

Your North East Combined Authority's Accounts – Your Rights

Background

The Government and the seven North East Councils agreed a “minded to” devolution deal during the 2022/23 year. The governance review carried out by the North East Councils concluded that the creation of a new mayoral combined authority would meet the necessary statutory criteria under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, namely that it would improve the exercise of statutory functions across the region.

On 12 March 2024, the North East Mayoral Combined Authority (Establishment and Functions) Order 2024 was approved. The Order provides for the establishment on 7 May 2024 of the North East Mayoral Combined Authority, and simultaneously abolishes the existing North East Combined Authority (NECA) and the North East Combined Authority (NTCA) and the office of the Mayor of North of Tyne. As a result of this these accounts are for the final period from the 1 April 2023-6 May 2024 for the former North East Combined authority. The draft accounts for 2023/24 were certified by the Chief Finance Officer on the 26 November 2024.

Public Inspection of the Accounts

Public inspection of the accounts is regulated by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The main rights that are conferred on members of the public are:

- Any interested person or journalist can inspect the accounts for 2023/24 that are subject to audit; that is all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, and receipts underlying the accounts for the year under inspection.
- Copies of the accounts and supporting documents can be taken; (a small charge may be levied).
- In addition, a local authority elector for the area has the right to ask the external auditor questions about the accounts:

- As a local government elector, if you believe that money has been spent unlawfully you can send a formal 'notice of objection' to the external auditor; the letter should explain the reason for the objection. The external auditor must then reach a decision on your objection and provide a statement of reasons if you require this. Finally, if you are not happy with the decision you can appeal to the courts.
- You can also object if you think that there is something in the accounts that the auditor should tell the public about in a 'public interest report.' You must give your reasons for taking this action. The auditor will then decide whether to take any action. The auditor will normally but does not have to give reasons for their decision and you cannot appeal to the courts.

Objections should be addressed to the auditor, Forvis Mazars LLP, The Corner,
Bank Chambers.26 Mosley Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 1DF

There are a number of restrictions on information disclosure and the right to object to the accounts:

- You cannot inspect and copy documents that contain personal information about a member of staff. Details of salaries or other benefits/ payments are confidential.
- An officer or an auditor cannot give you personal information about anyone when they answer your questions.
- The right to ask the external auditor questions is limited. Questions about the accounts can be asked, but you cannot ask questions about the Combined Authority policy, finances or procedures that are not about the accounts.

- Your questions should be about facts, not opinions. You should not ask an auditor if they think something the Combined Authority has done, or an item in the accounts, is lawful or reasonable.
- You cannot use the objection process to make a personal complaint or claim against the Combined Authority.

The public inspection period is Friday 29 November to Friday 10 January 2025, between the hours of 9.00am and 4.30pm.

Initial applications for inspection should be made to Janice Gillespie, Director of Finance and Investment, up to the 31 December 2024, and subsequent to that to Mags Scott the Interim Director of Finance and Investment at The Lumen, Newcastle Helix, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 5BZ.

A full copy of the accounts is available at www.northeast-ca.gov.uk