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Thank you for your correspondence dated 11 October and 3 January about the delay in finalisation of the audit of 2018/19 local authority accounts. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

I note your views about the change to the timing of local government accounts publication contributing to the delays. As part of his independent review into the arrangements in place to support the transparency and quality of local authority financial reporting and external audit in England, Sir Tony Redmond will be considering the current publication deadline for accounts. I am pleased to hear that the LGA is actively engaging with the Review. I await Sir Tony's recommendations with interest and we will consider them carefully.

I acknowledge the LGA's continuing concerns about the delays in closing accounts this year, which has affected many councils and agree that this is unacceptable. Councils rely on the timely auditing of their accounts to be able to make budgeting decisions and to provide reassurance to others of their financial health in relation to grant claims, applications and borrowing requests. My understanding is that most of the outstanding accounts are due to be closed by the end of January.

I am also pleased to hear that you are engaging with PSAA directly on this issue and would like to reassure you that we are also working closely with PSAA and other stakeholders to monitor progress and assess the impact of these delays, especially where there may be a knock-on effect in relation to payment of claims going forward, such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) housing benefit claim mentioned in your letter.

We are continuing to monitor the situation and are in contact with other Whitehall departments - including DWP - to make them aware of the reason for the delays and ensure that councils are not penalised for something that is beyond their control. This is certainly not a situation that we would want to see repeated next year and we are working hard to ensure that as far as possible, sufficient mitigations are in place to ensure that this does not happen.

Thank you for writing in on this important matter.

LUKE HALL MP