

Public Services News – July 2014

- Queen's Speech 2014 – The Implications for Local Government
- Local Authorities short of £5.8billion
- Local Growth Deals launched
- Copeland votes for elected Mayor
- Irwin Mitchell challenges Haringey Council over Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy enjoys International success
- Oldham Council sets Accounting Record
- National Housing Federation – Service Charges Conference and SORP roadshows



Copeland Council Centre In Whitehaven. Adrian Waite wrote the Outline Business Case for this innovative scheme. Copeland has now opted for an elected Mayor.

The Queen's Speech – The Implications for Local Government

The 2014 Queen's Speech, that sets out the government's legislative programme until the next general election in May 2015 was made on 4th June 2014. In advance of the speech the government made it known that it would be 'unashamedly pro-work and pro-business'. Ministers said that changes to annuities and the funding of workplace pensions would show the coalition's continuing 'boldness' as would proposals to 'recall' failed MPs. A total of eleven bills and three draft bills were laid out by the monarch.

The Queen stated that the government would continue to focus on cutting the public sector deficit, with both a total cap on benefit spending and an updated charter for budget responsibility being introduced to parliament. The charter is expected to commit the next government to run a surplus by the end of the next Parliament in 2020.

Ministers said the measures would mark a 'significant step' in helping to embed the economic recovery and in promoting work, enterprise and opportunity. They also refuted opposition claims that the coalition has run out of steam and that the months leading up to the election will be dominated by wrangling and attempts by the coalition partners to put distance between themselves.

The principal measures are:

- An Infrastructure Bill that will reduce the obligations on developers to provide affordable housing through section 106 agreements; and reduce the environmental obligations on developers.
- Reforms to speed up infrastructure projects, including new freedoms for the Highways Agency and allowing fracking firms to run shale gas pipelines on private land without getting prior permission. This proposal had generated opposition even before the Queen's speech was made with protestors surrounding David Cameron's house in Oxfordshire.
- A bill implementing reforms to annuities announced in March's Budget. In future, people will not be required to buy an annuity with their pension savings and will be able to draw their retirement income as a lump sum if they choose.

Unit 3, Shire Hall, The Sands, Appleby in Westmorland, Cumbria. CA16 6XN.
Telephone: 017683-52165. Mobile: 07502-142658. Twitter @AdrianWaite.
E-Mail: Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Website: www.awics.co.uk

Managing Director: Adrian Waite MA CPFA CIHM FInstLM
Registered Address as above. Company Number: 3713554. VAT Registration Number: 721 9669 13

- A separate bill to allow employees to pay into collective pension funds shared with other workers, a move it is hoped will cut costs and encourage saving.
- A new state-funded childcare subsidy worth up to £2,000 a year, replacing the existing employer-funded scheme.
- Extra legal protection for people carrying out good deeds, volunteering or planning local events who end up being involved in liability claims.
- Restrictions on public sector employees claiming redundancy and then taking a job within the same sector.
- Plans for a 5p charge for plastic bags in England as proposed at the 2013 Liberal Democrat conference. This policy is already in place in Wales.
- New criminal sentences for those assisting organised crime syndicates and tougher powers to seize the assets of crime bosses.
- Help for pub landlords including a statutory code and a body to adjudicate disputes.
- Giving voters the ability to trigger by-elections where MPs have committed serious wrongdoing.

In advance of the Queen's Speech the Prime Minister and his deputy made a joint statement in which they said that the emphasis of the programme would be helping those 'who want to get on in life' and added:

"We may be two parties, with two different philosophies but we understand one thing... Countries rise when their people rise. So this Queen's Speech is unashamedly pro-work, pro-business and pro-aspiration."

They also said that the legislative programme was testament to the coalition's longevity and the fact it was still capable of 'taking bold steps'. They said that the pension changes would provide 'freedom and security in retirement', suggesting they would prove every bit as radical as reforms to schools and welfare since 2010 in terms of empowering people.

With Parliament taking a six-week summer recess from July and rising for a further five weeks for the party conference season in September, parliamentary time available to agree new legislation will be limited. In addition, six bills - including one authorising the building of a new high-speed rail line between London and the West Midlands - are being carried over from the last session.

Jonathan Carr-West of the Local Government Information Unit commented as follows:

"Two weeks after the local elections we might reflect that there is little in the next year which fundamentally changes local government. In fact, the current fiscal regime and devolutionary measures all occurred in the first years of the Coalition – local government has effectively been set to task from the start. Yet gone are the days when a speech from the Throne would entail a check-list of measures which councils would have to incorporate. Policy officers across the country will welcome the clear, if constrained steer the Government has provided."

"The Local Government Information Unit has some concern over the proposed changes to allow developers effectively to bypass the local democratic planning system if a decision has not been given in time. The Government assumes that the blockage in development lies at the hands of local authority planners – after many years of land banking on the part of developers.

"The government has announced that it will stop public sector employees from keeping redundancy payments when returning to the public sector. A popular move but could this have implications for the freedom of councils to employ, and fire, who they want to?

"Free school meals will also be a project which councils will need to watch in development – the provision of kitchens and the relationship between school meals and the pupil premium will need to be worked out to give councils a clear idea of what their own spending commitment is likely to be.

"The question for local government to ask is what will the Queen be announcing in a year's time – will we see an administration of whichever political hue usher in another period of radical change? Or will the next Government send out the message 'steady as she goes', with a continued dribbling down of difficult funding settlements with no bargain to devolve real power?"

We have published a briefing paper on the Queen's Speech and its implications for local government that can be freely downloaded from our website at:
<http://www.awics.co.uk/dynamicdata/data/docs/queens%20speech%20june%202014%20-%20briefing%20paper.pdf>

Local Authorities short of £5.8billion

In June 2014 the Local Government Association warned that Councils in England face a funding gap of £5.8billion between March 2014 and the end of 2015/16; and that local authorities will need to make huge savings before next April, equivalent to 12.5% of their total budgets.

The Local Government Association's Future funding outlook 2014 said the gap in funding was growing at an average of £2.1billion a year due to a combination of funding cuts and spending pressures such as social care demand, and could top £12billion by 2020.

The £5.8billion shortfall in council budgets is caused by a combination of reduced Government funding and rising demand on services, in particular from growing numbers of elderly people. The funding gap in adult social care alone already amounts to £1.9billion by 2015/16 – based on council adult social care budgets in 2013/14.

In spite of the reductions in their budgets, the Local Government Association says that local authorities will continue to try to protect spending on adult social care in 2015/16 as much as possible that could be at the expense of other services including housing, environmental services, buses, libraries, museums and leisure centres.

The Local Government Association said that the figures provide a stark warning that the successful integration of health and social care in 2015 is vital to save the care system from collapsing.

April 2015 will mark a critical point for adult social care in England with the pooling of £5.4billion from councils and the health service. The Better Care Fund will aim to improve care for older people and reduce financial pressure on councils and the health system through stopping lengthy waits for discharge from hospitals and avoiding unnecessary admissions to care homes.

The Local Government Association argues that the scale of savings that need to be found in 2015/16 illustrate the urgent need for the Better Care Fund to succeed quickly in radically improving the way public money is spent on looking after England's elderly. Council leaders say that 2015 will be a 'make or break' point for adult social care. The Better Care Fund has the potential to significantly improve people's quality of life in older age. But failure to overhaul services quickly and spending would tip councils, care services and the National Health Service into financial crisis.

Former Local Government Association Chairman Sir Merrick Cockell said that:

"Council finances are on a knife-edge and the old way of doing things – including the way we care for our elderly population – just won't work anymore.

"In recent years, local government has worked tirelessly to save billions while protecting services for those who need them most. But the scale of the challenge facing local authorities next year is stark. Council finances are on a knife-edge and the old way of doing things – including the way we care for our elderly population – just won't work anymore.

"Next year will be a make or break moment for adult social care, for local services provided by councils and for the National Health Service.

"The introduction of the Better Care Fund next year is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to both improve the quality of life for people in their older years and steer England's social care system away from the road to financial ruin. The stakes have never been higher.

"We all know that we must do better by our elderly population. Too many older people are being let down by a system which leaves them languishing in hospital beds while they wait for an alternative, or consigned to residential care because we lack the capacity to help them live independently.

"The joined-up approach between councils and the health service will provide better support for less money, by cutting out the cost of failure.

"It will only be through a determined effort from councils, the health service and government working together that we can end the vicious cycle of over-spending on a broken system. Failure to get this right would be catastrophic for an entire generation who rely upon care and the National Health Service. It will also deprive millions of the popular local services like buses, parks, libraries and leisure centres that help improve quality of life and bind communities together.

"Neither councils, the NHS or England's elderly can afford for this not to work."

Dementia is a particular area of concern and is an increasingly important issue with the changing demographics that we are seeing and will involve ever closer working between housing, social care and health services. It is estimated that a million people in the United Kingdom currently suffer from dementia and that the number will increase to 1.7million in 2051. The United Kingdom government has responded with the Prime Minister's dementia challenge in 2012 and the Care Act 2014. Among other things the Act places a duty on local authorities to address preventing needs, provide care and support plans and operate personal budgets.

It is possible that housing associations could provide part of the answer. Impact Housing Association, of which I am Chair, is currently developing two extra care schemes in addition to those that we already provide and are discussing a potential third. As our focus is on sustaining communities, building capacity and addressing poverty, it is crucial that we ensure that our services contain an awareness of dementia and that the communities we work in are dementia friendly.

Cumbria County Council is one of those that is planning significant further reductions in its budgets. The Council recently wrote to all its employees to explain the situation as follows:

"On top of the £88million worth of savings we need to find, as identified in the budget... it was announced at Cabinet that the council needs to find an additional £20million by 2018. As the 2014/15 financial year begins the County Council budget planning cycle has been extended to 1st April 2018.

"So far, over the past three years, the County Council has made £88million worth of savings and when council set the budget in February 2014 we stated that we would need to deliver another £88million over the next three years 2014-17.

By extending the financial planning period by another year into 2018 it is now projected that an additional £20million of savings will be required. This means, over the next four years taking us to April 2018, the County Council actually needs to find ways to deliver savings of £108million. To date we have only found saving amounting to £39.5million - so we still have some way to go.

Taking this alongside our updated local projections based on announcements made by the chancellor on the 19th March, this means the Council still has to find savings in the region of £70 million."

Councillor Jo Stephenson (Liberal Democrat), Deputy Leader of Cumbria County Council and Cabinet Member for Resources, said:

"The challenge ahead is stark, sobering and serious. The drive to cut back on public sector spending to address the national deficit means we will be nearly £200million a year out of pocket, as a council, by 2018.

"We have already delivered £88million of savings and are on track to deliver another £24.4million this year. Some of these savings have been unpopular, and given the scale of the task that is inevitable, but we are committed to protecting the most vulnerable who rely on Council services.

"However, the need to find significant additional savings means that we will be taking a longer view this year on where we will be in four years' time and start reshaping now to achieve that. The annual process of agreeing budgets year on year will run alongside a more strategic overview of how we're going to operate in this massively pared down climate - we are going to have to rethink what we do and how we do it."

"I appreciate that this is an unsettling time for council employees, but we want everyone to be aware of the task ahead and to understand that we will be looking to reshape the council this year with the four-year vision in mind."

Despite this, Local Government Minister Brandon Lewis said the Local Government Association claims were 'doom laden and alarmist' and lacked credibility. He said:

"Councils are balancing their books each year and, as the Local Government Association's own research shows, the public now thinks they are delivering better services than before,

"All the main political parties now agree that public spending is going to remain constrained well into the future. Councils account for a quarter of all public spending so they must continue to play their part reducing the deficit."

"This means councils must all make that extra effort to spend taxpayers' hard-earned cash ever more wisely."

"There is significant scope for councils to make sensible savings and cut waste by tackling the £2billion a year of council tax left uncollected, the £2billion ignored or lost from fraud, the £2.4billion of surplus properties left dormant and the £19billion piled-up in reserves."

An independent commission into the future of council finance was launched in June 2014 by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy and the Local Government Association, tasked with developing reforms to address key challenges amid spending reductions.

The group has been asked to examine the current funding regime and to come up with reforms to support local services and promote economic growth in England. It is chaired by Darra Singh. The commission will examine the need for local government finance reform by looking at the ways the current system presents barriers to the changes needed to create more jobs and grow local economies.

It will examine five key themes across local spending, including investment in infrastructure and housing, integrating of health and social care, creating a welfare benefits system that promotes work and protects the vulnerable, and supporting families and young people through early intervention.

Singh said it was clear that public spending would continue to fall in the next parliament, while there was also growing demand for social care and a need to promote growth. He said:

"Previous commissions have looked at reforms to local government finance.. But the challenges are now much more critical which means the work of the commission could not be more timely. I am looking forward to working with the other commissioners to identify practical solutions that will help enable local and central government's vision for our communities."

Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy, Rob Whiteman said that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy has expressed its growing concerns with the way that local government is financed in England for many years. He said:

“Governments of all persuasions have let the public down with their refusal to reform the system and the way in which they have allocated precious public resources has repeatedly demonstrated the urgent need for change... The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy hopes that this independent commission into local government finance will help to redress this issue and provide impartial and insightful advice to all those involved in the future funding of local government.”

Then Local Government Association Chair Sir Merrick Cockell added that although reviews of local government finance have been undertaken before, including the last Labour government's Lyons review, the nature of the challenge had changed. He said:

“Without reform of public services, a combination of rising demand and reducing resources will make the public services people value unsustainable and undermine the nation's future prosperity,”

It is expected the commission will publish interim findings in the autumn, ahead of a final report in early 2015 that will shape debate on the future of local government finance and influence the next government.

During the autumn of 2014, AWICS will hold two seminars and workshops that will be of interest to people who are concerned to understand local authority finance and / or to understand how local authorities can achieve improved value for money and performance management. Further information is available on our website as follows:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance – <http://www.awics.co.uk/lafin.asp>
- Value for Money and Performance Management in Local Government & Housing - <http://www.awics.co.uk/vfm2014.asp>

Local Growth Deals launched

In July 2014, the government signed growth deals with each of the 39 local enterprise partnerships in England under the £2billion single pot reforms for economic development, but more than £250million remained unallocated. Announcing the deals, Prime Minister David Cameron said the money was the first instalment of £12billion being provided to Local Enterprise Partnerships to boost local economies to the end of 2020/21.

The growth deals that were recommended in Lord Michael Heseltine's No Stone Unturned report, are intended to provide support for local businesses to train young people, create new jobs and undertake infrastructure projects, including transport improvements. The funding has been drawn from the existing budgets of central government departments, and is being devolved to the business-led LEPs to spend on local priorities set out in their growth plans.

According to today's announcement, £1.7billion has been allocated from the £2billion single pot for 2015/16, with £267million, including allocations of extra borrowing headroom from the Housing Revenue Account, still to be assigned.

However, £1.1billion of this fund was already committed to projects, principally local transport schemes, in 2015/16 that left £930million to be allocated on the basis of plans drawn up by Local Enterprise Partnerships. This will be matched by local investments worth around twice the contribution from Whitehall, the government said.

The biggest single allocation is made to the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership that receives £170million in 2015/16, followed by £151million for London and £112million for the North East. Some projects have been awarded funding for more than one year so that long-term developments can get underway, but ministers said further discussions over funding from 2016/17 to 2020/21 would now take place.

The Prime Minister said that the deals were crucial for Britain's long-term future. He said that:

"For too long our economy has been too London-focused and too centralised... Growth deals will help change all that. They are about firing up our great cities, towns and counties so they can become powerhouses. By trusting local people, backing business and investing in infrastructure, skills and housing, we can create thousands of new jobs. And that means more economic security, peace of mind and a brighter future for hardworking people across the country."

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, who chairs the local growth Cabinet committee, said the government was 'ending a culture of Whitehall knows best' and added:

"Decisions over spending on infrastructure, business support and housing are being made at a truly local level. It will help end our over-reliance on the banks and the City of London, and generate growth, jobs, and ambition in towns and cities all across England. We're placing the power and money in the hands of the people who know how to spend it best, making a real difference to local communities."

Among the funding plans announced is £18million to revamp the Metrolink transport system in Manchester and £23million for a new road tunnel linking Swindon to nearby Wichelstowe. In addition, funding has been allocation to Birmingham's Local Enterprise Partnership to help the city make the most of its HS2 rail link – including improving connection to the Birmingham Curzon Street station so that the area can maximise the benefits in terms of investment, jobs and skills.

However, the amount of money being made available through the local growth deals is small in comparison with the total of public expenditure, is being distributed through unelected Local Enterprise Partnerships rather than to democratically accountable bodies, and central government is still deciding which projects will be funded and which will not. Genuine devolution of powers and responsibilities to localities to take their own decisions even about spending their own money is still a long way off!

Copeland votes for elected Mayor

Copeland Borough Council is not one of England's best known local authorities. Located in West Cumbria it covers 285 square miles that includes much of remotest parts of the Lake District, towns that experience amongst the most serious unemployment and deprivation in the United Kingdom, and the Sellafield nuclear waste reprocessing plant. It is certainly a 'Borough of Contrasts' and I care deeply about what goes on there having spent five years working for Copeland Borough Council first as Finance Director and then as Strategic Director.

On 22nd May 2014, an historic vote took place across Copeland. It was a referendum over whether to have an elected Mayor. The turnout was 34% but electors voted overwhelmingly **FOR** an Elected Mayor despite the opposition of the Council. Elections will now follow. The result was:

- **For: 12,671**
- **Against: 5,489**

The campaign for an elected Mayor was spearheaded by the 'Time For Change Team'. They have stated that none of the team will stand as candidates. This was never their intention. They wanted to bring democracy, accountability and transparency to the fore and consider that 55,000 people choosing a leader, is more democratic than a minimum of fourteen councillors. Following the result they stated that:

"For years, Copeland Borough Council has been failing. We hope that this referendum result will mean a new beginning. After a Mayoral Election, we urge cross party working for the benefit of the community. There are talented people from both Labour and Conservative - we must use their skills."

More information about the campaign is available on the 'Time for Change Team' website at: <http://www.mywhitehaven.net/2014/05/copeland-public-vote-for-directly.html#sthash.OM1j9jt5.dpuf>

Copeland Borough Council has faced significant challenges for some years. Many of its councillors and officers are excellent, but unfortunately the Council has a long history of an inward looking and factious culture. When I worked there I attempted to make the Council more outward-looking, customer focused and effective - and I enjoyed some success - but I am afraid that the 'old' culture is very ingrained and radical change at the 'top' of the authority is required. I hope that the appointment of a directly elected Mayor will lead to radical change at the Council to the benefit of the people of Copeland.

Irwin Mitchell challenges Haringey Council over Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Lawyers, Irwin Mitchell are earning a reputation for making successful challenges to public bodies that they consider are unlawfully discriminating against vulnerable groups.

In 2011, I was pleased to be able to assist them as an expert witness in local authority finance in their successful attempt to quash Birmingham City Council's budget following reductions in adult social care budgets and reductions in the entitlement of clients to support.

Another landmark case concerning local authorities' obligations when carrying out public consultations was heard by the Supreme Court in June 2014. Believed to be the first of its kind, the case concerns Haringey Council's implementation of last April's council tax rebate system - which led to many residents paying council tax for the first time.

Irwin Mitchell, that is representing a single mother struggling with the new payments, claimed that the council's consultation was unlawful and didn't provide enough information for people to make an informed decision about the changes.

In 2013, the government abolished the council tax benefit system in favour of a local rebate scheme, implemented by each council separately but with reduced funding. This left a shortfall that Haringey Council decided to meet by requiring all residents who previously paid nothing, except disabled people and the elderly, to pay approximately 20% of their council tax.

At the time of the original legal challenge to the changes in Haringey, lawyers at Irwin Mitchell said that the 'poorest were being hit hardest' and that the council tax changes across the country were a 'post code lottery which would see many vulnerable residents forced to pay council tax for the first time'.

Following a Court of Appeal hearing in February 2013 that ruled in the council's favour, Irwin Mitchell applied to the Supreme Court on behalf of residents of Haringey who believed the consultation was unfair.

Although the decision can no longer be quashed as the new system has already been implemented, residents hope that they may still be able to influence the future of the rebate system, and have asked the court to order that Haringey redo its consultation should it declare that the first consultation was unlawful.

Alex Rook, a specialist health and welfare lawyer at Irwin Mitchell, said:

"Last year we warned that the council tax changes were going to hurt vulnerable residents who simply could not afford to pay under the new rules. Now just last month Citizens Advice revealed that they now receive more calls about council tax arrears than any other form of debt."

"Public consultation is extremely important to ensure there is proper local engagement and to make sure that people affected by decisions understand the background and can share their opinions to help shape local policies. We hope this case will provide clarity on the extent to which local authorities must consult with the public when introducing new policies such as this."

"This is understood to be the first time the Supreme Court will hear arguments in a case about a council's duty to undertake 'public consultation.' The importance of this issue should not be underestimated at the present time when local services are being cut back across the country."

Judgment was reserved.

Briefing papers on earlier cases in which 'AWICS' has been involved as an expert witness are available on our website:

- Birmingham City Council –
http://www.awics.co.uk/documents/briefing_papers/public_administration/Birmingham_Adult_Social_Care_Case_23-05-2011.pdf
- Isle of Wight Council –
http://www.awics.co.uk/documents/briefing_papers/public_administration/R_v_Isle_of_Wight_Council_%5b2011%5d_EWHC_2911_22-12-2011.pdf

Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy enjoys International success

In June 2014, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), was delighted to announce that following a period of rapid global growth the Institute now has over 1,000 international students.

The increase in the number of students studying for the CIPFA International Public Finance Management qualification is a result of CIPFA expanding its global reach in response to increased demand for training in public financial management (PFM) around the world.

The institute has been working to expand its global reach in response to worldwide demand for PFM training. Significant contributions to growth include CIPFA's new training partnerships with bodies such as the United Nations Development Programme and bilateral training agreements in Bangladesh and Nigeria. This year the Institute launched a new Accredited Training Partner (ATP) scheme licensing experienced training bodies to deliver CIPFA's suite of International Public Financial Management courses. The first of these was successfully launching in Dhaka this April with support from the Office of the Auditor and Comptroller General of Bangladesh.

This expansion of activity has also been driven by CIPFA being the first accountancy body in the world to offer a qualification based on International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). These standards, developed by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), are designed to improve government transparency and accountability, allowing for greater comparability between different countries and public sector bodies.

Commenting on the figures Adrian Pulham, CIPFA's Education and Training Director, said:

"This growth in student numbers demonstrates that CIPFA offers a truly global qualification, relevant to the needs of government and the public services worldwide. Our continued international growth is helping make sure that the next generation of public sector leaders and managers across the world have the skills and expertise necessary effectively to lead and manage their country's public finances. CIPFA is committed to continue to provide and support good financial management in the public sector around the world".

Other international initiatives taken forward this year include a new accredited training partner scheme, which licenses experienced training bodies to deliver CIPFA's PFM courses. The first of these was launched in Dhaka in April, with backing from the Office of the Auditor and Comptroller General of Bangladesh.

The partnership between the two bodies was sealed at a ceremony in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital city. It will allow accountancy students in Bangladesh to study for the CIPFA qualification in international public financial management, which is based on International Public Sector Accounting Standards. Speaking at the launch, Adrian Pulham, CIPFA's education and training director, said:

"The launch of this new partnership is a significant contribution to the stability of public finances in Bangladesh and ensures specialist training for government and public sector staff in good public financial management. It demonstrates how CIPFA's continued international growth is helping to ensure that the next generation of public sector managers across the world have the skills and expertise necessary to effectively lead and manage their country's public services."

M A Kalam, LCBS's Chief Executive, added the partnership was a 'milestone' for both parties, and the first of its kind in the world. He said:

"I hope that LCBS Dhaka, being the first global Accredited Training Provider, will be a role model for all future ATPs established elsewhere and wish this new CIPFA ATP scheme great success."

The ceremony was attended by Robert Gibson, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, and by Masud Ahmed, the country's comptroller and auditor general. Ahmed was elected as an honorary member of CIPFA in recognition of his ongoing commitment to improving public financial management.

As of June 2014 CIPFA has 1,137 students based overseas studying for CIPFA qualifications.

Adrian Waite is a CIPFA examiner in Management Accounting for their International Professional Certificate.

Oldham Council sets Accounting Record

In May 2014 it was announced that Oldham Council had become the quickest local authority to close its accounts in fifty years following final approval by its audit committee. The authority announced that final sign-off had been given to the accounts last night, and they had been published on the Council's website.

Formal confirmation of the close will come from the Audit Commission later this year, but this year's sign-off beat last year's close of 31st May that was the first in the country.

According to independent information from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy, confirmed sign-off for 28th May would also make it the quickest approval for any local government body in the past fifty years' of records.

Cabinet member for finance Abdul Jabbar said:

"Oldham Council is well on course to significantly raise the bar again in public finance standards. Each year our finance team set out to work smarter and faster, while also rigorously maintaining pinpoint accuracy."

He said that robust accounting meant the authority was able to meet its ongoing financial challenges and deliver value for money:

“Reliable financial data helps us spot issues quicker and take any preventative action needed to stop any potential waste. It also helps us plan ahead smarter.”

Oldham Borough Council is a significant customer of ‘AWICS’. We have recently completed some work at Oldham Borough Council on service charges and Oldham Borough Council has sent delegates to our seminars and workshops.

All You Want To Know About Local Authority Finance 2014

October 2014

Local Government is going through a period of significant change following the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. There has been a significant reduction in funding for local authorities and this is requiring a fundamental redesign of how authorities are organised and services are delivered. There are now far fewer ring-fenced grants giving local authorities more discretion over how they spend their money. The Localism Act also promotes local decision making. An understanding of the finances of local government is now of critical importance.

In the current climate, a working knowledge of local authority finance will put you and your colleagues in a position of advantage. Whether you are in a London Borough, Metropolitan, Unitary, County or District Council or otherwise involved in local government; whether you are an Elected Member, Non-Financial Manager, or even a member of the Finance Team, you could benefit from our seminar and workshop at which you will learn: **“All You Want To Know About Local Authority Finance”**

What the Session Covers:

The session will answer the following questions:

- How do Local Government Finances work?
- How does Local Government fund its Capital Programmes?
- What are the Implications of Localism and Austerity?
- What are the Financial Opportunities for Local Authorities?

The session includes a participatory case study and is accompanied by a very useful 100 page book that is designed for reference after the session entitled:

“All You Want To Know About Local Authority Finance 2014”

Venue and Date

London: Novotel Hotel, Waterloo – 7th October 2014

For further information or to make a booking please visit: <http://www.awics.co.uk/lafin.asp>

Room 3, Shire Hall, The Sands, Appleby in Westmorland, Cumbria. CA16 6XN.
Telephone: 017683-52165. Mobile: 07502-142658. Twitter @AdrianWaite.
E-Mail: Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Website: www.awics.co.uk

Managing Director: Adrian Waite MA CPFA CIHM FInstLM
Company Number: 3713554. VAT Registration Number: 721 9669 13

ADVERTISEMENTS

**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

The voice of housing associations

Leaseholder and Tenant Service Charges Conference
3 September 2014, America Square Conference Centre, London

Discover how to provide value for money and deliver an effective service for tenants

Speakers include:

- Lynda Hance Associate, HouseMark
- Jane Harrison Deputy Finance Director, Paradigm Housing Group
- Matthew Saye Assistant Director, One Housing Group
- Adrian Waite, Director of AWICS, Chair of Impact Housing Association
- Nicholas Kissen Senior Legal Adviser, The Leasehold Advisory Service
- Jeff Platt Chief Executive, Institute of Residential Property Management (IRPM)

Find out everything you need to know about service charges from designing an effective strategy to collection across leasehold properties and tenancy management. The conference will help you tackle issues raised by welfare reform and the changing regulatory and legal environment.

1. Case study - placing **value for money** at the heart of your service charge strategy with Paradigm Housing Group and HouseMark
2. **Legal update** - including implications of the Phillips and Francis LVT decision from the Leasehold Advisory Service
3. **Universal credit** - how to communicate the impact to your customers
4. Learn what an effective service charge **communications strategy** looks like
5. **Calculating and apportioning service charges** in an accurate and transparent manner
6. Evaluating key methods of **minimising service charges** to drive affordability for your customers

Optional: Introductory workshop How to calculate service charges, best practice and what to avoid

Session highlights

Overcoming the challenges of fixed and variable systems for charging for services
Integrating depreciate costs in to your service charges strategy Building a transparency strategy suitable for both rental and leasehold properties

Book Your Place Now

Federation members £275
Associate members £315
Non-members £345

Secure your place now by booking online at
<http://www.housing.org.uk/events/browse/leaseholder-and-tenant-service-charges>
or by calling on 020 7067 1066

**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

The voice of housing associations

SORP Roadshows 2014

London 22 September 2014, America Square Conference Centre, London

Understand the key changes being introduced by FRS 102 and put your questions directly to the SORP Working Party #NHFSORP

Speakers include

- Jack Stephen Chair, SORP Working Party
- Jonathan Pryor Partner, Smith & Williamson
- Faye Gordon Senior Manager, PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Phil Cliftlands Partner, Not For Profit Assurance, BDO

In March 2013, the Financial Reporting Council published Financial Reporting Standard 102 (FRS 102) which will be adopted by UK businesses as new UK GAAP for accounting periods commencing from 1 January 2015. The roadshows will guide you through this new accounting framework which will radically alter the structure and content of financial statements. By early autumn 2014, the housing SORP will be published and will translate the general accounting requirements of FRS 102 to reflect the nuances of the housing association business models.

Benefits of attending

An engaging way for housing associations to understand the key changes being introduced by FRS 102 Hours of practical advice on how to apply the new framework Clarity on the potential impact of the changes on your organisation

Get your free copy of the new housing SORP

All delegates will be given a free copy of the new housing SORP. Plus, you will have the chance to buy more copies at the event at a discounted rate.

Book Your Place Now

Member £300

Associate member £345

Non-member £375

Secure your place now by booking online at

<http://www.housing.org.uk/events/browse/sorp-roadshows-2014> or by calling on
020 7067 1066

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PLACE AN ADVERTISEMENT IN THE AWICS HOUSING
NEWS PLEASE CONTACT Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk**

The Public Services News is published by 'AWICS'. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. Other views that are expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of Adrian Waite or 'AWICS'.

About 'AWICS'

'AWICS' is a management consultancy and training company. We specialise in providing support in finance and management to clients in local government and housing in England, Scotland and Wales. We are well known for our ability to analyse and explain complex financial and management issues clearly.

Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We therefore provide support to clients from an independent standpoint that is designed to help the client to achieve their objectives. We are passionate about working with the utmost integrity. We believe that we offer the best value for money that is available today!

For more information about us and our services please visit our website at www.awics.co.uk or contact me at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk.

Services that are available from 'AWICS' include:

- Regional Seminars - <http://www.awics.co.uk/seminars2014.asp>
- In-House Training – <http://www.awics.co.uk/inHouseCourses.asp>
- Management Consultancy – <http://www.awics.co.uk/ManagementConsultancy.asp>
- Interim Management – <http://www.awics.co.uk/interimmanagement.asp>
- Independent Residents' Advice – <http://www.awics.co.uk/IndependentTenantAdvice.asp>
- Publications – <http://www.awics.co.uk/TechnicalBooks.asp>
- Information (including free newsletters and briefing papers - <http://www.awics.co.uk/informationsservice.asp>

I have a blog at <http://www.awics.co.uk/Blog.asp> and a Twitter feed at [@AdrianWaite](https://twitter.com/AdrianWaite)