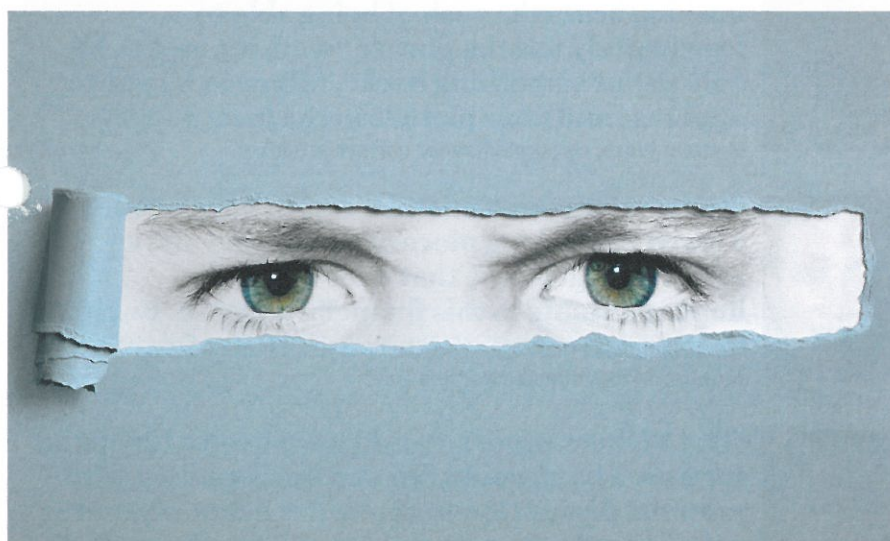


Your views

Readers' letters and online comments on the magazine



Victorian values for auditing?

Vivienne Russell's cover feature ('Audit – the next generation', September) was an excellent survey of the suggestions being made for the audit of councils following the demise of the Audit Commission.

However, she omitted one model of audit from the history of local government that should appeal to both those Conservatives who prefer traditional practices and those who want radical action to achieve a localist utopia.

Eric Pickles initially called for 'armchair auditors', reflecting the populist participatory democracy at the heart of the Big Society. However, he must soon have recognised that few citizens would be able to give enough time to that role.

An alternative to 'armchair auditors' for Conservatives who prefer representative democracy could be Victorian 'elected auditors', who lasted well into the twentieth century alongside district auditors.

Borough councils operating under the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act could, if they wished, use three non-professional auditors, who had to be qualified to hold the position of councillor or alderman.

The mayor selected one from within the council each year, and two others were elected annually by voters of the borough.

Such 'elected auditors' would go well with the policy of elected police commissioners. The abolition of the Audit Commission shows that the government opposes a public professional audit service.

Instead of decentralising to markets, which would mean the Big Four or Five accountancy firms, with perhaps a mutual organisation or two mopping up the rest, surely the government should stand for Conservative principles, decentralise to localities and build on the traditional model of elected auditors.

What could be more Conservative?

GEORGE JONES

Emeritus professor of government,
London School of Economics

PFI price is worth paying

Whether the Private Finance Initiative is the right policy is less a matter of principle than price ('The discreet charms of the PFI', September).

If the objection to the PFI is that the private sector makes too much money then the profits should be capped. But that would make it difficult to persuade the bankers and private investors that the risks are worthwhile.

The fact is that if you need to renew your facilities there is no alternative to the PFI. Given the public debt/GDP ratios, there is no chance of public money being found. The real danger is not that the PFI is unaffordable but that public services become unsustainable if their capital stock cannot be renewed in a timely and efficient way.

ROGER STEER

Director,
Healthcare Audit Consultants

Riot-hit firms need donations

The British public are asked to contribute to all manner of foreign disasters, rightly so. So why are we not being asked to help, financially, businesses that have been damaged by the riots? ('Councils count the cost of clean-up', September)

As government finances are stretched, it seems only right we should all help. A by-product would be to let the thugs know how much the rest of us care for our community.

CAROL ANN DICKSON

(Comment on publicfinance.co.uk)