

Issued by the Local Government Auditor



2011-12

To the Members of the  
North West Region Waste  
Management Group Joint  
Committee

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## 1. Introduction

The Department of the Environment may, with the consent of the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, designate persons who are members of the staff of the Northern Ireland Audit Office as local government auditors<sup>1</sup>. I have been designated the Local Government Auditor for the Joint Committee.

As an auditor independent of the audited body, I seek to examine that the body has proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources and that public money is properly accounted for.

This report provides a summary of the findings from my 2011-12 audit.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 4 (3) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005).

## 2. Financial Statements

### Summary of Audit Findings

The North West Region Waste Management Group Joint Committee (NWRWMG) must prepare its accounts in accordance with International Financial Accounting Standards as interpreted for Local Government in the 'The Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom'. This code sets out the accounting treatment and disclosures for all normal transactions of local authorities.

The financial statements were signed by the Chief Financial Officer on 28 June 2012. This is within the statutory timeframe of 30 June. Following the audit, the accounts were re-signed on 26 October 2012 and published on the website of Derry City Council on 31 October 2012 in accordance with the regulations.

For the year ended 31 March 2012 I gave the following unqualified opinion on the financial statements;

In my opinion:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with relevant legal and statutory requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2011-12, of the financial position of North West Region Waste Management Group Joint Committee as at 31 March 2012 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the Department of the Environment directions issued thereunder.

At the end of the audit I issued a Report to Those Charged with Governance on the results of the audit, noting the most significant issues, making recommendations and seeking comments. That report is presented separately to your Audit Committee.

## Financial Performance

The Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure of NWRWMG shows that during the year ended 31 March 2012 the Joint Committee spent £976,922 on the provision of services. It also received income of £976,922.

The major items of expenditure were;

- Residual waste project costs amounting to £725,564.

The major areas of income were:

- Government grants amounting to £816,139.

The Joint Committee currently has no non-current assets or loans. There was no expenditure on capital projects during 2011-12.

At 31 March the joint committee has no usable reserves. The Joint Committee is fully funded by either government grants or contributions from the seven participant councils.

### 3. Governance

The Good Governance Standard for Public Services<sup>2</sup> sets out the following key principles of good governance. Good governance means;

- focusing on the organisation's purpose and on outcomes for citizens and service users;
- performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles;
- promoting values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour;
- taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk;
- developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective; and
- engaging stakeholders and making accountability real.

#### Annual Governance Statement

The Joint Committee is required to conduct a review at least once in a financial year of the effectiveness of its governance framework (including its system of internal control) and to then approve an Annual Governance Statement<sup>3</sup>.

I am required to report if the Annual Governance Statement:

- does not reflect compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2011-12;
- does not comply with proper practices specified by the Department of the Environment; or
- is misleading or inconsistent with other information I am aware of from my audit

I had no inconsistencies to report.

The Joint Committee did not note any significant governance issues in its Governance Statement.

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<sup>2</sup> The Good Governance Standard for Public Services, OPM and CIPFA, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006 and DOE circular LG/04/08

## **Internal Audit**

The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006 requires joint committee's to maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit and to conduct a review at least once in a financial year of the effectiveness of its system of internal audit. The Joint Committee's internal audit service is provided by Derry City Council's in-house Internal Audit. A review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit, performed by Derry City Council, was carried out during 2011-12 by the Joint Committee and the findings of the review were considered by the Audit Committee.

## **Audit Committee**

It is essential that Members exercise effective scrutiny of the internal control processes and procedures in place within the Joint Committee. One way that Members carry out this function is through the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee was put in place in April 2012 following a recommendation from the 2010-11 Report to Those Charged with Governance. The Audit Committee has met twice since then.

## 4. Proper arrangements

Legislation requires me, each year to be satisfied that proper arrangements have been made for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources<sup>4</sup>.

My review of the Joint Committee's arrangements for securing value for money covered the following ten areas:

- a) **Financial Planning.** Planning finances effectively to deliver strategic priorities and secure sound financial health.
- b) **Financial Performance.** Having a sound understanding of costs and performance and achieving efficiencies in activities.
- c) **Financial Reporting.** Reliable and timely financial reporting that meets the needs of internal users, stakeholders and local people.
- d) **Procurement.** Commissioning and procuring quality services and supplies that are tailored to local needs and deliver sustainable outcomes and value for money.
- e) **Data to support decision making and manage performance.** Producing relevant and reliable data and information to support decision making and manage performance.
- f) **Good governance.** Promoting and demonstrating the principles and values of good governance.
- g) **Risk.** Managing risks and maintaining a sound system of internal control.
- h) **Natural Resources.** Making effective use of natural resources.
- i) **Asset Management.** Managing assets effectively to help deliver strategic priorities and service needs.
- j) **Workforce Management.** Planning, organising and developing the workforce effectively to support the achievement of strategic priorities.

I am satisfied that the Joint Committee had in place proper arrangements to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

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<sup>4</sup> Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005



## **5. Other Audit Work**

### **National Fraud Initiative (NFI)**

In the current economic climate with unprecedented budgetary pressures on public services, it is essential that public bodies use every means at their disposal to prevent and detect fraud and error. The NFI exercise, which is carried out every two years, is a highly effective tool which helps public bodies identify potentially fraudulent and duplicate transactions using sophisticated computer based data matching techniques. The Serious Crime Act 2007 inserted provisions dealing with data matching exercises into the Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. Local Councils were involved in the last NFI exercise which was conducted throughout 2011. The outcome of the NFI exercise can be found in the report produced by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, published on 26 June 2012. A copy can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office's website. Suggestions would be welcome for further potential data matches that could help in the prevention and detection of fraud.

I note that the Joint Committee operates a dedicated cost centre within its lead council, Derry City Council, and therefore the transactions are captured under the NFI exercise carried out by Derry City Council.

## **6. Future Challenges**

### **Implications of the Local Government Finance Act 2011**

The new prudential system for capital finance in Northern Ireland was introduced on 1 April 2012 with the implementation of Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Act and Regulations introduce significant changes to local authority capital financing and accounting in Northern Ireland. This modernises the legislative framework for local government finance, with a focus on greater freedom for Councils and Joint Committees. The Act covers budgeting, reserves and funds, borrowing powers and capital receipts and expenditure. The key change is that it gives Councils and Joint Committees more freedom to manage their finances without the need to obtain consent from the Department of the Environment. More emphasis is therefore to be placed on the Chief Financial Officers' assessment of affordability by applying the principles and requirements of the Prudential Code.

The Department of the Environment has also issued statutory guidance on the minimum revenue provision, capitalisation directions and local government investments.

### **Financial Pressures on the Public Sector**

The economic forecast remains difficult. The downturn has significantly changed the financial environment in the Northern Ireland public sector including reduced budgets and pay freezes. This has the potential to adversely impact the funding streams of Councils and Joint Committees and the ability to provide services. It is critical therefore that in this environment, Councils and Joint Committees make best use of funds available and provide a sharp focus on improving the value for money of the services which are delivered.

## **7. Closing Remarks**

The letter is addressed to the Members of the Joint Committee and prepared for the sole use of the audited body. No responsibility is taken by auditors to any member or officer in their individual capacity, or to any third party.

The factual accuracy of this Audit Letter has been agreed with the Chief Financial Officer.

The Council has taken a positive and constructive approach to our audit. I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the Joint Committee's assistance and co-operation.

This letter will be presented to your Audit Committee by my staff and I have asked for copies to be sent to all Members.

**Louise Mason**

**Local Government Auditor**

12 December 2012