

Audit Committee

28 February 2022

Final Accounts Timetable for the year ended 31 March 2022



Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides Members with information regarding the Final Accounts timetable for 2021/22. This timetable details the target dates for key actions in order to complete the Statement of Accounts in line with statutory deadlines.

Executive summary

- 2 It is the responsibility of the Corporate Director of Resources to sign and certify the unaudited Statement of Accounts 2021/22 by no later than 31 July 2022.
- 3 It is the responsibility of the Audit Committee to approve the final, or audited, set of accounts on or before 30 November 2022 (date subject to consultation and legislation).
- 4 The final accounts timetable is the means of communicating and gaining ownership of the deadlines for completing tasks by all those involved in the closure of accounts process and serves as a tool for monitoring progress against those target dates.

Recommendation

- 5 Members are asked to note the key dates in the Final Accounts timetable for 2021/22 detailed in Appendix 2.

Background

- 5 The report is presented in accordance with paragraph 4.2.3 of the Committee's operational terms of reference which requires it "to maintain an understanding of internal and external reporting requirements".
- 6 The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2021 extended the statutory deadlines for 2020/21 and 2021/22, as follows:
 - (i) the responsible financial officer, by no later than 31 July (previously 31 May), signs and certifies that the Statement of Accounts presents a true and fair view of the financial position of the County Council for the year to 31 March previous, subject to the views of the External Auditor.
 - (ii) on or before 30 September (previously 31 July), approval needs to be given to the Statement of Accounts by resolution of a committee, which for Durham County Council is the Audit Committee. This approval will take into account the views of the External Auditor.
- 7 As highlighted in the Accounting Code changes report, included in today's agenda, in December 2021, proposed measures were announced by Government to support the timely completion of local government audits and the ongoing stability of the local audit market. The proposals include extending the published/audited deadline to 30 November 2022 for the 2021/22 accounts, then reverting to 30 September for five years until 2027/28. The draft accounts deadline is proposed to remain at 31 May, although for 2021/22 this is overridden by the Amendment Regulations outlined above, i.e. 31 July 2022.
- 8 For 2020/21, the council's accounts for were certified on 18 June 2021, so well within the revised deadline. The accounts were approved by Audit Committee on 30 September 2021.

Main implications

- 9 The Final Accounts timetable is a tool for the effective management and monitoring of the process of closing the accounts.
- 10 Each year the timetable is compiled by officers within the central Strategic Finance Team, with input from officers across the council to ensure that deadlines are achievable and will lead to completion of a Statement of Accounts for signing by the Section 151 Officer (the responsible financial officer – in our case the Corporate Director of Resources) by the statutory deadline.

- 11 In preparing the closedown timetable new and amended processes are considered for the impact on the achievement of dates, as well as reference to any learning from the previous year, particularly where there were problems or issues in meeting of deadlines.
- 12 Although the statutory deadline has been extended, the timetable is based on a similar target to 2020/21 for the unaudited draft accounts to be completed by late May/early June.
- 13 Officers in the Strategic Finance Team closely monitor the achievement of the dates in the timetable throughout the final accounts period, sending prompts in advance of upcoming deadlines and following up any delays and missed deadlines. This helps to ensure that the overall timetable is achieved, and to identify improvements that can be made to the next year end process.
- 14 Meetings are also held to ensure that practitioners apply accounting procedures consistently; best practice is shared; there is a shared understanding of all interdependencies across the closedown period and that any difficulties or delays being encountered are escalated. The meetings also act as forum for disseminating updated information quickly and consistently and a conduit to ensuring that any external audit queries are quickly addressed.
- 15 The key dates included in the detailed Final Accounts timetable are attached at Appendix 2 for information.

Other useful documents

- Audit Committee 30 September 2021 – Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2021

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2021 require that the responsible financial officer, by no later than 31 July, signs and certifies that the Statement of Accounts presents a true and fair view of the financial position of the County Council for the year to 31 March previous, subject to the views of the External Auditor. Subject to consultation and secondary legislation, the audited accounts must be approved by Audit Committee by 30 November 2022.

Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising for the council as a result of this report, although by implementing the timetable, we are demonstrating efficient arrangements for the proper administration of the County Council's financial affairs and will meet the statutory deadline for the production of the Statement of Accounts.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

This report requires no decision and so a risk assessment has not been carried out.

Procurement

None.

Appendix 2: Key Dates from the Final Accounts Timetable

Task	Responsibility	Original Timetabled date 2020/21	Proposed completion date 2021/22
Circulation of Related Party declarations for completion by Members and Senior Officers	Resources – Democratic Services	Mon 1 Mar 2021	Mon 1 Mar 2022
Details of Related Party declarations for Members and Senior Officers to be returned to Democratic Services	Members / Senior Officers	Mon 15 Mar 2021	Tue 15 Mar 2022
Final postings by Benefits section	Finance & Transactional Services - Income & Support	Wed 31 Mar 2021	Thu 31 Mar 2022
Last creditors paysheet for the financial year	Finance & Transactional Services - Payments & Expenditure	Wed 31 Mar 2021	Thu 31 Mar 2022
All stock checks completed at 31 March	Services	Wed 31 Mar 2021	Thu 31 Mar 2022
All cash posted up to and including 31 March	Finance & Transactional Services - Income & Support	Thu 1 Apr 2021	Fri 1 Apr 2022
Last monthly salaries and wages information for the financial year processed into ledger	Payroll / Strategic Finance	Thu 1 Apr 2021	Fri 1 Apr 2022
All bank reconciliations to 31 March completed	Strategic Finance	Mon 19 Apr 2021	Tue 19 Apr 2022

Task	Responsibility	Original Timetabled date 2020/21	Proposed completion date 2021/22
Service ledgers finalised and final reports produced and net revenue outturn for each service grouping notified to Strategic Finance	Finance & Transactional Services / Strategic Finance	Tue 27 Apr 2021	Wed 27 Apr 2022
Chief Financial Officer to sign the Statement of Accounts	Strategic Finance / Corporate Director of Resources	Fri 28 May 2021	Tue 31 May 2022
Start of Inspection Period (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Tue 1 Jun 2021	Wed 15 Jun 2022
Start of Statement of Accounts audit (provisional)	External Audit	Tue 1 Jun 2021	Fri 1 Jul 2022
Cabinet – Overall Outturn Report considered (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Wed 7 Jul 2021	Wed 6 Jul 2022
End of Inspection Period (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Mon 12 Jul 2021	Tue 26 Jul 2022
Unaudited Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) return to External Audit and HM Treasury (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Fri 11 Jun 2021	Mon 15 Aug 2022
Audit Committee meeting – approval of Statement of Accounts (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Thu 30 Sep 2021	Fri 30 Sep 2022
Publication of Accounts (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Thu 30 Sep 2021	Fri 30 Sep 2022
Audited WGA return to HM Treasury (provisional)	Strategic Finance	Mon 4 Oct 2021	Fri 2 Dec 2022