

Guidance notes on completing the 2016/17 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 work by the auditor. NALC, SLCC and ADA 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 highlighted boxes), and is properly signed and dated. Avoid making amendments to the completed return. Any amendments must be approved by the smaller authority, properly initialled and explanation provided. Annual returns containing unexplained or unapproved amendments may be returned and incur additional costs.
- 3. Smaller authorities must approve Section 1 on page 2 before approving Section 2 on page 3.**
4. Use the checklist provided below. Use a second pair of eyes, perhaps a Councillor or Board Member, to review the annual return for completeness and accuracy before sending it to the external auditor.
5. Do not send the external auditor any information not specifically asked for. Doing so is not helpful. However, you must tell the external auditor about any change of Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer or Chair.
6. 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 smaller authority 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 2 on page 3). 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*.
7. Explain fully significant variances in the accounting statements on page 3. 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 a complete numerical and narrative analysis to support your explanation. There are a number of examples provided in the Practitioners' Guide* to assist you.
8. 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.
- 9. You must inform the external auditor of the date set for the commencement of the period for the exercise of public rights.**
10. Make sure that your accounting statements add up and the balance carried forward from the previous year (Box 7 of 2016) equals the balance brought forward in the current year (Box 1 of 2017).
11. Do not complete Section 3 which is reserved for the external auditor.

Completion checklist – 'No' answers mean you may not have met requirements		Done?
All sections	All highlighted boxes have been completed?	✓
	All additional information requested, including the dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights , has been provided for the external auditor?	✓
Section 1	For any statement to which the response is 'no', an explanation is provided?	✓
Section 2	Smaller authority approval of the accounting statements is confirmed by the signature of the Chair of the approval meeting?	✓
	An explanation of significant variations from last year to this year is provided?	✓
	Bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2017 agreed to Box 8?	✓
	An explanation of any difference between Box 7 and Box 8 is provided?	✓
Sections 1 and 2	Trust funds – all disclosures made if a Council is a sole managing trustee? NB: Do not send trust accounting statements unless requested.	✓
Internal Audit report	All highlighted boxes completed by internal audit and explanations provided?	✓

*Note: The Practitioners' Guide is available from your local NALC, SLCC or ADA representatives or from www.nalc.gov.uk or www.slcc.co.uk or www.ada.org.uk.

Local Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and other Smaller Authorities in England

Annual return for the year ended 31 March 2017

Every smaller authority in England with an annual turnover of £6.5 million or less must complete an annual return at the end of each financial year in accordance with proper practices summarising its activities. In this annual return the term 'smaller authority'* includes a Parish Meeting, a Parish Council, a Town Council and an Internal Drainage Board.

The annual return on pages 2 to 4 is made up of three sections:

- Sections 1 and 2 are completed by the smaller authority. **Smaller authorities must approve Section 1 before Section 2.**
- Section 3 is completed by the external auditor.

In addition, the **internal audit report** is completed by the smaller authority's internal audit provider.

Each smaller authority must approve Section 1 and Section 2 in order and in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

Completing your annual return

Guidance notes, including a completion checklist, are provided on page 6 and at relevant points in the annual return.

Complete all highlighted sections. Do not leave any highlighted box blank. Incomplete or incorrect returns require additional external auditor work and may incur additional costs.

Send the annual return, together with the bank reconciliation as at 31 March 2017, an explanation of any significant year on year variances in the accounting statements, **your notification of the commencement date of the period for the exercise of public rights** and any additional information requested, to your external auditor by the due date.

Your external auditor will ask for any additional documents needed for their work. Unless requested, do not send any original financial records to the external auditor.

Once the external auditor has completed their work, certified annual returns will be returned to the smaller authority for publication and public display of Sections 1, 2 and 3. You must publish and display the annual return, including the external auditor's report, by 30 September 2017.

It should not be necessary for you to contact the external auditor for guidance.

More guidance on completing this annual return is available in the Practitioners' Guide that can be downloaded from www.nalc.gov.uk or from www.slcc.co.uk or from www.ada.org.uk

*for a complete list of bodies that may be smaller authorities refer to schedule 2 to Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014