

Delay in publishing the Authority's Statement of Accounts (Subject to Audit) : Year Ended 31 March 2023

Publication of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's (TWFR) Statement of Accounts (Subject to Audit) 2022/2023

The Authority, despite its best endeavours, is not in a position to be able to publish its Statement of Accounts (subject to audit) for the year ended 31 March 2023 by the reverted statutory deadline of 31st May 2023.

This is due to a number of factors, which include:

the fact that the previous year's Accounts for 2021/22 have not yet been signed off by the external auditor (because of a very long delay in resolving an issue in respect of pension disclosures in respect of the Local Government Pension Scheme for 2021/22 which will, if not corrected, materially affect the accounts). The issue has just recently been resolved nationally and the new pension data and disclosures have now been received from the Actuary but these will have a significant impact on the accounts which once amended will need to be re-audited before they can be signed off by our external auditor. This will not be possible by 31st May 2023.

the fact the Authority has only just received the required pension data and disclosures for the current accounting year 2022/23 which means the deadline for the accounts of 31st May 2023 simply cannot be achieved.

The Finance Department despite best endeavours has worked extremely hard in challenging circumstances to complete the work but has had extra work to carry out in respect of the audit of the 2021/22 accounts which has caused a delay in the preparation of the 2022/23 accounts, which has been unavoidable, and finally,

the fact the government reverted the timescales of the unaudited accounts for 2022/23 back to 31st May 2023 deadline at very short notice despite a consultation that they carried out earlier in the year where the Local Government Association and the majority of local authorities (including this Authority) requested an extension to 30th June 2023 in order to reflect the amount of work involved in achieving the earlier timescales after the impact of the pandemic. Despite the overwhelming request to extend the deadline to 30th June (a month earlier than the 31st July 2022 deadline for 2021/22 accounts) the government insisted on adherence to 31st May 2023.

Implications

The delay in publishing the unaudited accounts for 2022/23 will mean that:

- 1. the Public Rights to inspect the accounts and accounting records for 2022/23 will be delayed** as these will not be available from the first working day in June 2023 as required by Sections 25 and 26 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ('the Act') that provide local government electors with the right to inspect

- and make copies of the statement of accounts, accounting records and all documents relating to those records, for the financial year ended 31st March 2023.
2. **the Publics Rights to question the auditor and to make objections at audit in respect of the Authority's unaudited accounts for 2022/23 will also be delayed** as a result of the late publication of the accounts, as under section 26 of the Act, a local government elector may question the auditor about the accounting records for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 and, under section 27 of the Act, a local government elector may make an objection to the auditor which:

- concerns a matter in respect of which the auditor could make a public interest report under section 24 of the Act; or
- concerns an item of account in respect of which the auditor could apply for a declaration that the item is unlawful under section 28 of the Act.

These rights as explained are delayed and will be made available once the Authority publishes its unaudited accounts for 2022/23.

The Authority therefore plans to release a further separate Notice when this is possible but it is expected to be before 30th June 2023.

The situation set out above are covered by Regulation 10, paragraph (2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/234/regulation/10>

In summary this Notification explains, as per Regulation 10 (2) (a), that we are not yet able to publish our unaudited 2022/23 Statement of Accounts in line with publication date of 31 May 2023, as per Regulation 10 (1). The Authority is continuing to work hard on the accounts to ensure the required work is completed as soon as possible and that the draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23 (subject to audit) will be published as soon as possible.

Once the accounts are published, revised dates will be provided to the public when they can inspect the accounts and question and raise objections to the external auditor in accordance with the provisions of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

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