
Audit and Standards Committee – 10th December 2013

Report of the Treasurer

Grant Thornton Audit and Standards Committee Update

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the External Auditors Update Report. The Audit Manager will be available at the meeting to deal with any issues.

Background

2. The Council's External Auditors (Grant Thornton LLP) have published a report to update Audit and Standards Committee members on progress in delivering their responsibilities as the Council's external auditors.
3. The paper also includes a summary of emerging national issues and developments and also includes a number of challenge questions in respect of these emerging issues which the Committee may wish to consider. These are listed below together with management responses:

a. Has the authority reviewed the costs of Social care for older people and the performance of your authority against similar organisations? Where issues have been identified, has an action plan been implemented?

Yes. The Council reviews the costs of activities and performance data against other similar organisations in several ways:

(i) Membership and participation in review/ benchmarking groups

We are members of the CIPFA benchmarking club for various areas of Adult Social care activity

We are also members of The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) regional standards and performance group which looks in detail at various areas of activity across the region.

We have participated in an ADASS sector led improvement programme during 2013/14 and are currently involved in a peer review of our Safeguarding services which will happen later in this financial year.

(ii) Ad hoc reviews

We regularly use data from the National Adult Social Care Information service (NASCIS) to compare costs and during this year have completed a detailed analysis of the Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care report

that was issue earlier in the year. This compared the costs and performance of the Directorate both regionally and nationally.

(iii) Specific reviews undertaken

Reviews in the following areas have either been completed or are currently being undertaken

Community equipment store

Access to services and care pathway

Reablement and services to support hospital diversion and hospital discharge

Commissioning for services for people with a Learning Disability and those with a Physical Disability.

Actions already in place

To deliver better value for money and outcomes for people using services a number of action plans are already in place these include:

- a) Transfer of long term home care hours to Independent sector from internal provision.*
- b) Transfer of people with a learning disability to supported living from residential care*
- c) A demand management model has been developed to manage the level of resources and demand for care services. The demand management model will be developed further to support all future development and investment in Adult Social Care, by providing benefit realisation data around the effectiveness of options being considered at the point of change*

b. Has the authority reviewed the costs of Council Tax Collection and the performance of your authority against similar organisations? Where issues have been identified, has an action plan been implemented?

Yes. Our principal benchmarking process is the CIPFA Council Tax Benchmarking Club, which provides a very detailed analysis of Dudley's costs/performance in this area which compares us to similar authorities. We have used the service for a number of years which means we can monitor trends over time. The latest results available (July 2013) show that Dudley is the best performing of the 19 metropolitan and unitary councils in our comparator group when both staff cost and collection performance are taken into consideration.

Other benchmarking activity that also takes place:

- a) with other West Midlands authorities through the West Midlands Revenues Group on a quarterly and ad-hoc basis, and*
- b) via annual council tax collection performance information for all metropolitan councils*

Any issues identified through these various means are incorporated into, and monitored via, the Revenue Services Business Plan.

c. Are your elected members taking a greater role in financial planning and has the authority ensured that members are trained for the task?

There is an annual training session on the Council's finances which is open to all members and which new members are particularly encouraged to attend. There is also specific training for new members of the Audit and Standards Committee as well as training on Treasury Management which is open to all members and particularly encouraged for members of the Audit and Standards Committee. The Treasurer offers briefings to all political groups as part of the budget process.

Finance

4. There are no resource implications as a consequence of the report.

Law

5. Legislation appertaining to Local Authority Audit and Accounts is contained in the Local Government Act 1999, the Audit Commission Act, 1998, and regulations made there under.

Equality Impact

6. The proposals take into account the Council's Policy on Equality and Diversity

Recommendation

7. That Members note the Audit and Standards Committee Update Report and comment on matters in the Report.



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Treasurer

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List of Background Papers

Grant Thornton Audit and Standards Committee Update for Dudley MBC December 2013