



# The Annual Audit Letter for Chorley Borough Council

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**Year ended 31 March 2019**

**August 2019**



# Contents



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## Section

1. Executive Summary
2. Audit of the Financial Statements
3. Value for Money conclusion

## Page

- 3  
5  
9

## Appendices

- A Reports issued and fees

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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 Chorley Borough Council (the Council) for the year ended 31 March 2019.

This Letter is intended to provide a commentary on the results of our work to the Council 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 Council's Governance Committee as those charged with governance in our Audit Findings Report on 24 July 2019.

## Our work

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<b>Materiality</b>	We determined materiality for the audit of the Council's financial statements to be £1.1million, which is 2% of the Council's gross revenue expenditure.
<b>Financial Statements opinion</b>	We gave an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements on 31 July 2019.
<b>Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)</b>	We did not need to complete work on the Council's consolidation return as the income, expenditure, assets and liabilities were below the de-minimis level set by the NAO
<b>Use of statutory powers</b>	We did not identify any matters which required us to exercise our additional statutory powers.

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## 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 Council's financial statements (section two)
- assess the Council'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 Council's financial statements, we comply with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs) and other guidance issued by the NAO.

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# Executive Summary

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<b>Value for Money arrangements</b>	We were satisfied that the Council 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 Council on 31 July 2019.
<b>Certification of Grants</b>	We also carry out work to certify the Council's Housing Benefit subsidy claim on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Our work on this claim is not yet complete and will be finalised by 30 November 2019. We will report the results of this work to the Governance Committee separately.
<b>Certificate</b>	We certified that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of Chorley Borough Council in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice on 31 July 2019.

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## Working with the Council

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

- An efficient audit – we delivered an efficient audit with you, delivering the financial statements opinion by the end of July.
- Improved audit processes – we worked with you to streamline the audit processes through the use of inflo software, allowing an easy way to share working papers
- 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 shared our thought leadership reports with the senior management team at the Council on a wide range of issues, including governance and alternative delivery models
- Regular meetings with senior management and the finance team where we discussed issues relevant to the local government sector and ensured we provided an efficient and effective audit.

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

**Grant Thornton UK LLP**  
August 2019

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# Audit of the Financial Statements

## Our audit approach

### Materiality

In our audit of the Council'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 Council's financial statements to be £1,104,000, which is 2% of the Council's gross revenue expenditure. We used this benchmark as, in our view, users of the Council's financial statements are most interested in where the Council has spent its revenue in the year.

We also designed our procedures to detect errors at a lower level of precision for senior officer remuneration and related parties.

We set a lower threshold of £54,000, above which we reported errors to the Governance Committee 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 narrative report and annual governance statement published alongside the financial statements to check the consistency with our understanding of the Council and with the financial statements 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 Council'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
<p><b>Valuation of land and buildings</b></p> <p>The Council revalues much of its land and buildings on a rolling five-yearly basis. This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>Additionally, management need to ensure that the carrying value in the Council's financial statements is not materially different from the current value or the fair value (for surplus assets) at the financial statements date, where a rolling programme is used.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of land and buildings, particularly revaluations and impairments, as a significant risk and a key audit matter.</p>	<p>As part of our audit work we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work</li> <li>evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert</li> <li>wrote to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out</li> <li>challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding</li> <li>tested revaluations made during the year to see if they had been input correctly into the Council's asset register</li> <li>evaluated the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management has satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value at year end.</li> </ul>	<p>No issues were identified.</p>
<p><b>Management override of internal controls</b></p> <p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities. For example, the Council faces external scrutiny of its spending and this could potentially place management under undue pressure in terms of how they report performance.</p> <p>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular journals, management estimates and transactions outside the course of business as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>As part of our audit work we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluated the design effectiveness of management controls over journals</li> <li>analysed the journals listing and determined criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals</li> <li>tested unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration</li> <li>gained an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and considered their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence</li> <li>evaluated the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.</li> </ul>	<p>No issues were identified.</p>

# 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
<p><b>Valuation of net pension liability</b> The Council's pension fund net liability, as reflected in its balance sheet as the net defined benefit liability, represents a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p> <p>The pension fund net liability is considered a significant estimate due to the size of the numbers involved (£45 million in the Council's balance sheet) and the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of the Council's pension fund net liability as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement, and a key audit matter.</p>	<p>As part of our audit work we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• updated our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Council's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluated the design of the associated controls;</li> <li>• evaluated the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work;</li> <li>• assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Council's pension fund valuation;</li> <li>• assessed the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Council to the actuary to estimate the liability;</li> <li>• tested the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary;</li> <li>• undertaken procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; and</li> <li>• obtained assurances from the auditor of the Lancashire Pension Fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements</li> <li>• considered the implications of the McCloud ruling on the pensions liability within the Council's balance sheet</li> </ul>	<p>No issues were identified</p>

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# Audit of the Financial Statements

## **Audit opinion**

We gave an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements on 31 July 2019.

## **Preparation of the financial statements**

The Council 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 Council's Governance Committee on 24 July 2019. Only a small number of non-material issues were identified from our audit work and the Council either agreed to amend the accounts or gave a valid explanation on why amendment was not to be made.

## **Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report**

We are required to review the Council'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 Council and with our knowledge of the Council.

## **Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)**

We carried out work on the Council's Data Collection Tool in line with instructions provided by the NAO. We issued an assurance statement which confirmed the Council was below the audit threshold on 31 July 2019.

## **Other statutory powers**

We are pleased to report that we did not have to use any of our additional powers and duties in completing our audit.

## **Certificate of closure of the audit**

We certified that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of Chorley Borough Council in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice on 31 July 2019.

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# 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. We also reported our finding to the Governance Committee on 24 July 2019.

## Overall Value for Money conclusion

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

# Value for Money conclusion

## Value for Money Risks

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions
<p><b>Financial sustainability</b> There remain financial challenges over the next few years which the Council needs to meet. There is a risk that revenue budget and capital programme delivery will not sufficiently meet those challenges.</p>	<p>We will review the arrangements the Council has in place to plan, manage and deliver its finances over the medium term by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• considering the Council's overall arrangements in place to develop its medium term financial plans</li> <li>• reviewing how the capital programme is planned and delivered, including the links to the medium term financial strategy (MTFS)</li> <li>• considering the development of the housing company, including how the potential financial risks and rewards are being reflected in the Council's MTFS.</li> </ul>	<p>The Council has a proven track record of delivering both its revenue budget and key elements of its capital programme. Much of this is due to the work and future planning of the Council's senior management who are supported by the finance team.</p> <p>During 2018-19 the Council met the challenge of delivering a balanced budget, reporting an underspend of £0.3million. Continued focus is required on delivering the budget, given future uncertainties around issues such as funding and implications from Brexit.</p> <p>The Council's capital programme is an ambitious one for a district council and is aimed at helping deliver key priorities. From an original capital programme of £26.1million approved in February 2018, which was increased to £34million due to amounts carried forward from 2017/18 and other adjustments, the Council was able to deliver almost £25million. Slippage or adjustments in the capital programme are not unusual but the amendments to planned spend tend not to be reported to Members until late in the year. Good progress was made on delivering key capital projects including Market Walk, Primrose Gardens and the Digital Park</p> <p>Looking forward, financial challenges remain and the Council has reported in its medium term financial strategy that it projects a cumulative gross budget deficit of £3.9million by 2021/22. Through a variety of initiatives and plans, such as reviewing fees and charges, productivity savings and council tax increases, the deficit reduces to an adjusted forecast cumulative deficit position of £1.7million. The Council remains confident that the budget deficit will be met by renegotiating contracts and transformation.</p> <p>Our review of arrangements built on the work completed in last year's VfM work. The Council provided further assurance that the key transformation projects are being appropriately planned, managed and monitored.</p> <p>Assumptions supporting the budget appear appropriate and were fully supported by explanations in the budget papers presented to Council in February. Those assumptions supporting medium term plans will need to be regularly reviewed and discussed with Members to ensure they remain consistent with policy decisions. We did note that the papers presented to the February Council meeting were thorough giving a complete picture of the financial position and consultation that took place in preparing the budget.</p> <p>The Council continues to consider different models for delivering efficient services, for example through extending shared services and consideration of setting up a company. Such issues receive careful and detailed consideration by Officers to help ensure outcomes are maximised for Chorley residents.</p>

# A. Reports issued and fees

We confirm below our final reports issued and fees charged for the audit and provision of non-audit services.

## Reports issued

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

## Fees

	Planned £	Actual fees £
Statutory audit	34,846	39,346
<b>Total fees</b>	<b>34,846</b>	<b>39,346</b>

## Audit fee variation

As outlined in our audit plan, the 2018-19 scale fee published by PSAA of £34,846 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
<b>Assessing the impact of the McCloud ruling</b>	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
<b>Pensions – IAS 19</b>	The Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that the quality of work by audit firms in respect of IAS 19 needs to improve across local government audits. Accordingly, we have increased the level of scope and coverage in respect of IAS 19 this year to reflect this.	£1,500
<b>PPE Valuation – work of experts</b>	As above, the Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that auditors need to improve the quality of work on PPE valuations across the sector. We have increased the volume and scope of our audit work to reflect this.	£1,500
<b>Total</b>		£4,500

Fee variations are subject to PSAA approval.

# A. Reports issued and fees continued

Service	£	Threats	Safeguards
<b>Audit related</b>			
Certification of Housing Benefits Subsidy Grant	9,750	Self-Interest (because this is potentially a recurring fee)	The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is £9,750 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £34,846 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors all mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.
Homes England	5,000	Self-Interest (because this is potentially a recurring fee)	The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is £5,000 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £34,846 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors all mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.

## Non- audit services

- For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Council. 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 Council's auditor and have ensured that appropriate safeguards are put in place.

The above non-audit services are consistent with the Council'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 AQR

### 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



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