

Executive summary

This Audit Results Report contains findings from our 2019-20 financial audits of local governments and regional councils (LG entities).

Following proclamation of the *Local Government Amendment (Auditing) Act 2017* (Amendment Act), the Auditor General has progressively assumed responsibility for the annual financial audits of LG entities. We were responsible for 132 audits for 2019-20, the third year of the transition, and will have responsibility for all 148 Western Australian LG entities by 2020-21.

Our annual financial audits focus on providing assurance over an entity's annual financial report. During an audit we also make related recommendations in respect to compliance, financial management and information system controls. This report summarises our findings.

Key findings

- We issued auditor's reports for the 2019-20 financial year for 65 of the 132 LG entities by the required date of 31 December 2020 (96 of 112 in 2019) and a further 52 entities by 31 May 2021. The results of the remaining 15 will be tabled in Parliament once complete. (page 10)
- All but 1 auditor's report included a clear (unqualified) audit opinion on the financial report (page 10). However, we reported 101 material matters of non-compliance with the *Local Government Act 1995*, Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 1996 (FM Regulations) or other written law in 45 of our auditor's reports. (page 12)
- An Emphasis of Matter was included in the auditor's report of most entities as the FM Regulations require vested land to be measured at zero cost and vested improvements at fair value. This is a departure from the Australian Accounting Standards AASB 16 *Leases* which requires LG entities to measure the vested improvements also at zero cost. (page 11)
- We issued 120 certifications to LG entities to acquit funding received under Commonwealth and State Government programs for projects such as Roads to Recovery and other capital works projects. We also certified 12 LG entities' annual claims for pensioner deferments of rates and charges. (page 17)
- We reported the following control weaknesses to LG entity management, those charged with governance (mayor, president or chairperson of the council) and to the Minister for Local Government:
 - 704 financial management control weaknesses at 117 entities, (802 at 107 entities for all entities last year). We considered 88% to be significant or moderate risk if not resolved in the short term (86% last year). Eighty percent of the weaknesses related to expenditure, financial management, payroll and human resources, and revenue. (page 18)
 - 328 information system (IS) control weaknesses at 50 entities (202 at 38 entities last year). Our capability assessments at 11 of the 50 LG entities showed that 79% of the audit results were below our minimum benchmark. (page 23)
- We continue to support the need for the DLGSC to develop more thorough and balanced performance assessment criteria to replace the existing reporting and audit of 7 financial ratios and any adverse trends in these ratios. (page 16)