

Statement of responsibilities of auditors and of audited bodies

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our remit covers more than 15,000 bodies which between them spend nearly £125 billion of public money every year. Our work covers local government, housing, health, criminal justice and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

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General introduction

- 1 The Audit Commission (the Commission) is responsible for appointing auditors and determining their terms of appointment, as well as for preparing a *Code of Audit Practice*, which prescribes the way in which auditors are to carry out their functions. The Commission has prepared a *Code* for the audits of local government bodies and a *Code* for the audit of local NHS bodies. From time to time, the Commission issues guidance to auditors under section 3(8) of the Audit Commission Act 1998 (the Act) and paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Act. This statement sets out guidance on general responsibilities relevant to audits in both sectors and so supports each *Code*.
- 2 The purpose of this statement is to assist auditors and audited bodies by summarising where – in the context of the usual conduct of an audit – the different responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas. Throughout this statement, the term ‘audited body’ covers both the members of the body (for example, elected members in local authorities and directors of NHS bodies) and its management (the senior officers of the body).
- 3 The responsibilities of auditors are derived from statute (principally the Audit Commission Act 1998) and from the *Code*. Nothing in this statement is intended to limit or extend those responsibilities. In particular, audited bodies should note that, because auditors must not prejudice their independence of the audited body, the audit role does not include providing financial or legal advice or consultancy to the audited body.
- 4 Auditors may wish to refer to, and/or incorporate, this statement in audit planning documents, annual audit letters, reports and other audit outputs.

Introduction to responsibilities

- 5 Those who are responsible for the conduct of public business and for spending public money are accountable for ensuring both that public business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- 6 In discharging this accountability, public bodies and their management (both members and officers) are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of their affairs and the stewardship of the resources at their disposal. They are also required to report on their arrangements in their annual published Statements on Internal Control.
- 7 It is the responsibility of the audited body to ensure that proper arrangements are in place, but certain individuals have specific responsibilities. In NHS bodies there is a unitary board, consisting of executive members and part-time non-executive members, chaired by a non-executive member. The chairman and non-executive members are responsible for monitoring the executive management of the body and are responsible to the Secretary of State for the discharge of these responsibilities. In addition, there is a requirement for an audit committee, which contributes independently to the board's overall process for ensuring that an effective internal control and risk management system is maintained. The chief executive is responsible to the board for the day-to-day management of the organisation and, as accountable officer, is also responsible to the Department of Health for the proper stewardship of public money and assets. Local authorities have three designated statutory officers, each of whom has a specific role in relation to accountability and control:
 - head of paid service – usually the chief executive, responsible to the full council for the corporate and overall strategic management of the authority;
 - monitoring officer – responsible for reporting to the authority any actual or potential breaches of the law or any maladministration, and for ensuring that procedures for recording and reporting key decisions are operating effectively; and
 - chief financial officer – with responsibility for the proper administration of their financial affairs.
- 8 In carrying out their responsibilities, auditors may wish to obtain representations from management, both orally and in writing, on important matters.
- 9 The following paragraphs summarise the responsibilities of auditors and of audited bodies in relation to the responsibilities of auditors described in the *Code*.

Auditing the financial statements

- 10** The financial statements, which comprise the published accounts of the audited body, are an essential means by which it accounts for its stewardship of the resources at its disposal and its financial performance in the use of those resources. It is the responsibility of the audited body to:
- put in place systems of internal control to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions;
 - maintain proper accounting records; and
 - prepare financial statements that present fairly (or, for specified NHS bodies and for local probation boards, give a true and fair view of) the financial position of the body and its expenditure and income.
- 11** The audited body is also responsible for preparing and publishing with its financial statements a statement on internal control.
- 12** Auditors audit the financial statements and give their opinion, including:
- (a) whether they present fairly, or give a true and fair view of, the financial position of the audited body and its expenditure and income for the year in question;
 - (b) whether they have been prepared properly in accordance with relevant legislation and applicable accounting standards; and
 - (c) for certain bodies, on the regularity of their expenditure and income.
- 13** In carrying out their audit of the financial statements, auditors will have regard to the concept of materiality.
- 14** Subject to the concept of materiality, auditors provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements:
- (a) are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error;
 - (b) comply with statutory and other applicable requirements; and
 - (c) comply with all relevant requirements for accounting presentation and disclosure.

- 15 Auditors examine selected transactions and balances on a test basis and assess the significant estimates and judgements made by the audited body in preparing the statements.
- 16 Subject to the concept of materiality, auditors of specified NHS bodies and local probation boards also provide reasonable assurance on the regularity of expenditure and income. In giving such assurance, auditors do not perform detailed tests of transactions to the extent that would be necessary to disclose all unlawful transactions or events that may have occurred or might occur, and the audit process should not be relied upon to disclose such matters.
- 17 Auditors evaluate significant financial systems, and the associated internal financial controls, for the purpose of giving their opinion on the financial statements. Where auditors identify any weaknesses in such systems and controls, they will draw them to the attention of the audited body, but they cannot be expected to identify all weaknesses that may exist.
- 18 Auditors review whether the statement on internal control has been presented in accordance with relevant requirements and report if it does not meet these requirements or if it is misleading or inconsistent with other information of which the auditor is aware. In doing so auditors take into account the knowledge of the audited body gained through their work in relation to the audit of the financial statements and through their work in relation to the body's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources. Auditors are not required to consider whether the statement on internal control covers all risks and controls, nor are auditors required to form an opinion on the effectiveness of the audited body's corporate governance procedures or risk and control procedures.

Responsibilities in relation to arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources

- 19** It is the responsibility of the audited body to put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, and to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and regularly to review the adequacy and effectiveness of them. Such corporate performance management and financial management arrangements form a key part of the system of internal control and comprise the arrangements for:
- establishing strategic and operational objectives;
 - determining policy and making decisions;
 - ensuring that services meet the needs of users and taxpayers and for engaging with the wider community;
 - ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations;
 - identifying, evaluating and managing operational and financial risks and opportunities, including those arising from involvement in partnerships and joint working;
 - ensuring compliance with the general duty of best value, where applicable;
 - managing its financial and other resources, including arrangements to safeguard the financial standing of the audited body;
 - monitoring and reviewing performance, including arrangements to ensure data quality; and
 - ensuring that the audited body's affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of financial conduct, and to prevent and detect fraud and corruption.
- 20** The audited body is responsible for reporting on these arrangements as part of its annual statement on internal control.
- 21** Auditors have a responsibility to satisfy themselves that the audited body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. In meeting this responsibility auditors should review and, where appropriate, examine evidence that is relevant to the audited body's corporate performance management and financial management arrangements, as summarised above, and

report on these arrangements. Auditors of specified local government bodies (best value authorities) also have a responsibility to consider, and report on, the audited body's compliance with statutory requirements in respect of the preparation and publication of its best value performance plan.

- 22** Auditors are responsible for reporting annually their conclusion, having regard to relevant criteria specified by the Audit Commission, as to whether the audited body has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. Auditors report if significant matters have come to their attention that prevent them from concluding that the audited body has put in place proper arrangements. However, auditors are not required to consider whether aspects of the audited body's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are effective.
- 23** In planning their audit work in relation to the arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources, auditors consider and assess the relevant significant business risks. These are the significant operational and financial risks to the achievement of the audited body's statutory functions and objectives, which apply to the audited body and are relevant to auditors' responsibilities under the *Code*, and the arrangements it has put in place to manage these risks. The auditor's assessment of what is significant is a matter of professional judgement and includes consideration of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the item or subject matter in question. Auditors discuss their assessment of risk with the audited body.
- 24** When assessing risk auditors consider:
- the relevance and significance of the potential business risks faced by all bodies of a particular type;
 - other risks that apply specifically to individual audited bodies;
 - the audited body's own assessment of the risks it faces; and
 - the arrangements put in place by the body to manage and address its risks.
- 25** In assessing risks auditors have regard to:
- evidence gained from previous audit work, including the response of the audited body to previous audit work;

- the results of assessments of performance carried out by the Commission;
 - the work of other statutory inspectorates; and
 - relevant improvement needs, identified in discussion with the Commission or other statutory inspectorates.
- 26** Where auditors rely on the reports of statutory inspectorates as evidence relevant to the audited body's corporate performance management and financial management arrangements, the conclusions and judgements in such reports remain the responsibility of the relevant inspectorate or review agency.
- 27** In reviewing the audited body's arrangements for its use of resources, it is not part of auditors' functions to question the merits of the policies of the audited body, but auditors may examine the arrangements by which policy decisions are reached and consider the effects of the implementation of policy. It is the responsibility of the audited body to decide whether and how to implement any recommendations made by auditors and, in making any recommendations, auditors should avoid any perception that they have any role in the decision-making arrangements of the audited body.
- 28** While auditors may review audited bodies' arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources, they cannot be relied on to have identified every weakness or every opportunity for improvement. Audited bodies should consider auditors' conclusions and recommendations in their broader operational or other relevant context.
- 29** Auditors are not required to report to audited bodies on the accuracy of performance information that the audited bodies publish. Auditors' work is limited to a review of the systems put in place by the audited body to collect, record and publish the information, in accordance with guidance issued by the Commission. Nor are auditors required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of the information or the realism and achievability of the assessments published by those audited bodies that are required to prepare best value performance plans.
- 30** Audit work in relation to the audited body's arrangements to ensure that its affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of financial conduct, and to prevent and detect fraud and corruption, does not remove the possibility that breaches of proper standards of financial conduct, or fraud and corruption, have occurred and remained undetected. Nor is it auditors' responsibility to prevent or detect breaches of proper standards of financial conduct, or fraud and corruption, although they will be alert to the possibility and will act promptly if grounds for suspicion come to their notice.

- 31** The reviews arising from national studies developed by the Commission, or in support of the Healthcare Commission's national work programme, and the extent to which auditors are expected to apply them at relevant bodies, are prescribed by the Commission and are notified to audited bodies each year by the Commission in its annual work programme and by auditors in their audit planning documents. When carrying out national studies, auditors are required to follow the methodologies and, for certain studies, use comparative data provided by the Commission. Responsibility for the adequacy and appropriateness of these methodologies and the data rests with the Commission.

Specific powers and duties of auditors

- 32** Auditors have specific powers and duties under the Audit Commission Act 1998 in relation to matters of legality and, in local government, electors' rights. Fees arising in connection with auditors' exercise of these powers and duties, including costs relating to the appointment of legal or other advisers to the auditors, are borne by the audited body.

Reporting the results of audit work

- 33** Auditors provide:
- (a) an audit planning document;
 - (b) oral and/or written reports or memoranda to officers and, where appropriate, members on the results of, or matters arising from, specific aspects of auditors' work;
 - (c) a report to those charged with governance summarising the work of the auditor;
 - (d) an audit report, including the auditor's opinion on the financial statements and a conclusion on whether the audited body has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. For best value authorities this conclusion incorporates the auditor's report on the audit of the best value performance plan;
 - (e) a certificate that the audit of the accounts has been completed in accordance with statutory requirements; and
 - (f) an annual audit letter or, for those bodies where the Commission carries out inspections, information to be reported to the Commission in a specified format to enable it to prepare an annual audit and inspection letter to the audited body.

- 34** In addition, the following outputs, the need for which may arise at any point during the audit process, are issued where appropriate:
- (a) a report dealing with any matter that the auditor considers needs to be raised in the public interest under section 8 of the Act;
 - (b) any recommendations under section 11(3) of the Act (local government bodies);
 - (c) any referral to the Secretary of State under section 19 of the Act (local NHS bodies) where the auditor considers that a decision by a body or officer has led to, or would lead to, unlawful expenditure, or that some action by a body or officer has been, or would be, unlawful and likely to cause a loss or deficiency; and
 - (d) information to be reported to the Commission in a specified format to enable it to carry out any of its other functions, including assessments of performance at relevant bodies, or to assist other bodies, such as the Healthcare Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection and the National Audit Office, in carrying out their functions.
- 35** When considering the action to be taken on audit reports, audited bodies should bear in mind the scope of the audit and responsibilities of auditors, as set out in the *Code* and as further explained in this statement. Matters raised by auditors will be drawn from those that come to their attention during the audit. The audit cannot be relied upon to detect all errors, weaknesses or opportunities for improvements in management arrangements that might exist. Audited bodies should assess auditors' conclusions and recommendations for their wider implications before deciding whether to accept or implement them.
- 36** Although annual audit letters and reports may be addressed to officers or members of the audited body, they are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors do not have responsibilities to officers or members in their individual capacities (other than in the exercise of auditors' specific powers and duties in relation to matters relating to electors' rights in local government) or to third parties that choose to place reliance upon the reports from auditors.

Ad hoc requests for auditors' views

- 37** There may be occasions when audited bodies will seek the views of auditors on the legality, accounting treatment or value for money of a transaction before embarking upon it. In such cases, auditors will be as helpful as possible, but are precluded from giving a definite view in any case because auditors:
- must not prejudice their independence by being involved in the decision-making processes of the audited body;
 - are not financial or legal advisers to the audited body; and
 - may not act in any way that might fetter their ability to exercise the special powers conferred upon them by statute.
- 38** In response to such requests, auditors can offer only an indication as to whether anything in the information available to them at the time of forming a view could cause them to consider exercising the specific powers conferred upon them by statute. Any response from auditors should not be taken as suggesting that the proposed transaction or course of action will be exempt from challenge in future, whether by auditors or others entitled to raise objection to it. It is the responsibility of the audited body to decide whether to embark on any transaction.

Access to information

- 39** Auditors have wide-ranging rights of access to documents and information in relation to the audit. Such rights apply not only to documents and information held by the audited body and its members and staff, but also to the audited body's partners and contractors, whether in the public, private or voluntary sectors. However, there are strict restrictions on the disclosure of information obtained in the course of the audit, subject only to specific exemptions. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply to the Commission's appointed auditors, as they have not been designated as 'public authorities' for the purposes of that legislation.

Grant claims and returns – certification

- 40 The Commission agrees to make certification arrangements in accordance with the framework set out in the separate *Statement of responsibilities of grant-paying bodies, authorities, the Audit Commission and appointed auditors in relation to claims and returns* (April 2004). The responsibility for ensuring the completion, accuracy and completeness of grant claims and returns lies with the audited body. Grant-paying bodies may require independent examination as a condition of their acceptance of claims and returns and may ask the Commission to make arrangements for auditor certification of claims and returns. The Commission will have regard to what it is appropriate, practically and professionally, to expect the certification process and auditors to do before agreeing to make certification arrangements.

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