

Agenda Item No: 11
Report To: **Audit Committee**
Date: **30th June 2016**
Report Title: **Audit Committee Update Report for Ashford Borough Council**
Year ended 31 March 2016
Report Author: Cover – Ben Lockwood
Main Report - Grant Thornton



Summary: The attached report from our external auditors is to update the committee on their progress against the audit plan. Overall progress is good and we continue to maintain the good working relationship we have with Grant Thornton.

As part of the report the Auditor has highlighted two reports that they have published the first on the use of Joint Venture companies and the second on review of the effectiveness of Audit committees. The Council has no Joint Venture Companies but may consider these as a suitable vehicle to deliver services or investment in the borough and therefore the paper has less direct reference to the Councils activities but this should be held on file should a Joint Venture be considered later. The Second Paper on the effectiveness of Audit Committees and the committee may wish to consider this paper as a separate item for future meetings.

The report also refers to a report by CIPFA about Fighting Fraud and Corruption. Members may wish to consider this in light of the report elsewhere on the agenda updating them on the progress that the Fraud Team has made over the last year.

Key Decision: N/A
Affected Wards: N/A
Recommendations: **The committee is asked to**
i. note the report

Policy Overview: The paper updates the committee on our External Auditors progress in delivering its responsibilities as our appointed auditor.

The report contains references to 3 reports produced by Grant Thornton that may be of reference to the committee or other committees of the Council.

**Financial
Implications:**

N/A

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Audit Committee Update Report for Ashford Borough Council

Year ended 31 March 2016

June 2016

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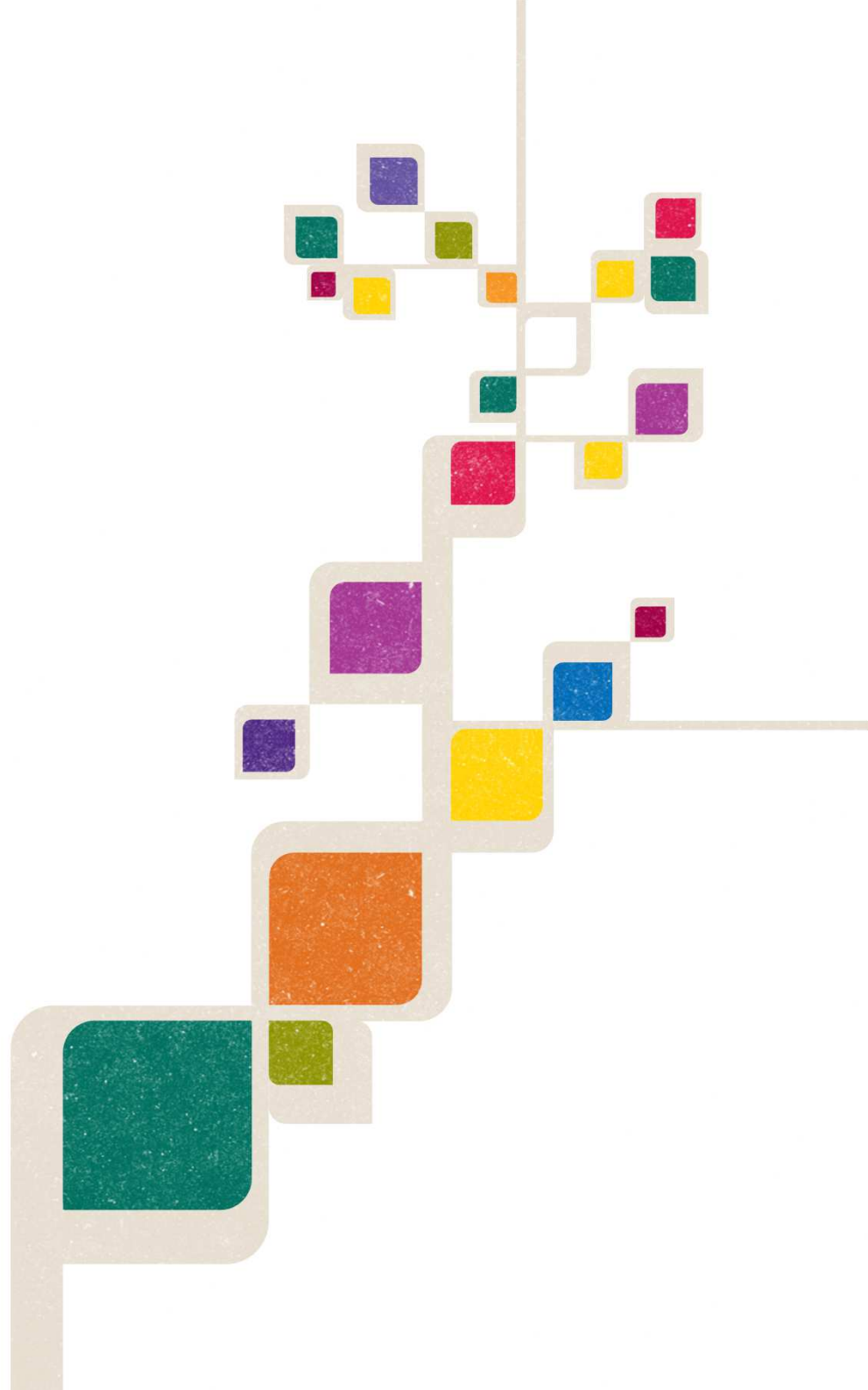
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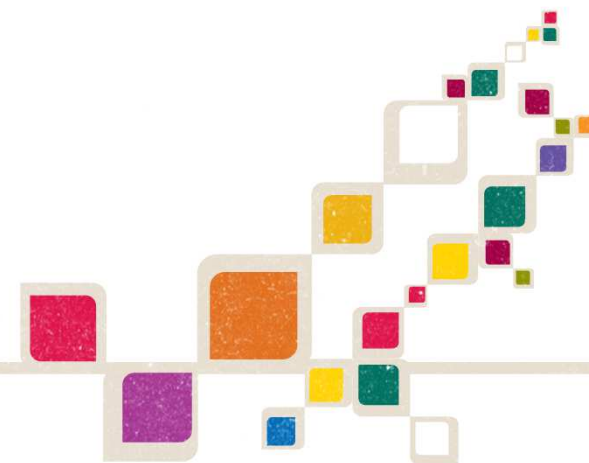
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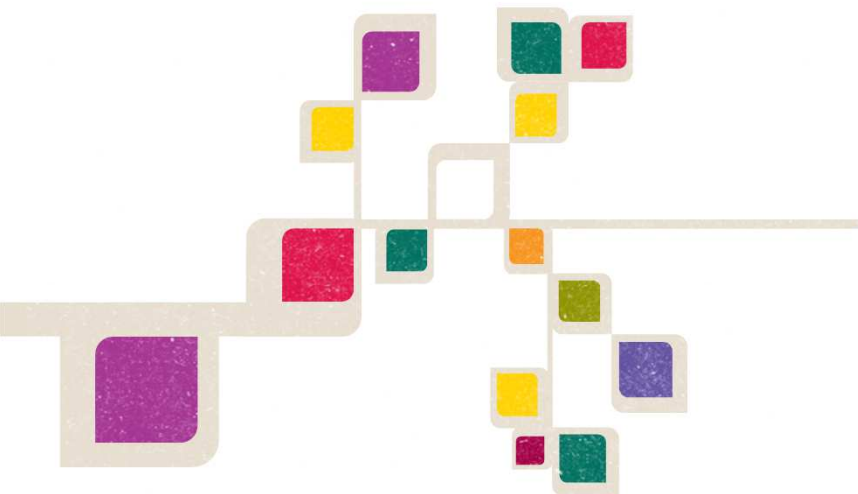
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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect your business or any weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.



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Introduction

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

Members of the Audit Committee can find further useful material on our website www.grant-thornton.co.uk, where we have a section dedicated to our work in the public sector. Here you can download copies of our publications including:

- Better Together: Building a successful joint venture company;
<http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/building-a-successful-joint-venture-company/>
- Knowing the Ropes – Audit Committee; Effectiveness Review ;
www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/knowing-the-ropes--audit-committee-effectiveness-review-2015/
- Making devolution work: A practical guide for local leaders (October 2015)
www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/making-devolution-work/

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.



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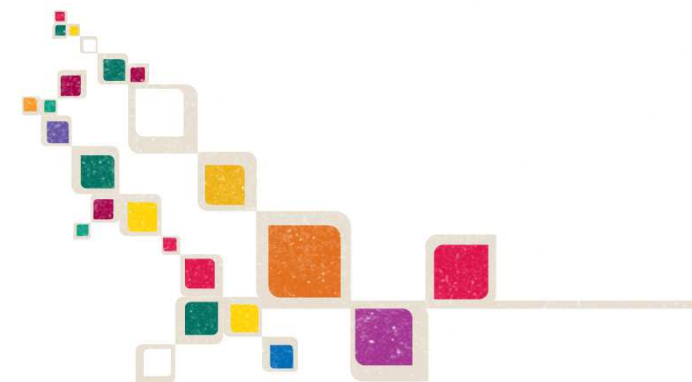


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Progress at June 2016



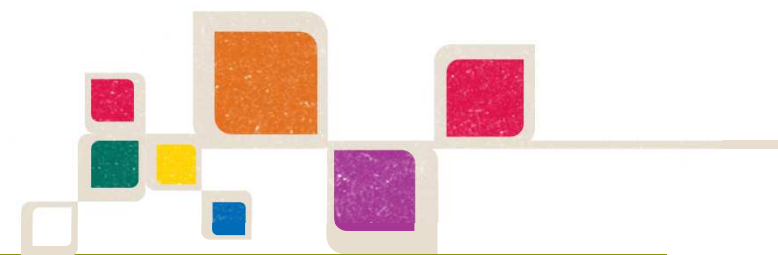
 **Progress against plan**
On track

 **Opinion and VfM conclusion**
Plan to give in July 2016, before deadline of 30 September 2016

 **Outputs delivered**
Fee letter, Progress Reports, delivered to plan

| 2015/16 work | Completed | Comments |
|---|------------|--|
| <p>Fee Letter We issued the 'Planned fee letter for 2015/16 in April 2015.</p> | April 2015 | <p>The Commission published the work programme and scales of fees for the audit of the 2015/16 accounts reducing scale audit fees for Councils by 25%. The fee letter confirmed the 2015/16 scale audit fees as £60,311. After the Commission's closure, the 2015/16 work programme and fees is accessible from the PSAA website psaa.co.uk. We have also recently issued the fee letter for 2016/17, with no change to the fee proposed. This is reported to this meeting of the Audit Committee.</p> |
| <p>Accounts Audit Plan We are required to issue a detailed accounts audit plan to the Council setting out our proposed approach in order to give an opinion on the Council's 2015-16 financial statements. We also inform you of any subsequent changes to our audit approach.</p> | March 2016 | <p>This was presented to the Audit Committee in March 2016</p> |
| <p>Interim accounts audit Our interim fieldwork visit includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updating our review of the Council's control environment • updating our understanding of financial systems • review of Internal Audit reports on core financial systems • early work on emerging accounting issues • early substantive testing | March 2016 | <p>The finding from our interim audit were included in the audit plan, presented to the March 2016 Audit Committee.</p> <p>As part of our formal communication between auditors and the council's Audit Committee, we have sent letters to the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Director of Finance, requesting views on management's arrangements and member oversight, to prevent and detect fraud and to ensure compliance with laws and regulations. (see separate item on this June agenda)</p> |

Progress at June 2016



| 2015/16 work | Completed | Comments |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Final accounts audit Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit of the 2015-16 financial statements • proposed opinion on the Council's accounts | <p>In progress (due July 2016)</p> | <p>We are planning to complete our audit by 31st July as part of the transition to the earlier closedown and audit cycle that is required from 2018.</p> <p>The findings from this work will be presented within our Audit Findings Report, presented to the Committee in July 2016.</p> |
| <p>Value for Money (VfM) conclusion The scope of our work has changed and is set out in the final guidance issued by the National Audit Office in November 2015. The Code requires auditors to satisfy themselves that; "the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources". The guidance confirmed the overall criterion as; "in all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people". The three sub criteria for assessment to be able to give a conclusion overall are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed decision making • Sustainable resource deployment • Working with partners and other third parties <p>We will be required to report by exception if we conclude that we are not satisfied that the Council has in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources for the period.</p> | <p>In progress (due July 2016)</p> | <p>We set out the results of our risk assessment and the proposed focus of our work in the audit plan presented to the March Audit Committee.</p> <p>The results of our VfM audit work and the key messages arising will be reported in our Audit Findings Report in July 2016.</p> <p>We will include our conclusion as part of our report on your financial statements which we are planning to issue by 31 July 2016.</p> |
| <p>Housing Benefits 2015/16 We are required to certify the Housing Benefit Claim in accordance with HBCOUNT approach by 30 November 2016.</p> | <p>August 2016 – November 2016.</p> | <p>Our initial fieldwork is scheduled for September 2016.</p> |
| <p>Other activities Since our last committee update, we have continued discussions to support the trading company audits and tax compliance and issued our LG financial health and governance review.</p> | <p>-</p> | <p>We would always be happy to discuss any other ways in which Grant Thornton can support the Council.</p> <p>Further details of the publications that may be of interest to the Council are set out from page 12.</p> |

Better Together: Building a successful joint venture company

Local government is evolving as it looks for ways to protect front-line services. These changes are picking up pace as more councils introduce alternative delivery models to generate additional income and savings.

'Better together' is the next report in our series looking at alternative delivery models and focuses on the key areas to consider when deciding to set up a joint venture (JV), setting it up and making it successful.

JVs have been in use for many years in local government and remain a common means of delivering services differently. This report draws on our research across a range of JVs to provide inspiring ideas from those that have been a success and the lessons learnt from those that have encountered challenges.

Key findings from the report:

- JVs continue to be a viable option – Where they have been successful they have supported councils to improve service delivery, reduce costs, bring investment and expertise and generate income
- There is reason to be cautious – Our research found a number of JVs between public and private bodies had mixed success in achieving outcomes for councils
- There is a new breed of JVs between public sector bodies – These JVs can be more successful at working and staying together. There are an increasing number being set up between councils and wholly-owned commercial subsidiaries that can provide both the commercialism required and the understanding of the public sector culture.

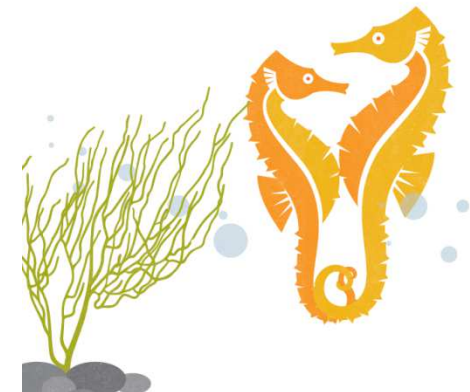
Our report, Better Together: Building a successful joint venture company, can be downloaded from our website: <http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/building-a-successful-joint-venture-company/>

Grant Thornton reports

 Grant Thornton
An instinct for growth™

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Better together
Building a successful
joint venture company



Knowing the Ropes – Audit Committee Effectiveness Review

Grant Thornton reports

We have published our first cross-sector review of Audit Committee effectiveness encompassing the corporate, not for profit and public sectors.

It provides insight into the ways in which audit committees can create an effective role within an organisation’s governance structure and understand how they are perceived more widely. The report is structured into four key issues:

- What is the status of the audit committee within the organisation?
- How should the audit committee be organised and operated?
- What skills and qualities are required in the audit committee members?
- How should the effectiveness of the audit committee be evaluated?

The detailed report is available here

<http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/knowning-the-ropes--audit-committee-effectiveness-review-2015/>

Size: 3-5 members is an ideal size for an audit committee

Frequency: meetings should be regular and the length should adapt to content

Relevance: audit committee members should be selected based on the skills and experience they bring

Communication: papers should strike the balance between detail and length

Ability: training should be provided for audit committee members

Clarity: the role of the audit committee and its relationship with other committees, should be clearly defined

Evolution: audit committees should continually develop

The two key things that audit committee members should be asking are:

- 1** What is expected of the audit committee and does it reflect the specific nature of the industry in which the organisation sits?
- 2** Does the audit committee have clear terms of reference in place? Audit committees should set themselves targets for what they want to achieve and define how these will be measured to ensure they are operating effectively.

Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally

CIPFA publication

Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally is a strategy for English local authorities that is the result of collaboration by local authorities and key stakeholders from across the counter fraud landscape .

This strategy is the result of an intensive period of research, surveys, face-to-face meetings and workshops. Local authorities have spoken openly about risks, barriers and what they feel is required to help them improve and continue the fight against fraud and to tackle corruption locally.

Local authorities face a significant fraud challenge. Fraud costs local authorities an estimated £2.1bn a year. In addition to the scale of losses, there are further challenges arising from changes in the wider public sector landscape including budget reductions, service remodelling and integration, and government policy changes. Local authorities will need to work with new agencies in a new national counter fraud landscape.

The strategy:

- calls upon local authorities to continue to tackle fraud with the dedication they have shown so far and to step up the fight against fraud in a challenging and rapidly changing environment
- illustrates the financial benefits that can accrue from fighting fraud more effectively
- calls upon central government to promote counter fraud activity in local authorities by ensuring the right further financial incentives are in place and helping them break down barriers to improvement
- updates and builds upon Fighting Fraud Locally 2011 in the light of developments such as The Serious and Organised Crime Strategy and the first UK Anti-Corruption Plan
- sets out a new strategic approach that is designed to feed into other areas of counter fraud and corruption work and support and strengthen the ability of the wider public sector to protect itself from the harm that fraud can cause.

The strategy can be downloaded from

<http://www.cipfa.org/services/counter-fraud-centre/fighting-fraud-and-corruption-locally>





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