

Merseyside Pension Fund External Audit Plan

Year ending 31 March 2022

1 June 2022



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Your key Grant Thornton team members are:

Sarah Ironmonger

Key Audit Partner

T 0161 953 6499

E Sarah.L.Ironmonger@uk.gt.com

Stuart Basnett

Senior Manger

T 0151 224 7232

E Stuart.H.Basnett@uk.gt.com

Curtis Wallace

Associate

T 0151 224 0891

E Curtis.AG.Wallace@uk.gt.com

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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit planning process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect the Pension Fund or all weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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Significant improvements from the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) quality inspection

On 29 October, the FRC published its annual report setting out the findings of its review of the work of local auditors. The report summarises the results of the FRC's inspections of twenty audit files for the last financial year. A link to the report is here: [FRC AQR Major Local Audits October 2021](#)

Grant Thornton are one of seven firms which currently delivers local audit work. Of our 330 local government and NHS audits, 87 are currently defined as 'major audits' which fall within the scope of the AQR. This year, the FRC looked at nine of our audits.

Our file review results

The FRC reviewed nine of our audits this year. It graded six files (67%) as 'Good' and requiring no more than limited improvements. No files were graded as requiring significant improvement, representing an impressive year-on-year improvement. The FRC described the improvement in our audit quality as an 'encouraging response by the firm to the quality findings reported in the prior year.' Our Value for Money work continues to be delivered to a high standard, with all of the files reviewed requiring no more than limited improvement. We welcome the FRC findings and conclusions which demonstrate the impressive improvement we have made in audit quality over the past year.

The FRC also identified a number of good practices including effective challenge of management's valuer, use of an auditor's expert to assist with the audit of a highly specialised property valuation, and the extent and timing of involvement by the audit partner on the VFM conclusion.

Our results over the past three years are shown in the table below:

Grade	Number 2018/19	Number 2019/20	Number 2020/21
Good with limited improvements (Grade 1 or 2)	1	1	6
Improvements required (Grade 3)	2	5	3
Significant improvements required (Grade 4)	1	0	0
Total	4	6	9

Our continued commitment to Audit quality and continuous improvement

Our work over the past year has been undertaken during the backdrop of COVID, when the public sector has faced the huge challenge of providing essential services and helping safeguard the public during the pandemic. Our NHS bodies in particular have been at the forefront of the public health crisis. As auditors we have had to show compassion to NHS staff deeply affected by the crisis, whilst staying focused on the principles of good governance and financial management, things which are more important than ever. We are very proud of the way we have worked effectively with audited bodies, demonstrating empathy in our work whilst still upholding the highest audit quality.

Significant improvements from the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) quality inspection (cont.)

Over the coming year we will make further investments in audit quality including strengthening our quality and technical support functions, and increasing the level of training, support and guidance for our audit teams. We will address the specific improvement recommendations raised by the FRC, including:

- Enhanced training for local auditors on key assumptions within property valuations, and how to demonstrate an increased level of challenge
- Formalising our arrangements for the consideration of complex technical issues by Partner Panels.

As part of our enhanced Value for Money programme, we will focus on identifying the scope for better use of public money, as well as highlighting weaknesses in governance or financial stewardship where we see them.

Conclusion

Local audit plays a critical role in the way public sector audits an society interact, and it depends on the trust and confidence of all those who rely on it. As a firm we're proud to be doing our part to promote good governance, effective stewardship and appropriate use of public funds.

Key matters

Factors

Pension Fund developments

We have continued to hold regular meetings with the senior finance team at the Fund. During these meetings we discuss a range of key issues regarding the Fund's general developments, current and projected financial performance, developments within the LGPS Northern pooling arrangements and regulatory oversight.

At the time of producing this Plan, Merseyside Pension Fund's latest available fund asset valuation shows a continuing increase on the overall valuation of assets. At 31 March 2021, the Fund reported net assets of £10.080bn. By 31 January 2022, the valuation of the Fund's assets had increased to £10.722bn.

Since this date, there has been uncertainty caused in markets as a result of the Russia/Ukraine conflict. Whilst Merseyside Pension Fund's direct exposure to investments in Russia is immaterial, the volatility caused by the conflict in markets may cause the year-end valuation of investments to be less than originally forecast.

Changes in IT systems

We are aware that there will be changes to the Pension Funds financial systems during 2022-23. The Pension Fund is expected to upgrade its General Ledger system to Oracle Fusion in October 2022. Whilst this is not expected to have any impact on the audit of the 2021/22 annual accounts, we have begun engaging with our internal IT specialist auditors to ensure that appropriate work is performed to provide us with the necessary assurance over the completeness and accuracy of any data migrated to new systems and the controls adopted for future audit purposes.

Our response

- As a firm, we are absolutely committed to audit quality and financial reporting in the local government sector. Our proposed work and fee, as set further in our Audit Plan, sets out the proposed fee for this year's audit, recognising that there are further cost pressures in 2021/22.
- We will continue to provide you with sector updates via our Audit Committee updates.
- There is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to improper recognition of revenue. We have rebutted this risk for all types of revenue. We have also considered the risk of material misstatement due to fraud related to expenditure and concluded that this is not a significant risk for the Pension Fund.
- There is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management override of controls is present in all entities. We have therefore identified a significant risk in regard to management override of controls for the audit of the Pension Fund – see page 7 for more information.

Introduction and headlines

Purpose

This document provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Merseyside Pension Fund ('the Pension Fund') for those charged with governance.

Respective responsibilities

The National Audit Office ('the NAO') has issued a document entitled Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'). This summarises where the responsibilities of auditors begin and end and what is expected from the audited body. Our respective responsibilities are also set out in the agreed in the Terms of Appointment and Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), the body responsible for appointing us as auditor of Merseyside Pension Fund. We draw your attention to both of these documents.

Scope of our audit

The scope of our audit is set in accordance with the Code and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the Pension Fund's financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Pensions Committee and the Audit & Risk Management Committee).

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of your responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the Pension Fund to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the conduct of its business, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. We have considered how the Pension Fund is fulfilling these responsibilities.

Our audit approach is based on a thorough understanding of the Pension Fund's business and is risk based.

Significant risks

Those risks requiring special audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood of a material financial statement error have been identified as:

- Management Override of Controls
- Valuation of Directly-held Investment Property
- Valuation of Level 3 Investments

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings (ISA 260) Report.

Materiality

We have determined planning materiality to be £96.496m (PY £87.735m) for the Pension Fund, which equates to 0.9% of your net assets as at 31 January 2022. We are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. Clearly trivial has been set at £4.825m (PY £4.386m).

Audit logistics

Our interim visit will take place in March and our final visit will take place during July to September. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan and our Audit Findings Report. Our audit approach is detailed in Appendix A.

Our fee for the audit for 2021-22 is still to be confirmed as the PSAA approval process for 20-21 audit fees has only just been finalised. The fee for 2021-22 will be subject to the Pension Fund delivering a good set of financial statements and working papers. The audit fee for the previous year was £51,249.

We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard (revised 2019) and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

Significant risks identified

Significant risks are defined by ISAs (UK) as risks that, in the judgement of the auditor, require special audit consideration. In identifying risks, audit teams consider the nature of the risk, the potential magnitude of misstatement, and its likelihood. Significant risks are those risks that have a higher risk of material misstatement.

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
ISA 240 Fraud in Revenue and Expenditure Recognition	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.</p> <p>This presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue recognition.</p> <p>We have also rebutted the presumption of fraud in expenditure recognition.</p>	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Fund, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Wirral Council mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable <p>Therefore, we do not consider this to be a significant risk for Merseyside Pension Fund.</p>
Management over-ride of controls	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities. The Fund faces external scrutiny of its spending and stewardship of funds, and this could potentially place management under undue pressure in terms of how they report performance.</p> <p>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular journals, management estimates and transactions outside the course of business as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluate the design effectiveness of management controls over journals• analyse the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals• test unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration• gain an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence• evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.

Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Valuation of Directly Held Property	<p>The Fund revalues its directly held property on a quarterly basis to ensure that the carrying value is not materially different from the fair value at the financial statements date. This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved (£463 million) and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>Management have engaged the services of a valuer to estimate the current value as at 31 March 2022.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of directly held property, particularly revaluations and impairments, as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work • evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert • write out to them and discuss with the valuer the basis on which the valuation was carried out • challenge the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding • engage our own valuer to assess the instructions to the Fund's valuer, the Fund's valuation report and the assumptions that underpin the valuation • test, on a sample basis, revaluations made to ensure they have been input correctly into the Fund's financial records • where available review investment manager service auditor report on design effectiveness of internal controls.
Valuation of Level 3 Investments	<p>The Fund revalues its investments on a quarterly basis to ensure that the carrying value is not materially different from the fair value at the financial statements date.</p> <p>By their nature Level 3 investment valuations lack observable inputs. These valuations therefore represent a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved (£2,535 million) and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>Under ISA 315 significant risks often relate to significant non-routine transactions and judgemental matters. Level 3 investments by their very nature require a significant degree of judgement to reach an appropriate valuation at year end.</p> <p>Management utilise the services of investment managers as valuation experts to estimate the fair value as at 31 March 2022.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of Level 3 investments as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate management's processes for valuing Level 3 investments • review the nature and basis of estimated values and consider what assurance management has over the year end valuations provided for these types of investments; to ensure that the requirements of the Code are met • independently request year-end confirmations from investment managers • for a sample of investments, test the valuation by obtaining and reviewing the audited accounts, (where available) at the latest date for individual investments and agreeing these to the fund manager reports at that date. Reconcile those values to the values at 31 March 2022 with reference to known movements in the intervening period and • in the absence of available audited accounts, we will evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert • test revaluations made to see if they had been input correctly into the Pension Fund's financial records • where available review investment manager service auditor report on design effectiveness of internal controls.

Accounting estimates and related disclosures

The Financial Reporting Council issued an updated ISA (UK) 540 (revised): *Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures* which includes significant enhancements in respect of the audit risk assessment process for accounting estimates.

Introduction

Under ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) auditors are required to understand and assess an entity's internal controls over accounting estimates, including:

- The nature and extent of oversight and governance over management's financial reporting process relevant to accounting estimates;
- How management identifies the need for and applies specialised skills or knowledge related to accounting estimates;
- How the entity's risk management process identifies and addresses risks relating to accounting estimates;
- The entity's information system as it relates to accounting estimates;
- The entity's control activities in relation to accounting estimates; and
- How management reviews the outcomes of previous accounting estimates.

As part of this process auditors also need to obtain an understanding of the role of those charged with governance, which is particularly important where the estimates have high estimation uncertainty or require significant judgement.

Specifically do committee members:

- Understand the characteristics of the methods and models used to make the accounting estimates and the risks related to them;
- Oversee management's process for making accounting estimates, including the use of models, and the monitoring activities undertaken by management; and
- Evaluate how management made the accounting estimates?



Accounting estimates and related disclosures

Additional information that will be required

To ensure our compliance with this revised auditing standard, we will be requesting further information from management and those charged with governance during our audit for the year ended 31 March 2022.

Based on our knowledge of the Pension Fund we have identified the following material accounting estimates for which this is likely to apply:

- Valuations of directly held property
- Valuation of level 2 and level 3 investments

The Pension Fund's Information systems

In respect of the Pension Fund's information systems, we are required to consider how management identifies the methods, assumptions and source data used for each material accounting estimate and the need for any changes to these. This includes how management selects, or designs, the methods, assumptions and data to be used and applies the methods used in the valuations.

When the models used include increased complexity or subjectivity, as is the case for many valuation models, auditors need to understand and assess the controls in place over the models and the data included therein. Where adequate controls are not in place, we may need to report this as a significant control deficiency, and this could affect the amount of detailed substantive testing required during the audit.

If management has changed the method for making an accounting estimate, we will need to fully understand management's rationale for this change. Any unexpected changes are likely to raise the audit risk profile of this accounting estimate and may result in the need for additional audit procedures.

We are aware that the Pension Fund uses management experts in deriving some of its more complex estimates, e.g. asset and investment. However, it is important to note that the use of management experts does not diminish the responsibilities of management and those charged with governance to ensure that:

- All accounting estimates and related disclosures included in the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the financial reporting framework, and are materially accurate;
- There are adequate controls in place at the Pension Fund (and where applicable its service provider or management expert) over the models, assumptions and source data used in the preparation of accounting estimates.



Estimation uncertainty

Under ISA (UK) 540 we are required to consider the following:

- How management understands the degree of estimation uncertainty related to each accounting estimate; and
- How management address this estimation uncertainty when selecting their point estimate.

For example, how management identified and considered alternative, methods, assumptions or source data that would be equally valid under the financial reporting framework, and why these alternatives were rejected in favour of the point estimate used.

The revised standard includes increased emphasis on the importance of the financial statement disclosures. Under ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018), auditors are required to assess whether both the accounting estimates themselves and the related disclosures are reasonable.

Where there is a material uncertainty, that is where there is a significant risk of a material change to the estimated carrying value of an asset or liability within the next year, there needs to be additional disclosures. Note that not all material estimates will have a material uncertainty and it is also possible that an estimate that is not material could have a risk of material uncertainty.

Where there is material estimation uncertainty, we would expect the financial statement disclosures to detail:

- What the assumptions and uncertainties are;
- How sensitive the assets and liabilities are to those assumptions, and why;
- The expected resolution of the uncertainty and the range of reasonably possible outcomes for the next financial year; and
- An explanation of any changes made to past assumptions if the uncertainty is unresolved.

Planning enquiries

As part of our planning risk assessment procedures, we have issued management with a set of questions to be completed and presented to Pensions Committee for ratification. We would appreciate a prompt response to these enquires in due course.

Further information

Further details on the requirements of ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) can be found in the auditing standard on the Financial Reporting Council's website:

[https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/0fa69c03-49ec-49ae-a8c9-cc7a2b65382a/ISA-\(UK\)-540_Revised-December-2018_final.pdf](https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/0fa69c03-49ec-49ae-a8c9-cc7a2b65382a/ISA-(UK)-540_Revised-December-2018_final.pdf)

Other matters

Other work

The Pension Fund is administered by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (the 'Council'), and the Pension Fund's accounts form part of the Council's financial statements.

Therefore, as well as our general responsibilities under the Code of Practice a number of other audit responsibilities also follow in respect of the Pension Fund, such as:

- We read any other information published alongside the Council's financial statements to check that it is consistent with the Pension Fund financial statements on which we give an opinion and is consistent with our knowledge of the Authority.

Other material balances and transactions

Under International Standards on Auditing, "irrespective of the assessed risks of material misstatement, the auditor shall design and perform substantive procedures for each material class of transactions, account balance and disclosure". All other material balances and transaction streams will therefore be audited. However, the procedures will not be as extensive as the procedures adopted for the risks identified in this report.

Materiality

The concept of materiality

Materiality is fundamental to the preparation of the financial statements and the audit process and applies not only to the monetary misstatements but also to disclosure requirements and adherence to acceptable accounting practice and applicable law. Misstatements, including omissions, are considered to be material if they, individually or in the aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

Materiality for planning purposes

We have determined financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the net assets of the Pension Fund. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. Materiality at the planning stage of our audit is £96.496m (PY £87.735m), which equates to 0.9% of your net assets as at 31 January 2022.

We reconsider planning materiality if, during the course of our audit engagement, we become aware of facts and circumstances that would have caused us to make a different determination of planning materiality.

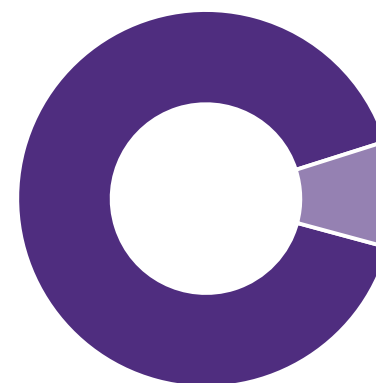
Matters we will report to the Pensions Committee

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our opinion on the financial statements as a whole, we nevertheless report to the Pensions Committee any unadjusted misstatements of lesser amounts to the extent that these are identified by our audit work. Under ISA 260 (UK) 'Communication with those charged with governance', we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA 260 (UK) defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. In the context of the Pension Fund, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £4.825m (PY £4.386m).

If management have corrected material misstatements identified during the course of the audit, we will consider whether those corrections should be communicated to the Pensions Committee to assist it in fulfilling its governance responsibilities.

Net assets at 31 January 2022

£10,722m Pension Fund
(PY: £9,748m)



■ Net assets ■ Materiality

Materiality

£96.496m
Pension Fund
financial
statements
materiality
(PY: £87.735m)

£4.825m
Misstatements
reported to the
Pensions Committee
(PY: £4.386m)

IT audit strategy

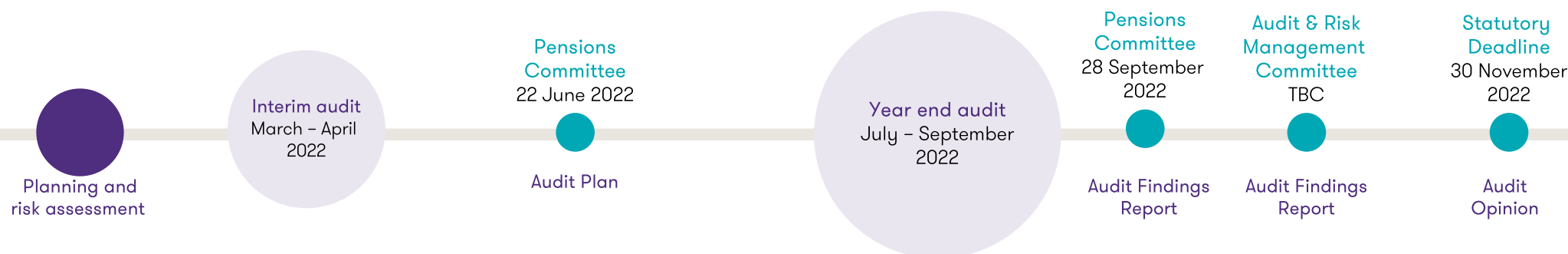
In accordance with ISA (UK) 315, we are required to obtain an understanding of the information systems relevant to financial reporting to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement. As part of this we obtain an understanding of the controls operating over relevant Information Technology (IT) systems i.e., IT general controls (ITGCs).

Our audit will include completing an assessment of the design of ITGCs related to security management; technology acquisition, development and maintenance; and technology infrastructure. Based on the level of assurance required for each IT system the assessment may focus on evaluating key risk areas ('streamlined assessment') or be more in depth ('detailed assessment').

The following IT systems have been judged to be in scope for our audit and based on the planned financial statement audit approach we will perform the indicated level of assessment:

IT system	Audit area	Planned level IT audit assessment
Oracle E-Business Suite	Financial reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Roll-forward procedures linked to prior year detailed ITGC assessment (design and operating effectiveness)
Altair	Contributions & Benefits payable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Streamlined ITGC design assessment

Audit logistics and team



Sarah Ironmonger, Key Audit Partner



Sarah leads our relationship with you and takes overall responsibility for the delivery of a high-quality audit, ensuring the highest professional standards are maintained and a commitment to add value to the Pension Fund.

Stuart Basnett, Engagement Manager



Stuart plans, manages and leads the delivery of the audit, is your key point of contact for your finance team and is your first point of contact for discussing any issues.

Curtis Wallace, Engagement Incharge



Curtis assists in planning, managing and delivering the audit fieldwork, ensuring that the audit is delivered effectively and efficiently. He supervises and co-ordinates the day to day running of the audit.

Audited body responsibilities

Where audited bodies do not deliver to the timetable agreed, we need to ensure that this does not impact on audit quality or absorb a disproportionate amount of time, thereby disadvantaging other audits. Where the elapsed time to complete an audit exceeds that agreed due to a client not meeting its obligations we will not be able to maintain a team on site. Similarly, where additional resources are needed to complete the audit due to a client not meeting their obligations we are not able to guarantee the delivery of the audit to the agreed timescales. In addition, delayed audits will incur additional audit fees.

Our requirements

To minimise the risk of a delayed audit, you need to ensure that you:

- produce draft financial statements of good quality by the agreed timetable you have agreed with us, including all notes, and the Annual Report.
- ensure that good quality working papers are available at the start of the audit, in accordance with the working paper requirements schedule that we have shared with you
- ensure that the agreed data reports are available to us at the start of the audit and are reconciled to the values in the accounts, in order to facilitate our selection of samples for testing
- ensure that all appropriate staff are available on site throughout (or as otherwise agreed) the planned period of the audit
- respond promptly and adequately to audit queries.

Audit fees

In 2018, PSAA awarded a contract of audit for Merseyside Pension Fund to begin with effect from 2018/19. The fee agreed in the contract was £28,399. Since that time, there have been a number of developments, particularly in relation to the revised Code and ISA's which are relevant for the 2021/22 audit.

Additionally, across all sectors and firms, the FRC has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge and to undertake additional and more robust testing, as detailed on page 9 in relation to the updated ISA (UK) 540 (revised): Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures.

As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and public sector financial reporting. We have engaged an audit expert to improve the level of assurance we require for directly -held investment property valuations, which has been included in our proposed audit fee. Our proposed work and fee for 2021/22, as set out below, is detailed overleaf and has been agreed with management.

	Actual Fee 2019/20	Actual Fee 2020/21	Proposed fee 2021/22
Merseyside Pension Fund Audit	£44,356	£51,249	£TBC
IAS 19 Assurance Letters	£12,250	£13,125	£13,125
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	£56,606	£64,374	£TBC

Assumptions

In setting the above fees, we have assumed that the Pension Fund will:

- prepare a good quality set of accounts, supported by comprehensive and well-presented working papers which are ready at the start of the audit
- provide appropriate analysis, support and evidence to support all critical judgements and significant judgements made during the course of preparing the financial statements
- provide early notice of proposed complex or unusual transactions which could have a material impact on the financial statements.

Relevant professional standards

In preparing our fee estimate, we have had regard to all relevant professional standards, including paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the FRC's [Ethical Standard \(revised 2019\)](#) which stipulate that the Engagement Lead (Key Audit Partner) must set a fee sufficient to enable the resourcing of the audit with partners and staff with appropriate time and skill to deliver an audit to the required professional and Ethical standards.

Independence and non-audit services

Auditor independence

Ethical Standards and ISA (UK) 260 require us to give you timely disclosure of all significant facts and matters that may bear upon the integrity, objectivity and independence of the firm or covered persons. relating to our independence. We encourage you to contact us to discuss these or any other independence issues with us. We will also discuss with you if we make additional significant judgements surrounding independence matters.

We confirm that there are no significant facts or matters that impact on our independence as auditors that we are required or wish to draw to your attention. We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard (Revised 2019) and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements. Further, we have complied with the requirements of the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 01 issued in May 2020 which sets out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Ethical Standard. For the purposes of our audit, we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Council.

Other services

The following other services provided by Grant Thornton were identified.

The amounts detailed are fees agreed to-date for audit related and non-audit services to be undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP in the current financial year. These services are consistent with the Pension Fund's policy on the allotment of non-audit work to your auditors.

Any changes and full details of all fees charged for audit related and non-audit related services by Grant Thornton UK LLP and by Grant Thornton International Limited network member Firms will be included in our Audit Findings report at the conclusion of the audit.

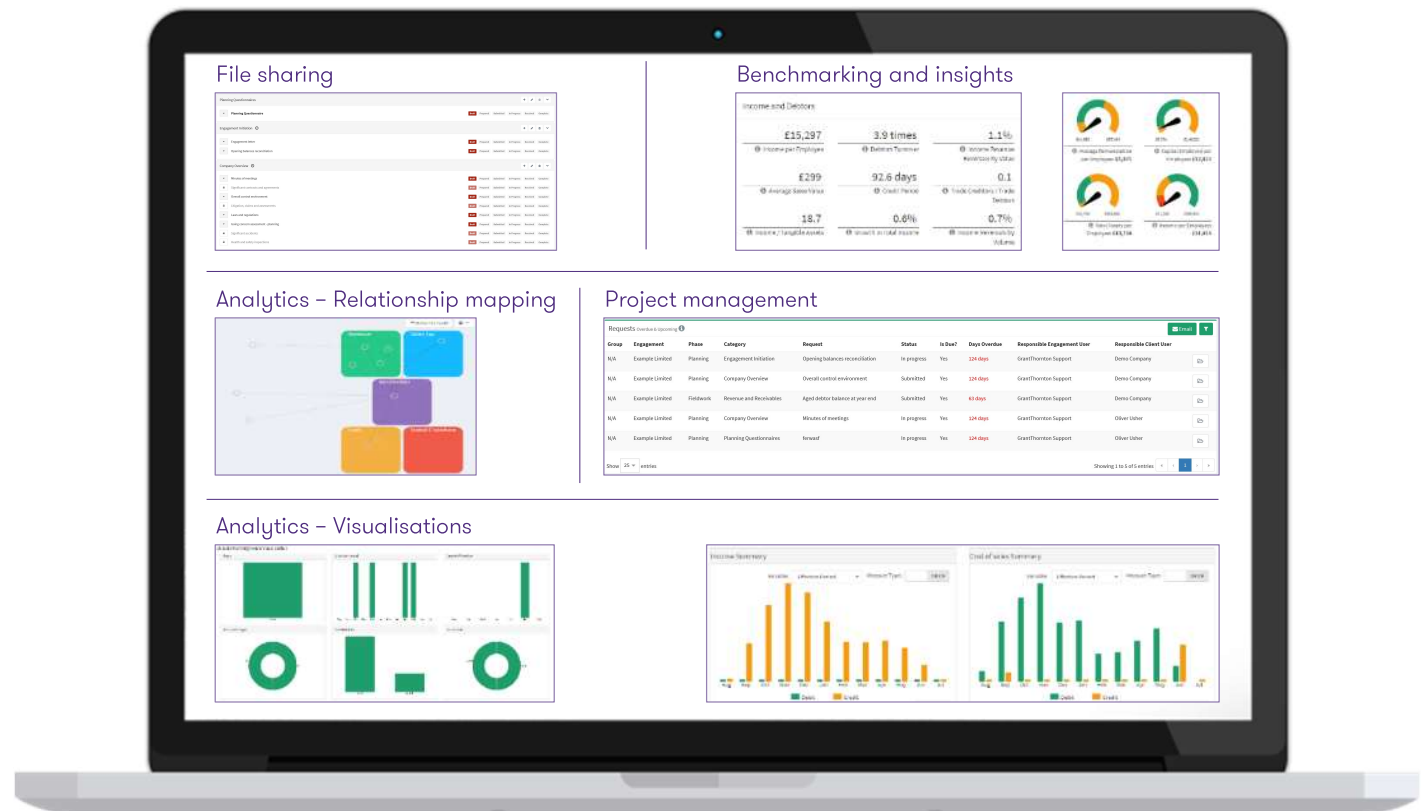
None of the services provided are subject to contingent fees.

Service	Fees £	Threats	Safeguards
Audit related			
IAS19 Assurance procedures/ letters for Admitted Bodies	£13,125 (15 bodies requiring assurance procedures)	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	<p>The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is £13,125 in comparison to the total fee for the audit and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall.</p> <p>Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors all mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.</p>
Non-audit related			
None			

Our digital audit experience

A key component of our overall audit experience is our comprehensive data analytics tool, which is supported by Inflo Software technology. This tool has a number of key functions within our audit process:

Function	Benefits for you
Data extraction	Providing us with your financial information is made easier
File sharing	An easy-to-use, ISO 27001 certified, purpose-built file sharing tool
Project management	Effective management and oversight of requests and responsibilities
Data analytics	Enhanced assurance from access to complete data populations



Grant Thornton's Analytics solution is supported by Inflo Software technology

Our digital audit experience

A key component of our overall audit experience is our comprehensive data analytics tool, which is supported by Inflo Software technology. This tool has a number of key functions within our audit process:



Data extraction

- Real-time access to data
- Easy step-by-step guides to support you upload your data



File sharing

- Task-based ISO 27001 certified file sharing space, ensuring requests for each task are easy to follow
- Ability to communicate in the tool, ensuring all team members have visibility on discussions about your audit, reducing duplication of work



Project management

- Facilitates oversight of requests
- Access to a live request list at all times



Data analytics

- Relationship mapping, allowing understanding of whole cycles to be obtained quickly
- Visualisation of transactions, allowing easy identification of trends and anomalies

How will analytics add value to your audit?

Analytics will add value to your audit in a number of ways. We see the key benefits of extensive use of data analytics within the audit process to be the following:

Improved fraud procedures using powerful anomaly detection

Being able to analyse every accounting transaction across your business enhances our fraud procedures. We can immediately identify high risk transactions, focusing our work on these to provide greater assurance to you, and other stakeholders.

Examples of anomaly detection include analysis of user activity, which may highlight inappropriate access permissions, and reviewing seldom used accounts, which could identify efficiencies through reducing unnecessary codes and therefore unnecessary internal maintenance.

Another product of this is identification of issues that are not specific to individual postings, such as training requirements being identified for members of staff with high error rates, or who are relying on use of suspense accounts.

More time for you to perform the day job

Providing all this additional value does not require additional input from you or your team. In fact, less of your time is required to prepare information for the audit and to provide supporting information to us.

Complete extracts from your general ledger will be obtained from the data provided to us and requests will therefore be reduced.

We provide transparent project management, allowing us to seamlessly collaborate with each other to complete the audit on time and around other commitments.

We will both have access to a dashboard which provides a real-time overview of audit progress, down to individual information items we need from each other. Tasks can easily be allocated across your team to ensure roles and responsibilities are well defined.

Using filters, you and your team will quickly be able to identify actions required, meaning any delays can be flagged earlier in the process. Accessible through any browser, the audit status is always available on any device providing you with the information to work flexibly around your other commitments.

Appendix 1: Progress against prior year audit recommendations

We identified the following issues in our 2020/21 audit of the Pension Fund’s financial statements, which resulted in One recommendations being reported in our 2020/21 Audit Findings Report. Work in relation to the implementation of the recommendation remains ongoing. A further update will be provided in our Audit Findings Report.

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
In Progress	<p>During our audit of level 3 investments, it was identified that service auditor control reports are not obtained and reviewed by management for all investment managers used. Management assert that initial Due Diligence and ongoing discussions between Merseyside Pension Fund and the Investment Managers takes place which covers the controls in operation. As part of quarterly valuation processes, management also review internal controls for any outlier investment manager valuations on a sample basis. Management also obtain reports from investment managers on an exception basis where there has been a failure with internal controls.</p> <p>There is a risk that controls in place at investment fund managers may have changed since the point in time which the initial Due Diligence was undertaken and that it is best practice to ensure that there is documented evidence confirming that investment fund managers are maintaining effective controls over the valuation of Merseyside Pension Fund’s assets. There are compensating controls in place which reduce this risk; however, they do not cover all investment managers. Therefore, gaps in assurance remain.</p>	<p>It is recommended that Management obtain and review a service auditor controls report for each investment manager as part of the financial statements closedown procedures. Where investment managers do not have a service auditor control report covering the audited period, Management should obtain sufficient alternative evidence to satisfy themselves that appropriate controls were in operation for the period.</p> <p>Management response</p> <p>Management recognise there is a potential gap in assurance. We will discuss with the external auditors on how best to address the issue due to the number of investment fund managers which are used by the Fund and the potential impact on the Pension Fund’s resources. A further update on progress made will be included on future External Audit reports presented to the Pensions Committee.</p>



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