

Guidance notes on completing the 2014/15 annual return

- 1 You must apply proper practices for preparing this annual return. Proper practices are found in the Practitioners' Guide* which is updated from time to time and contains everything you should need to prepare successfully for your financial year-end and the subsequent audit. Both NALC and SLCC have helplines if you want to talk through any problem you encounter.
- 2 Make sure that your annual return is complete (i.e. no empty green boxes), and is properly signed and dated. Avoid making any amendments to the completed return. But, if this is unavoidable, make sure the amendments are drawn to the attention of and approved by the council, properly initialled and an explanation is provided to the external auditor. Annual returns containing unapproved or unexplained amendments will be returned unaudited and may incur additional costs.
- 3 Use the checklist provided below. Use a second pair of eyes, perhaps a council member or the Chair, to review your annual return for completeness before sending it to the external auditor.
- 4 Do not send the external auditor any information not specifically asked for. Doing so is not helpful. However, you must notify the external auditor of any change of Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer or Chair.
- 5 Make sure that the copy of the bank reconciliation which you send to your external auditor with the annual return covers all your bank accounts. If your council holds any short-term investments, note their value on the bank reconciliation. The external auditor must be able to agree your bank reconciliation to Box 8 on the Accounting Statements (Section 1). You must provide an explanation for any difference between Box 7 and Box 8. More help on bank reconciliation is available in the Practitioners' Guide*.
- 6 Explain fully significant variances in the accounting statements on page 2. Do not just send in a copy of your detailed accounting records instead of this explanation. The external auditor wants to know that you understand the reasons for all variances. Include complete analysis to support your explanation. There are a number of examples provided in the Practitioners' Guide* to assist you.
- 7 If the external auditor has to review unsolicited information, or receives an incomplete bank reconciliation, or you do not fully explain variances, this may incur additional costs for which the auditor will make a charge.
- 8 Make sure that your accounting statements add up and the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2014) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2015).
- 9 Do not complete section 3. The external auditor will complete it at the conclusion of the audit.

Completion checklist – 'No' answers mean you may not have met requirements		Done?
All sections	All green boxes have been completed?	
	All information requested by the external auditor has been sent with this annual return? Please refer to your notice of audit.	
Section 1	Council approval confirmed by signature of Chair of meeting approving accounting statements?	
	An explanation of significant variations from last year to this year is provided?	
	Bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2015 agreed to Box 8?	
Sections 1 and 2	An explanation of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8 is provided?	
	Trust funds – all disclosures made if council is a sole managing trustee? NB: Do not send trust accounting statements unless requested.	
Section 2	For any statement to which the response is 'no', an explanation is provided?	
Section 4	All green boxes completed by internal audit and explanations provided?	

*Note: Governance and Accountability for Local Councils in England – A Practitioners' Guide is available from your local NALC and SLCC representatives or from www.nalc.gov.uk or www.slcc.co.uk