of spending. The data is supplemented with financial standing data and indicators to give a fully rounded view. The service is supported by a dedicated team of analysts and is available to access directly as an on-line platform.

Phillip Woolley, Partner, Grant Thornton UK LLP, said:

"The fall-out from the recent failure of Carillion has highlighted the urgent need for robust and ongoing supply chain monitoring and assurance. Supply Chain Insights provides a clear picture of your suppliers' activities across the sector, allowing you to understand risks, capacity and track-record. We think it's an indispensable resource in today's supplier market."



The tool enables you to immediately:

- access over 96 million transactions that are continually added to
- segment invoices by:
 - organisation and category
 - service provider
 - date at a monthly level
- benchmark your spend against your peers
- identify:
 - organisations buying similar services
 - differences in pricing
 - the leading supplier
- see how important each buyer is to a supplier
- benchmark public sector organisations' spend on a consistent basis
- see how much public sector organisations spend with different suppliers

Supply Chain Insights forms part of the Grant Thornton Public Sector Insight Studio portfolio of analytics platforms.

Click on Supply Chain Insights for more information.

Supply Chain Insights

In good company: Latest trends in local authority trading companies

Our recent report looks at trends in LATC's (Local Government Authority Trading Companies). These deliver a wide range of services across the country and range from wholly owned companies to joint ventures, all within the public and private sector.

Outsourcing versus local authority trading companies

The rise of trading companies is, in part, due to the decline in popularity of outsourcing. The majority of outsourced contracts operate successfully, and continue to deliver significant savings. But recent high profile failures, problems with inflexible contracts and poor contract management mean that outsourcing has fallen out of favour. The days of large scale outsourcing of council services has gone.

Advantages of local authority trading companies

- Authorities can keep direct control over their providers
- Opportunities for any profits to be returned to the council
- Provides suitable opportunity to change the local authority terms and conditions, particularly with regard to pensions, can also bring significant reductions in the cost base of the service
- Having a separate company allows the authority to move away from the constraints of the councils decision making processes, becoming more agile and responsive to changes in demand or funding
- Wider powers to trade through the Localism act provide the company with the opportunity to win contracts elsewhere

Choosing the right company model

The most common company models adopted by councils are:

Wholly
owned

Joint
Ventures

Social
Enterprise

Wholly owned companies are common because they allow local authorities to retain the risk and reward. And governance is less complicated. Direct labour organisations such as Cormac and Oxford Direct Services have both transferred out in this way.

JVs have become increasingly popular as a means of leveraging growth. Pioneered by Norse, Corserv and Vertas organisations are developing the model. Alternatively, if there is a social motive rather than a profit one, the social enterprise model is the best option, as it can enable access to grant funding to drive growth.

Getting it right through effective governance

While there are pitfalls in establishing these companies, those that have got it right are: seizing the advantages of a more commercial mind-set, generating revenue, driving efficiencies and improving the quality of services. By developing effective governance they can be more flexible and grow business without micromanagement from the council.

LATC's need to adapt for the future

- LATC's must adapt to developments in the external environment
 - These include possible changes to the public procurement rules after Brexit and new local authority structures. Also responding to an increasingly crowded and competitive market where there could be more mergers and insolvencies.
- Authorities need to be open to different ways of doing things, driving further developments of new trading companies. Relieving pressures on councils to find the most efficient ways of doing more with less in today's austere climate.

Overall, joint ventures can be a viable alternative delivery model for local authorities. Our research indicates that the numbers of joint ventures will continue to rise, and in particular we expect to see others follow examples of successful public-public partnerships.



[Download the report here](#)

Links

Grant Thornton website links

<https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/>

<http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/industries/publicsector>

<https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/a-caring-society/>

<https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/care-homes-where-are-we-now/>

<https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/the-rise-of-local-authority-trading-companies/>

National Audit Office link

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-health-and-social-care-interface/>

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government links

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-green-paper-a-new-deal-for-social-housing>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728722/BRR_Pilots_19-20_Prospectus.pdf

Institute for Fiscal Studies

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R148.pdf>



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