

Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

Lancashire County Council and Lancashire County Pension Fund
Year ending 31 March 2019

January 2019



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Introduction



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This paper provides the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee with a report on progress in delivering our responsibilities as your external auditors.

The paper also includes a summary of our recent publications that may be relevant to you as a local authority.

Members of the Audit, Risk and 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.grant-thornton.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.

Progress at January 2019

2017/18 Audit – Lancashire County Council

We have completed our audit of the Council's 2017/18 financial statements. Our audit opinion, including our value for money conclusion was issued on the 28 August 2018.

We issued:

- an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements; and
- a qualified (except for) value for money conclusion on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

We have issued all our deliverables for 2017/18 except for the closure certificate. We cannot formally conclude the audits from 2012/13 onwards until a police investigation is finalised and we have had the opportunity to consider the outcome and assess the implications for our audit of the Council.

2017/18 Audit – Lancashire County Pension Fund

We have completed our audit of the Pension Fund's 2017/18 financial statements. Our unqualified audit opinion was issued on 31 July 2018.

Our Annual Audit Letter, summarising the outcomes of both the Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire County Pension Fund was presented to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee on 29 October 2018.

2018/19 Audit

We have begun our planning for the 2018/19 financial year audit for both Lancashire County Council and Lancashire County Pension Fund.

Our detailed work and audit visits will begin later in the year and we will discuss the timing of these visits with management. In the meantime we will:

- continue to hold regular discussions with management to inform our risk assessment for the 2018/19 financial statements and value for money audits;
- review minutes and papers from key meetings; and
- continue to review relevant sector updates to ensure that we capture any emerging issues and consider these as part of audit plans.

The Audit Plans for Lancashire County Council and Lancashire County Pension Fund will be drafted by February 2019, and will be presented to the next meeting of the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee.

Other areas

Change of Engagement Lead and Engagement Manager

Robin Baker (Director) is your new Engagement Lead. Robin replaced Mike Thomas from December 2018.

Angela Pieri (Senior Manager) is your new Engagement Manager. Angela replaced Richard McGahon in November 2018.

Handover meetings with senior officers has ensured a smooth transition for the Council.

Certification of claims and returns

We completed the certification of the Council's 2017/18 Teachers Pension Return in accordance with the procedures agreed with the Teachers Pension Agency. This certification work concluded on 29 November 2018, and there were no significant issues arising.

Meetings

Since our last update report we have held liaison meetings with senior management, finance officers, finance staff and internal audit regarding emerging developments to ensure the audit process is smooth and effective.

Events

We provide a range of workshops, along with network events and publications to support the Council. We thank the Council for hosting one of our Local Government Chief Accountants workshops that officers are attending. Further details of our recent 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

Fee Letter

Confirming audit fee for 2018/19.

Planned Date

April 2018

Status

Complete

Accounts Audit Plan

We are required to issue a detailed accounts audit plan to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee setting out our proposed approach in order to give an opinion on the Council's 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.

April 2019

Not yet due

Audit Findings Report

The Audit Findings Report will be reported to the July Audit, Risk and 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 local government 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 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

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 took place on 4 December. Julia Unwin, Chair of the Civil Societies Futures Project, former CEO of the Joseph Rowntree Association and author on kindness provided 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



Care Homes for the Elderly – Where are we now?

It is a pivotal moment for the UK care homes market. In the next few months the government is to reveal the contents of its much-vaunted plans for the long-term funding of care for older people.

Our latest Grant Thornton report draws together the most recent and relevant research, including our own sizeable market knowledge and expertise, to determine where the sector is now and understand where it is heading in the future. We have spoken to investors, providers and market consultants to showcase the diversity and innovation that care homes can offer.

Flourishing communities are not a 'nice to have' but an essential part of our purpose of shaping a vibrant economy. Growth simply cannot happen sustainably if business is disconnected from society. That is why social care needs a positive growth framing. Far from being a burden, the sector employs more people than the NHS, is a crucible for technological innovation, and is a vital connector in community life. We need to think about social care as an asset and invest and nurture it accordingly.

There are opportunities to further invest to create innovative solutions that deliver improved tailored care packages to meet the needs of our ageing population.

The report considers a number of aspects in the social care agenda

- market structure, sustainability, quality and evolution
- future funding changes and the political agenda
- the investment, capital and financing landscape
- new funds and methods of finance
- future outlook.

The decline in the number of public-sector focused care home beds is a trend that looks set to continue in the medium-term. However, it cannot continue indefinitely as Grant Thornton's research points to a significant rise in demand for elderly care beds over the coming decade and beyond.

A strategic approach will also be needed to recruit and retain the large number of workers needed to care for the ageing population in the future. Efforts have already begun through education programmes such as Skills for Care's 'Care Ambassadors' to promote social care as an attractive profession. But with the number of nurses falling across the NHS as well, the Government will need to address the current crisis.

But the most important conversation that needs to be had is with the public around what kind of care services they would like to have and, crucially, how much they would be prepared to pay for them. Most solutions for sustainable funding for social care point towards increased taxation, which will generate significant political and public debate. With Brexit dominating the political agenda, and the government holding a precarious position in Parliament, shorter-term funding interventions by government over the medium-term look more likely than a root-and-branch reform of the current system. The sector, however, needs to know what choices politicians, and society as a whole, are prepared to make in order to plan for the future.

Copies of our report can be requested on our website



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/care-homes-where-are-we-now/>

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

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government links

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

Institute for Fiscal Studies

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



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