

Audit and Governance Committee

15 February 2010

Report of the Assistant Director of Resources (Customer Service & Governance)

Summary of Audit Commission National Reports

Summary

1. This paper gives a brief overview of national reports produced by the Audit Commission (AC). The last summary, presented to the Audit & Governance Committee in June 2009, covered reports up to 17 June, and the current summary continues from that point up to 31 January 2010. Whilst this report is for information only, it may prompt a request for a more detailed response from council officers, where the content of a specific report may impact on the governance or internal control arrangements of the council.

Background

Report Summaries

2. **Financial Management in a Glacial Age
(Published 27 November 2009)**

This document identifies common themes and trends in financial management, in particular possible causes of financial failure and steps that leadership can take to improve financial health. There is an accompanying Powerpoint presentation that gives the background to current financial pressures on local government. This can be downloaded from the Audit Commission website at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/Pages/financialmanagementinagacialage.aspx>.

3. **Nothing but the Truth
(Published 5 November 2009)**

This is a discussion paper on the methods of ensuring that data on local public services is fit for purpose, and examines the causes and consequences of poor data quality.

**4. Means to an end: Joint financing across health and social care
(Published 29 October 2009)**

The report examines how councils and NHS bodies jointly fund services for people who need both health and social care provision, as well as looking at the impact such partnerships have on service users.

**5. Lofty ambitions: the role of councils in reducing CO2 emissions
(Published 21 October 2009)**

This report examines English local authorities' opportunities in responding to climate change, in particular the need to reduce domestic emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Councils can take a lead in this area, for example by improving the efficiency of their own housing stock, as well as by setting high standards for new houses via the planning process.

**6. Protecting the public purse – Local government fighting fraud
(Published 15 September 2009)**

The report considers the key fraud risks and pressures facing councils. The report acknowledges that local councils, have since the 1990s put in place a range of strategies to minimise this risk. The main body of the report describes in detail some of the current and emerging fraud risks that councils face, such as benefit fraud and housing tenancy fraud. The report outlines the actions that all organisations should take to minimize the risk of fraud and improve detection. Specific recommendations include councils reviewing their involvement in counter-fraud partnerships; improving staff awareness of money laundering regulations and setting clear targets and expected outcomes for the work of counter-fraud teams. *As this report is directly relevant to the work of this committee, a copy of the summary report is attached at the annex to this report.*

**7. Building better lives – Getting the best from strategic housing
(Published 9 September 2009)**

The report examines the strategic role that local authorities play in terms of the nation's housing stock, and highlights that few local authorities are performing well. The report also considers the impact of the recession on meeting housing targets, and places an emphasis on improving the condition of existing properties.

**8. When it comes to the crunch: how councils are responding to the recession
(Published 12 August 2009)**

This report discusses the recession and the actions that councils have taken to attempt to counter its effects. While different local authorities have been affected in different ways, all councils will need to continue to prepare for rising levels of unemployment, as the role of councils will become

increasingly important as the recession spreads from businesses into communities.

9. Is there something I should know? Making the most of information (Published 30 July 2009)

This paper sets out a basis for discussion on how to ensure data about local public services is fit for purpose. It asks if citizens, along with frontline staff, managers, politicians, central government and local public service regulators, can have confidence in the data they rely on.

10. Valuable Lessons – Improving economy and efficiency in schools (Published 30 June 2009)

This report covers the way money has been spent on schools in the past, and the need for schools to improve their economy and efficiency. Schools could save large amounts through the use of better procurement processes and more efficient deployment of workforce.

Consultation

10. The council's corporate Policy Officer has been consulted on the list of reports in this paper.

Options

11. Not relevant for the purpose of the report.

Analysis

12. Not relevant for the purpose of the report.

Corporate Priorities

13. This report contributes to the overall effectiveness of the council's financial, governance and assurance arrangements in the achievement of all its priorities, and in particular the Effective Organisation theme of the Corporate Strategy.

Implications

- 14.
- (a) **Financial** – There are no implications.
 - (b) **Human Resources (HR)** - There are no implications.
 - (c) **Equalities** - There are no implications.
 - (d) **Legal** - There are no implications.
 - (e) **Crime and Disorder** - There are no implications.
 - (f) **Information Technology (IT)** - There are no implications.
 - (g) **Property** - There are no implications.

Risk Management

15. By not considering the content of Audit Commission Reports, the council will fail to properly comply with best practice requirements, and its Use of Resources score in CAA assessments could be adversely affected.

Recommendations

16. Members are asked to note the report and annex, and comment on any areas for further consideration by the Committee or by officers.

Reason

To ensure that the council can benchmark, learn from and meet best practice requirements derived from external audit national activity and enhance its governance frameworks as a result.

Contact Details

Author:

Pauline Stuchfield
Assistant Director (Customer Service
& Governance)
Telephone: 01904 551706

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Ian Floyd
Director of Resources

Report Approved



Date 1st February 2010

Specialist Implications Officers

Not applicable

Wards Affected: Not applicable

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Audit Commission Reports as follows:

- Financial Management in a Glacial Age – handout and presentation, published 27 November 2009
- Nothing But the Truth, Published 5 November 2009
- Means to an end, published 29 October 2009
- Lofty ambitions, published 21 October 2009
- Protecting the public purse, published 15 September 2009
- Building better lives, published 9 September 2009
- When it comes to the crunch, published 12 August 2009
- Is there something I should know?, published 30 July 2009
- Valuable lessons, published 30 June 2009

Annex

Protecting the public purse, published 15 September 2009

None