

# Annual Audit Letter

## North of Tyne Combined Authority

Year ending 31 March 2020





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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Purpose of the Annual Audit Letter

Our Annual Audit Letter summarises the work we have undertaken as the auditor for the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) for the year ended 31 March 2020. Although this letter is addressed to NTCA, it is designed to be read by a wider audience including members of the public and other external stakeholders.

Our responsibilities are defined by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the 2014 Act) and the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office (the NAO). The detailed sections of this letter provide details on those responsibilities, the work we have done to discharge them, and the key findings arising from our work. These are summarised below.

Area of responsibility	Summary
Audit of the financial statements	<p>Our auditor's report issued on 27 November 2020 included our opinion that the financial statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• give a true and fair view of the NTCA's and Group's financial position as at 31 March 2020 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended; and</li><li>• have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20</li></ul>
Other information published alongside the audited financial statements	<p>Our auditor's report included our opinion that the other information in the Statement of Accounts is consistent with the audited financial statements.</p>
Value for money conclusion	<p>Our auditor's report concluded that we are satisfied that in all significant respects, NTCA has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020.</p>
Statutory reporting	<p>Our auditor's report confirmed that we did not use our powers under section 24 of the 2014 Act to issue a report in the public interest or to make written recommendations to NTCA.</p>
Reporting to the group auditor	<p>In line with group audit instructions, issued by the NAO on 4 November, we reported to the group auditor in line with the requirements applicable to the NECA's WGA return on 1 December 2020.</p>



## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Opinion on the financial statements

Unqualified

### The scope of our audit and the results of our work

The purpose of our audit is to provide reasonable assurance to users that the financial statements are free from material error. We do this by expressing an opinion on whether the statements are prepared, in all material respects, in line with the financial reporting framework applicable to NTCA and whether they give a true and fair view of NTCA's financial position as at 31 March 2020 and of its financial performance for the year then ended.

Our audit was conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice issued by the NAO, and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs). These require us to consider whether:

- the accounting policies are appropriate to NTCA's circumstances and have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed;
- the significant accounting estimates made by management in the preparation of the financial statements are reasonable; and
- the overall presentation of the financial statements provides a true and fair view.

### Emphasis of matter

Our audit report, stated that in our view, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the NTCA's and Group's financial position as at 31 March 2020 and of its financial performance for the year then ended. However, our report was modified to include an emphasis of matter paragraph associated with material valuation uncertainty relating to property assets held by the Pension Fund. As disclosed in Notes 19 and 29 of the NTCA's financial statements, and Notes 1 and 12 of the Group financial statements, the outbreak of Covid-19 has had a significant impact on global financial markets, and as such the Pension Fund's property investment manager included a material valuation uncertainty clause in some of their 31 March 2020 valuation reports due to the possible impact of Covid-19. Therefore, there was less certainty and a higher degree of caution needed to be attached to valuations of unquoted property assets than would normally be the case.



## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Our approach to materiality

We apply the concept of materiality when planning and performing our audit, and when evaluating the effect of misstatements identified as part of our work. We consider the concept of materiality at numerous stages throughout the audit process, in particular when determining the nature, timing and extent of our audit procedures, and when evaluating the effect of uncorrected misstatements. An item is considered material if its misstatement or omission could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users of the financial statements.

Judgements about materiality are made in the light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by both qualitative and quantitative factors. As a result we have set materiality for the financial statements as a whole (financial statement materiality) and a lower level of materiality for specific items of account (specific materiality) due to the nature of these items or because they attract public interest. We also set a threshold for reporting identified misstatements to NTCA. We call this our trivial threshold.

The table below provides details of the materiality levels applied in the audit of the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2020:

Financial statement materiality	Our financial statement materiality is based on 2% of Total Assets	£5.081 million (NTCA) £9.787 million (Group).
Trivial threshold	Our trivial threshold is based on 3% of financial statement materiality.	£152,000 (NTCA) £294,000 (Group)
Specific materiality	We have applied a lower level of materiality to the following area of the accounts: - Senior Officer Remuneration	£5,000



## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Our response to significant risks

As part of our continuous planning procedures we considered whether there were risks of material misstatement in NTCA's financial statements that required special audit consideration. We reported significant risks identified at the planning stage to NTCA within our Audit Strategy Memorandum and provided details of how we responded to those risks in our Audit Completion Report. The table below outlines the identified significant risks, the work we carried out on those risks and our conclusions.

Identified significant risk	Our response	Our findings and conclusions
<p><b>Management override of controls (single entity and group accounts)</b></p> <p>In all entities, management at various levels within an organisation are in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of their ability to manipulate accounting records and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Because of the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, we considered there to be a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk on all audits.</p>	<p>We addressed this risk through performing audit work over:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting estimates impacting on amounts included in the financial statements;</li> <li>Consideration of identified significant transactions outside the normal course of business; and</li> <li>Journals recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments made in preparation of the financial statements.</li> </ul>	<p>Our audit work provided the assurance we sought and did not identify any material issues to bring to the attention of NTCA.</p>
<p><b>Revenue recognition - in relation to Tyne Tunnel tolls and grant income (relevant to single entity and group accounts)</b></p> <p>This was due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cut off considerations for Tyne Tunnel toll income given the cash nature of the receipts; and</li> <li>grant income being recognised when all conditions attached to the grant were met so there was significant management judgement in determining if there were any conditions and if they had been met.</li> </ul>	<p>We addressed this risk by performing audit work over:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the design and implementation of controls management had in place to ensure income was recognised in the correct period;</li> <li>cash receipts around the year end to ensure they had been recognised in the right year;</li> <li>the judgements made by management in determining when grant income was recognised;</li> <li>for Tyne Tunnel toll income, perform a substantive analytical review; and</li> <li>for major grant income, obtaining counterparty confirmation.</li> </ul>	<p>Our audit work did not identify any material issues to bring to the attention of NTCA.</p>



## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Identified significant risk	Our response	Our findings and conclusions
<p>Defined benefit liability valuation (relevant to group accounts only)</p> <p>The financial statements contain material pension entries in respect of the retirement benefits. The calculation of these pension figures, both assets and liabilities, can be subject to significant volatility and includes estimates based upon a complex interaction of actuarial assumptions. This results in an increased risk of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We addressed the defined benefit liability valuation risk through performing audit work over:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluating the management controls you have in place to assess the reasonableness of the figures provided by the Actuary;</li> <li>considered the reasonableness of the Actuary's output, referring to an expert's report on all actuaries nationally which was commissioned annually by the National Audit Office; and</li> <li>we discussed with key contacts any significant changes to the pension estimates prior to the preparation of the financial statements.</li> </ul>	<p>We received and considered the assurance from the Pension Fund auditor. NTCA and Group have included in its revised financial statements, a disclosure in respect of material uncertainty due to Covid 19 for the pension fund property investments. We therefore updated our auditor's report wording to draw attention to this in an Emphasis of Matter paragraph.</p>



## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Internal control recommendations

As part of our audit we considered the internal controls in place that are relevant to the preparation of the financial statements. We did this to design audit procedures that allow us to express our opinion on the financial statements, but this did not extend to us expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal controls. We identified the following deficiencies in internal control as part of our audit -

#### Description of deficiency

In 2018/19 we raised that for NTCA to strengthen their governance arrangements they should consider having a list of significant partners disclosed on their website showing signed assurance statements for governance – we have raised this as a recommendation for 2018/19 rather than an internal control deficiency as NTCA should consider their governance arrangements as they are still embedding in due to the Authority only being established in November 2018. Management’s response was that work is already underway to develop a partnership risk register – was not in place for 2018/19 as newly established Authority. We have therefore followed up this recommendation as part of the 19/20 audit and found that a partnership risk register has not been made available on NTCA’s website.

#### Potential effects

Governance arrangements that are weak could lead to NTCA working with unsuitable partners or partners being omitted from the related party note.

#### Recommendation

NTCA should have a partnership risk register published on their website.

#### Management response

An exercise was undertaken with NTCA Officers to identify NTCA’s significant partnerships - this is a partnership arrangement between NTCA and an organisation or body who is entirely or substantially responsible for delivering or managing an outcome for NTCA. A draft register was produced which includes the North East LEP, Nexus and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations (VCSE). To support the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), Annual Partnership Assurance Statements were received from the North East LEP and Nexus, however work is underway to determine how to gather the necessary evidence from across the VCSE sector to support production of the 2020/21 AGS. Officers will work with VCSE organisations during 2020/21 to support the information gathering exercise to support production of the 2020/21 AGS.

Our new Website has only been up and running for a matter of weeks. The pandemic has inevitably caused delays to this work. We will place the required information on the site as soon as practicable. To be clear, I intend to identify the significant partners, as suggested, but it goes without saying that we are, by nature, a partnership organisation and work collaboratively with external anchor organisations across our region.



## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Description of deficiency

There are numerous errors that have been highlighted as part of the audit that should have been picked up as part of a quality control review of the accounts for instance, double counting of levy income, omission/misclassification of levy income, missing 2018/19 figures etc.

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### Potential effects

Possible material misstatement due to incorrect accounting treatment, error or omission. Increased officer time in responding to audit queries and amending the accounts. A longer audit period, leading to delayed completion and increased audit fees.

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### Recommendation

Quality control arrangements should be strengthened to ensure that the draft statement of accounts are of a higher standard before published online and audited.

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### Management response

The Chief Finance Officer has been considering the level of finance capacity supporting the NTCA , particularly following the event of becoming the Accountable Body for the North East LEP and the impact this has had on the capacity within the team. Whilst many financial systems and processes have been embedded during 2019/20, there is a recognition that the approach to the production of the Statement of Accounts could be improved to include more review and quality assurance. The intention is to continue to work with key finance officers from NECA and Nexus regarding timetable for the sharing of relevant financial information, and further with the NTCA constituent authorities agree an independent review process to support what is a very small finance team. This will enable the sharing of knowledge and skills around the final accounts process with the expectation of improved performance for the 2020-21 Statement of Accounts.

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## 2. AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Description of deficiency

Related party declarations should be updated and obtained annually for all members and made available on the website.

We identified numerous members whose declaration forms were not available on the website and when requested Democratic Services stated the forms were outstanding.

A couple of members tested had a form on the website however the link did not work therefore was not available for the public to view. Democratic Services also stated that members were expected to provide any changes to their declarations but nil responses are not followed up to confirm if there has been any changes. We requested a response for one of the members and a response had not been received to confirm any changes.

The declaration of interests available on the websites are not dated therefore unable to view when they have been completed.

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### Potential effects

Related parties may not be identified which potentially may lead to fraud and error.

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### Recommendation

Ensure that related party declarations are completed, received annually (including nil responses and form dated) and made available on the website.

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### Management response

Under the Authority's Code of Conduct Members are required to register a range of interests and are under a continuing obligation to update their register entries when any change is submitted. The entries are therefore undated because the register reflects the current position as notified to the authority by the members.

With regard to the comments that numerous members' declaration forms were not available and that there were defects in the links on the website, it is acknowledged that the Authority had recently launched its new website and that there had been technical issues with the availability of members' entries on the register of interests. These issues were resolved after they were identified. At that time two members of the authority included in the sample by the auditors had not submitted their declaration forms. One declaration form has now been submitted and the other remains outstanding – this has been raised with the member in question

Whilst there is no requirement under the Authority's Code of Conduct or legislation that members make an annual declaration that they have not been involved in any related party transaction, it is noted that the auditors consider that this is good practice and the Authority will seek these from members in future.

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### 3. VALUE FOR MONEY CONCLUSION

Value for money conclusion	Unqualified
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#### Our audit approach

We are required to consider whether NTCA has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The NAO issues guidance to auditors that underpins the work we are required to carry out in order to form our conclusion, and sets out the criterion and sub-criteria that we are required to consider.

The overall criterion is that, ‘in all significant respects, NTCA had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.’ To assist auditors in reaching a conclusion on this overall criterion, the following sub-criteria are set out by the NAO:

- informed decision making;
- sustainable resource deployment; and
- working with partners and other third parties.

Our auditor’s report, stated that that, in all significant respects, NTCA put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

Sub-criteria	Commentary	Arrangements in place?
Informed decision making	<p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b> - The responsibility for scrutinising the decisions of the Mayor and Cabinet is carried out by this Committee. The membership comprises of 3 representative members from each of the constituent councils (independent of NTCA’s Cabinet). The Committee are entitled to call-in and scrutinise decisions taken either by the Cabinet or the Mayor. Scrutiny of the decisions of the Joint Transport Committee are dealt with by a separate joint overview and scrutiny committee established between NECA and NTCA.</p> <p><b>Audit &amp; Standard Committee</b> – This Committee is responsible for fulfilling the audit and risk responsibilities and for dealing with matters relating to the Code of Conduct for Members of NTCA. The Committee comprises of 3 members from each constituent council and one independent person who is a co-opted member of the Committee. The audit and risk responsibilities of the Joint Transport Committee are dealt with by a separate joint audit committee established between NECA and NTCA.</p> <p>A calendar of committee meetings is available on NTCA’s website to allow anyone to view upcoming meeting agendas.</p> <p>Risk management arrangements along with an up to date risk register are in place. A risk update is reported regularly to the Audit and Standards Committee to provide the necessary challenge.</p> <p>An annual governance statement is prepared, reviewed and approved before being included in the financial statements.</p> <p>No indicators of inappropriate governance arrangements have been identified.</p>	Yes



### 3. VALUE FOR MONEY CONCLUSION

Sub-criteria	Commentary	Arrangements in place?
Sustainable resource deployment	<p>The 2019/20 revenue budget was approved by the Cabinet in February 2019. In February 2020, Cabinet approved NTCA's 20/21 budget alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy covering periods to 21/22. No funding gaps have been identified.</p> <p>A very experienced officer team is in place at NTCA, mainly through secondments from constituent authorities and has been built upon since 2018/19.</p> <p>Arrangements are in place for Cabinet to receive quarterly financial report to outline the current financial position of the Authority.</p>	Yes
Working with partners and other third parties	<p>NTCA constitution (section 1.1) outlines the areas in which the Authority have developed relationships. These are in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• economic development, skills, housing and regeneration. NTCA does not replace the three constituent councils, nor does it take away any of their statutory powers;</li> <li>• certain transport functions, these are dealt with through a joint transport committee made up of members from both NTCA and the North East Combined Authority ("NECA") which comprises the areas of Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland Councils. This ensures that the integrated transport arrangements across the North East region are maintained, this service is carried out by Nexus. In addition North East Metro Operations Limited (NEMOL) continues to operate and maintain the Tyne and Wear metro service on behalf of the joint transport committee.</li> </ul> <p>NTCA is committed to working with neighbouring local authorities, combined authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in support of common objectives. The LEP covers the areas of both combined authorities, i.e. NTCA and NECA, and therefore it encompasses the area of the seven local authorities in the North East region. Effective engagement between NTCA, the LEP and the wider business community is critical to delivering the ambitions for the area. The LEP arrangements have delivered a significant number of development and growth projects which have begun to transform the North East area and provide an effective framework to manage and commission the multi-million-pound investment programmes designed to improve and support the North East's economy. The seven authorities will continue to work closely with and through the LEP in delivery of the Strategic Economic Plan.</p>	Yes



### 3. VALUE FOR MONEY CONCLUSION

Sub-criteria	Commentary	Arrangements in place?
Working with partners and other third parties	<p>The bodies outlined above already have long standing partnerships with NECA and these have been passed to NTCA through the devolution. An internal control deficiency has been raised (see page 10) with regards to NTCA publishing a partnership register on their website. NTCA has Service Level Agreements (SLAs) in place with Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council and Northumberland County Council. The aim of SLAs is to summarise the nature of the services provided and the charges associated with the services, together with the performance management process which outlines service standards etc. A service concession exists in relation to the Tyne Tunnel. This is subject to a detailed 30 year agreement with the operator TT2 which was introduced in 2008.</p>	Yes



### 3. VALUE FOR MONEY CONCLUSION

#### Significant audit risks

The NAO's guidance requires us to carry out work to identify whether or not a risk to our conclusion exists. Risk, in the context of our work, is the risk that we come to an incorrect conclusion rather than the risk of the arrangements in place at NTCA being inadequate. In our Audit Strategy Memorandum, we reported that we had not identified any significant audit risks.



## 4. OTHER REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Exercise of statutory reporting powers	No matters to report
Other information published alongside the audited financial statements	Consistent
Completion of group audit reporting requirements	Below testing threshold

The NAO's Code of Audit Practice and the 2014 Act place wider reporting responsibilities on us, as NTCA's external auditor. We set out below, the context of these reporting responsibilities and our findings for each.

### Matters on which we report by exception

The 2014 Act provides us with specific powers where matters come to our attention that, in our judgement, require reporting action to be taken. We have the power to:

- issue a report in the public interest;
- make statutory recommendations that must be considered and responded to publicly;
- apply to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law; and
- issue an advisory notice under schedule 8 of the 2014 Act.

We did not exercise any of these statutory reporting powers.

The 2014 Act also gives rights to local electors and other parties, such as the right to ask questions of the auditor and the right to make an objection to an item of account. We did not receive any such objections or questions.

### Other information published alongside the financial statements

The Code of Audit Practice requires us to consider whether information published alongside the financial statements is consistent with those statements and our knowledge and understanding of NTCA. In our opinion, the other information in the Statement of Accounts is consistent with the audited financial statements.

### Reporting to the NAO in respect of Whole of Government Accounts consolidation data

The NAO, as group auditor, requires us to complete the WGA Assurance Statement in respect of its consolidation data. We submitted this information to the NAO on 1 December 2020.



## 5. OUR FEES

### Fees for work as the Council's auditor

We reported our proposed fees for the delivery of our work in the Audit Strategy Memorandum, presented to Audit Committee in July 2020.

Having completed our work for the 2019/20 financial year, we can confirm that our final fees are as follows:

Area of work	2019/20 proposed fee	2019/20 final fee
Delivery of audit work under the NAO Code of Audit Practice	£27,500	£ 35,500 (Note 1)

Note 1 – The additional fee has been agreed with management however it is subject to Public Sector Auditor Appointments Ltd's (PSAA) approval

### Fees for other work

We confirm that we have not undertaken any non-audit services for NTCA in the year.



## 6. FORWARD LOOK

### Financial outlook and Operational challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of lockdowns will have a significant impact on the UK economy for years to come. The pandemic has created significant uncertainties and pressures for NTCA and the knock on effect on both the annual revenue budget and the medium term financial plan. It is critical that the medium term plan is reviewed and refreshed on a regular basis so that any potential funding shortfalls can be identified as early as possible and mitigations identified to minimise the impact on performance.

Clarity over the impact will only be obtained once the virus has been brought under control and the impact on the economy becomes clearer. Public spending in general is likely to be tightly controlled as the Government begins to manage the levels of borrowing incurred.

There is also uncertainty in regards the UK and European Union trade deal. Whilst this impact on NTCA is currently unknown, any impact on the overall economy may create indirect pressures.

NTCA must ensure the smooth transfer of staff from the North East LEP (NELEP) which were transferred from NECA on 1 April 2020.



## 6. FORWARD LOOK

### How we will work with NTCA

We will focus our work on the risks that your challenges present to your financial statements and your ability to maintain proper arrangements for securing value for money.

In the coming year we will continue to support NTCA by:

- continued liaison with NTCA's Internal Auditors to minimise duplication of work;
- attending Audit and Standards Committee meetings and presenting an Audit Progress Report including updates on regional and national developments; and
- hosting events for staff, such as our Local Government Accounts workshop.

We will meet with the officers to identify any learning from the 2019/20 audit. Given the impact of COVID-19 on the 2019/20 reporting timetable there is some uncertainty regarding the 2020/21 timetable. We will continue to work with the finance team to ensure any future timetable is adhered to.

In terms of the technical challenges that officers face around the production of the statement of accounts, we will continue to work with them to share our knowledge of new accounting developments and we will be on hand to discuss any issues as and when they arise. We will continue to share our insights from across local government and relevant knowledge from the wider public and private sector.

NTCA has taken a positive and constructive approach to our audit and we wish to thank members and officers for their support and co-operation during our audit.



## 6. FORWARD LOOK

### Changes to the Code of Audit Practice

The Code of Audit Practice (the Audit Code), issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General, prescribes the way we carry out our responsibilities as your auditors. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 a new Code came in to force and will apply to our work from 2020/21 onwards.

The new Audit Code continues to apply the requirements of International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) to our audit of the financial statements. While there are changes to the ISAs that are effective from 2020/21 the Audit Code has not introduced any changes to the scope of our audit of the financial statements. We will continue to give our opinion on the financial statements in our independent auditor's report.

There are however significant changes to the work on value for money arrangements, and the way we report the outcomes of our work to you.

### The auditor's work on value for money arrangements

From 2020/21 we are still required to satisfy ourselves that you have made proper arrangements for securing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources, however unlike under the 2015 Audit Code, we will no longer report in the form of a conclusion on arrangements. Instead, where our work identifies significant weaknesses in arrangements, we are required to report those weaknesses to you, along with the actions that need to be taken to address those weaknesses.

Our work on value for money arrangements will focus on three criteria, specified in the revised Audit Code:

- Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

Under the new Audit Code we will be expected to report and make recommendations as soon as we identify a significant weakness in arrangements, as opposed to reporting our conclusion on arrangements at the end of the audit cycle as has previously been the case.

### Reporting the results of the auditor's work

We currently issue you with an Annual Audit Letter which provides a summary of our work across all aspects of our audit. From 2020/21 the Annual Audit Letter will be replaced by the Auditor's Annual Report. This will continue to provide a summary of our work over the year of audit but will also include a detailed commentary on your arrangements in place to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This commentary replaces the conclusion on arrangements that was previously provided and will include details of any significant weakness identified and reported to you, follow up of any previous recommendations made, and the our view as to whether recommendations have been implemented satisfactorily.

The guidance supporting the new Audit Code is being developed by the National Audit Office and we will provide you with any further updates to our approach arising from this guidance when it is released.



## 6. FORWARD LOOK

### Redmond Review

In September 2020, Sir Tony Redmond published the findings of his independent review into the oversight of local audit and the transparency of local authority financial reporting. The report makes several recommendations that, if implemented, could affect both the financial statements that local authorities are required to prepare and the work that we as auditors are required to do.

The report and recommendations are wide-ranging, and includes:

- the creation of the Office of Local Audit and Regulation (OLAR), be created to manage, oversee and regulate local audit;
- reviewing reporting deadlines;
- reviewing governance arrangements in local authorities, including the membership of the Audit Committee; and
- increasing transparency and reducing the complexity of local authority financial statements.

The recommendations and findings will now be considered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and we look forward to working with all stakeholders to implement changes to ensure the development and sustainability of local audit.

The full report is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-financial-reporting-and-external-audit-independent-review>



## CONTACT

### **Cameron Waddell**

Partner

Phone: 0191 383 6300

Mobile: 07813 752 053

Email: [Cameron.Waddell@mazars.co.uk](mailto:Cameron.Waddell@mazars.co.uk)

### **Jim Dafter**

Senior Manager

Phone: 0191 383 6300

Mobile: 07815 876 052

Email: [Jim.Dafter@mazars.co.uk](mailto:Jim.Dafter@mazars.co.uk)

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