

The Audit Plan for Wirral Council

Year ended 31 March 2017

May 2017

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Wirral Council
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May 2017

Dear Members of the Audit & Risk Management Committee

Audit Plan for Wirral Council for the year ending 31 March 2017

This Audit Plan sets out for the benefit of those charged with governance (in the case of Wirral Council, the Audit & Risk Management Committee), an overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit, as required by International Standard on Auditing (UK & Ireland) 260. This document is to help you understand the consequences of our work, discuss issues of risk and the concept of materiality with us, and identify any areas where you may request us to undertake additional procedures. It also helps us gain a better understanding of the Council and your environment. The contents of the Plan have been discussed with management.

We are required to perform our audit in line with Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General in April 2015.

Our responsibilities under the Code are to:

- give an opinion on the Council's financial statements
- satisfy ourselves the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

As auditors we are responsible for performing the audit, in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland), which is directed towards forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance. The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities for the preparation of the financial statements which give a true and fair view.

We look forward to working with you during the course of the audit.

Yours sincerely

Robin Baker

Engagement Lead

Chartered Accountants

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Understanding your business and key developments

Developments

Highways network asset (HNA)

We have reported previously that CIPFA/LASAAC had announced that local authorities would be required to measure their Highways Network Asset and account for the asset at Depreciated Replacement Cost in financial statements from 2016/17.

At its meeting on March 8th 2017, CIPFA/LASAAC have decided not to proceed with the introduction of the Highways Network Asset Code into the financial reporting requirements for local authorities. The Board decided that, currently and in particular in the absence of central support for key elements of the valuation, the benefits are outweighed by the costs of implementation for local authorities. Further consideration to this issue only if provided with clear evidence that benefits outweigh costs for local authorities.

Integration with health sector

Wider transfers of responsibility for public health to local government, and more specifically Better Care Fund (BCF) plans and the associated pooled budgets have been operational since 1st April 2015. Progress to integrate health and social care is being made by the Council and a single commissioning organisation with the CCG is to be established.

Liverpool City Region Devolution deal

Progress has been made with the City Region's devolution deal. The deal has been agreed with Government and new powers and funding are being provided to the Combined Authority. The first City Region Mayor was elected in May 2017.

Key challenges

Financial Position and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2017/18 – 2020/21

The Quarter 3 revenue monitoring report 2016/17 set out a forecast underspend of £0.4 million. However, the report sets out significant overspends for Childrens services (£5.3m) and Adult services (£3.4m) offset by savings within other areas.

Future budgets remain challenging with further reductions required and increasing demands and costs. The MTFS details an anticipated funding gap of £132 million over the four years of the plan and includes a £45million funding gap in 2017/18. The strategy recognises that key elements of future funding are subject to further decisions resulting in increased financial uncertainty.

OFSTED Inspection

In September 2016 Ofsted issued their report to the Council following an Inspection of the Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The report concluded that the overall arrangements for ensuring the effectiveness of Children's Services at the Council and the Local Safeguarding Board in the Wirral Council area were judged to be inadequate. Consequently, we issued a qualified "except for" VFM conclusion in 2015/16.

The Council have since taken action to begin to secure the required improvements there however remain areas for improvement that the Council still need to address

Financial reporting changes

CIPFA Code of Practice 2016/17 (the Code)

Changes to the Code in 2016/17 reflect aims of the 'Telling the Story' project, to streamline the financial statements to be more in line with internal organisational reporting and improve accessibility to the reader of the financial statements.

The changes affect the presentation of the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement and the Movement in Reserves Statements, segmental reporting disclosures and a new Expenditure and Funding Analysis note has been introduced. The Code also requires these amendments to be reflected in the 2015/16 comparatives by way of a prior period adjustment.

Earlier closedown

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require councils to bring forward the approval and audit of financial statements to 31 July by the 2017/2018 financial year.

For 2016/17 financial statements the Council is working towards having its accounts available for audit this year ahead of the end of June deadline.

Our response

- We aim to complete all our substantive audit work of your financial statements ahead by 30 September 2017.
- As part of our opinion on your financial statements, we will consider whether your financial statements accurately reflect the financial reporting changes in the 2016/17 Code
- We will review the Council's progress in managing addressing Ofsted concerns as part of our work in reaching our VFM conclusion..
- We will keep you informed of changes to the financial reporting requirements for 2016/17 through on-going discussions and invitations to our technical update workshops

Materiality

In performing our audit, we apply the concept of materiality, following the requirements of International Standard on Auditing (UK & Ireland) (ISA) 320: Materiality in planning and performing an audit. The concept of 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. An item does not necessarily have to be large to be considered to have a material effect on the financial statements. An item may be considered to be material by nature, for example, when greater precision is required (e.g. senior manager salaries and allowances).

We determine planning materiality (materiality for the financial statements as a whole determined at the planning stage of the audit) in order to estimate the tolerable level of misstatement in the financial statements, assist in establishing the scope of our audit engagement and audit tests, calculate sample sizes and assist in evaluating the effect of known and likely misstatements in the financial statements.

We have determined planning materiality based upon professional judgement in the context of our knowledge of the Council. In line with previous years, we have calculated financial statements materiality based on a proportion of the gross revenue expenditure of the Council. For purposes of planning the audit we have determined overall materiality to be £13.803 million (being 1.9% of gross revenue expenditure). Our assessment of materiality is kept under review throughout the audit process and we will advise you if we revise this during the audit.

Under ISA 450, auditors also set an amount below which misstatements would be clearly trivial and would not need to be accumulated or reported to those charged with governance because we would not expect that the accumulation of such amounts would have a material effect on the financial statements. "Trivial" matters are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any criteria of size, nature or circumstances. We have defined the amount below which misstatements would be clearly trivial to be £690k.

ISA 320 also requires auditors to determine separate, lower, materiality levels where there are 'particular classes of transactions, account balances or disclosures for which misstatements of lesser amounts than materiality for the financial statements as a whole could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users'. We have identified the following items where separate materiality levels are appropriate:

Balance/transaction/disclosure	Explanation	Materiality level
Disclosures of officers' remuneration, salary bandings and exit packages in the notes to the financial statements	Due to public interest in these disclosures and the statutory requirement for them to be made.	£10,000
Related party transactions	Due to public interest in these disclosures and the statutory requirement for them to be made.	Errors will be assessed individually, with due regard given to the nature of the error and its potential impact on the materiality of the other party.

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; Judgments about materiality are made in light of surrounding circumstances, and are affected by the size or nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both; and Judgments about matters that are material to users of the financial statements are based on a consideration of the common financial information needs of users as a group. The possible effect of misstatements on specific individual users, whose needs may vary widely, is not considered. (ISA (UK and Ireland) 320)

Significant risks identified

An audit is focused on risks. Significant risks are defined by ISAs (UK and Ireland) as risks that, in the judgment 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.

Significant risk	Description	Audit procedures
<p>The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions</p>	<p>Under ISA (UK and Ireland) 240 there is a presumed risk that revenue streams 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>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at Wirral Council, 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 do not consider this to be a significant risk for Wirral Council.</p>
<p>Management over-ride of controls</p>	<p>Under ISA (UK and Ireland) 240 there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities.</p>	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of accounting estimates, judgments and decisions made by management • Review of journal entry process and selection of unusual journal entries for testing back to supporting documentation • Review of unusual significant transactions

"Significant risks often relate to significant non-routine transactions and judgmental matters. Non-routine transactions are transactions that are unusual, due to either size or nature, and that therefore occur infrequently. Judgmental matters may include the development of accounting estimates for which there is significant measurement uncertainty." (ISA (UK and Ireland) 315) . In making the review of unusual significant transactions "the auditor shall treat identified significant related party transactions outside the entity's normal course of business as giving rise to significant risks." (ISA (UK and Ireland) 550)

Significant risks identified (continued)

We have also identified the following significant risks of material misstatement from our understanding of the entity. We set out below the work we have completed to date and the work we plan to address these risks.

Significant risk	Description	Audit procedures
<p>The expenditure cycle includes fraudulent transactions</p>	<p>Practice Note 10 suggests that the risk of material misstatement due to fraudulent financial reporting that may arise from the manipulation of expenditure recognition needs to be considered.</p>	<p>We have considered this risk and do not consider it to require additional audit procedures, because the nature of Council's expenditure streams means that material expenditure recognition fraud would be difficult to perpetrate and conceal.</p> <p>Our normal substantive procedures, including the work done in relation to the risk of management override of controls, adequately address the risk of fraud through provisions and accruals.</p>
<p>Valuation of property, plant and equipment</p>	<p>The Council revalues its assets on a rolling basis over a five year period. The Code requires that the Council ensures that the carrying value at the balance sheet date is not materially different from the current value. This represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements.</p>	<p>Work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate. • Review of the competence, expertise and objectivity of any management experts used. • Review of the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work • Discussions with valuer about the basis on which the valuation is carried out and challenge of the key assumptions. • Review and challenge of the information used by the valuer to ensure it is robust and consistent with our understanding. • Testing of revaluations made during the year to ensure they are input correctly into the Council's asset register • Evaluation of the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management has satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value.

Significant risks identified (continued)

Significant risk	Description	Audit procedures
Valuation of pension fund net liability	<p>The Council's pension fund asset and liability as reflected in its balance sheet represent a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p>	<p>Work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will identify the controls put in place by management to ensure that the pension fund liability is not materially misstated. We will also assess whether these controls were implemented as expected and whether they are sufficient to mitigate the risk of material misstatement. • We will review the competence, expertise and objectivity of the actuary who carried out your pension fund valuation. We will gain an understanding of the basis on which the valuation is carried out. • We will undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made. • We will review the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in notes to the financial statements with the actuarial report from your actuary.

Other risks identified

Reasonably possible risks (RPRs) are, in the auditor's judgment, other risk areas which the auditor has identified as an area where the likelihood of material misstatement cannot be reduced to remote, without the need for gaining an understanding of the associated control environment, along with the performance of an appropriate level of substantive work. The risk of misstatement for an RPR or other risk is lower than that for a significant risk, and they are not considered to be areas that are highly judgmental, or unusual in relation to the day to day activities of the business.

Reasonably possible risks	Description of risk	Audit procedures
Operating expenses	Year end creditors and accruals are understated or not recorded in the correct period.	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of the processes and controls within the operating expenses cycle and a walkthrough of controls to confirm our understanding • Initial substantive testing of a sample of expenditure to check for valid spend <p>Further work planned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further substantive testing of expenditure • Testing of reconciliations • Testing of payments made after the year-end to identify potential unrecorded liabilities and gain assurance over the completeness of the payables balance in the accounts.
Employee remuneration	Employee remuneration accruals are understated	<p>Work completed to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of the processes and controls within the employee remuneration cycle and a walkthrough of controls to confirm our understanding • Initial testing of employee expenses to staff record, pay rates, and classification in the ledger <p>Further Work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing the reconciliation of payroll expenditure recorded in the general ledger to the subsidiary systems and interfaces • Use of analytical techniques to compare expected payroll costs with actual • Review of payroll reconciliations including at the year end

"In respect of some risks, the auditor may judge that it is not possible or practicable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence only from substantive procedures. Such risks may relate to the inaccurate or incomplete recording of routine and significant classes of transactions or account balances, the characteristics of which often permit highly automated processing with little or no manual intervention. In such cases, the entity's controls over such risks are relevant to the audit and the auditor shall obtain an understanding of them." (ISA (UK and Ireland) 315)

Other risks identified (continued)

Other risks	Description	Audit procedures
Changes to the presentation of Council's financial statements.	CIPFA Code changes 'Telling the story' – restatement of CIES and MIRS plus additional note disclosures	<p>Work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will document and evaluate the process for the recording the required financial reporting changes to the 2016/17 financial statements. • We will review the re-classification of the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) comparatives to ensure that they are in line with the Authority's internal reporting structure. • We will review the appropriateness of the revised grouping of entries within the Movement In Reserves Statement (MIRS). • We will test the classification of income and expenditure for 2016/17 recorded within the Cost of Services section of the CIES. • We will test the completeness of income and expenditure by reviewing the reconciliation of the CIES to the general ledger. • We will review the new segmental reporting disclosures within the 2016/17 financial statements to ensure compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice.

Going concern

As auditors, we are required to “obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence about the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation and presentation of the financial statements and to conclude whether there is a material uncertainty about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern” (ISA (UK and Ireland) 570). We will review the management's assessment of the going concern assumption and the disclosures in the financial statements.

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 the previous sections but will include:

- Heritage assets
- Investment property
- Investments (long term)
- Borrowings and other liabilities (long and short term)
- Useable and unusable reserves
- Movement in Reserves Statement and associated notes
- Statement of cash flows and associated notes
- Financing and investment income and expenditure
- Welfare benefits expenditure
- Taxation and non-specific grants
- Schools balances and transactions
- New note disclosures
- Officers' remuneration note
- Leases note
- Related party transactions note
- Capital expenditure and capital financing note
- Financial instruments note
- Collection Fund and associated notes
- Cash and cash equivalents
- Trade and other receivables (long and short term)

Value for Money

Background

The Code requires us to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This is known as the Value for Money (VfM) conclusion.

The National Audit Office (NAO) issued its guidance for auditors on value for money work for 2016/17 in November 2016. The guidance states that for local government bodies, auditors are required to give a conclusion on whether the Council has proper arrangements in place.

The guidance identifies one single criterion for auditors to evaluate:

In all significant respects, the audited body takes properly informed decisions and deploys resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.

This is supported by three sub-criteria as set out opposite:

Sub-criteria	Detail
Informed decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting in the public interest, through demonstrating and applying the principles and values of sound governance Understanding and using appropriate cost and performance information (including, where relevant, information from regulatory/monitoring bodies) to support informed decision making and performance management Reliable and timely financial reporting that supports the delivery of strategic priorities Managing risks effectively and maintaining a sound system of internal control
Sustainable resource deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning finances effectively to support the sustainable delivery of strategic priorities and maintain statutory functions Managing and utilising assets effectively to support the delivery of strategic priorities Planning, organising and developing the workforce effectively to deliver strategic priorities.
Working with partners and other third parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with third parties effectively to deliver strategic priorities Commissioning services effectively to support the delivery of strategic priorities Procuring supplies and services effectively to support the delivery of strategic priorities.

Value for Money (continued)

Risk assessment

We have carried out an initial risk assessment based on the NAO's auditor's guidance note (AGN03). In our initial risk assessment, we considered:

- our cumulative knowledge of the Council, including work performed in previous years in respect of the VfM conclusion and the opinion on the financial statements.
- the findings of other inspectorates and review agencies,
- any illustrative significant risks identified and communicated by the NAO in its Supporting Information.
- any other evidence which we consider necessary to conclude on your arrangements.

We have identified significant risks which we are required to communicate to you and these are set out overleaf. Our risk assessment is an on going process and we will continue to consider relevant information and update our assessment of risks throughout the audit.

Reporting

The results of our VfM audit work and the key messages arising will be reported in our Audit Findings Report and in the Annual Audit Letter.

We will include our conclusion in our auditor's report on your financial statements.

Value for money (continued)

We set out below the significant risks we have identified as a result of our initial risk assessment and the work we propose to address these risks.

Significant risk	Link to sub-criteria	Work proposed to address
<p>Financial position</p> <p>The Council's medium term financial strategy (MTFS) 2017/18 – 2020/21 continues to be aligned with the delivery of the Wirral Plan and has been updated and sets out the scale of the financial challenge that the Council continues to face.</p> <p>The MTFS details an anticipated funding gap of £132 million over the four years of the plan and includes a £45million funding gap in 2017/18. The strategy recognises that key elements of future funding are subject to further decisions resulting in increased financial uncertainty.</p> <p>Savings plans are in place for 2017/18 alongside indicative proposals for 2018/19 – 2020/21 and progress in delivery will be continue to be monitored through a combination of existing arrangements and under the direction of the Transformation Programme that will report to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The on going uncertainty and delivery of the required savings represent a significant challenge to the Council.</p>	<p>This links to the Council's arrangements for ensuring they plan finances effectively to support their strategic functions and arrangements for ensuring informed decision making.</p>	<p>We will review the Council's arrangements for updating and agreeing savings plans alongside the monitoring arrangements and communication of key findings to Cabinet and Council.</p>
<p>Ofsted inspection of children's services</p> <p>Ofsted issued a report on the Council's children's services in 2015/16 which rated these as 'inadequate' and the Council is currently subject to follow up review. Until such time as Ofsted has confirmed that adequate arrangements are in place this remains a significant risk to the Council's arrangements.</p>	<p>This links to the Council's arrangements for managing risks effectively and maintaining a sound system of internal control, demonstrating and applying the principles and values of sound governance, and planning, organising and developing the workforce effectively to deliver strategic priorities.</p>	<p>We will review update reports from Ofsted as they become available and review progress made by the Council in the delivery of required improvement actions.</p>

Other audit responsibilities

In addition to our responsibilities under the Code of Practice in relation to your financial statements and arrangements for economy, efficiency and effectiveness we have a number of other audit responsibilities, as follows:

- We will undertake work to satisfy ourselves that the disclosures made in your Annual Governance Statement are in line with CIPFA/SOLACE guidance and consistent with our knowledge of the Council.
- We will read your Narrative Statement and check that it is consistent with the financial statements on which we give an opinion and that the disclosures included in it are in line with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice.
- We will carry out work on your consolidation schedules for the Whole of Government Accounts process in accordance with NAO instructions to auditors.
- We consider our other duties under the Act and the Code, as and when required, including:
 - We will give electors the opportunity to raise questions about your financial statements and consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the financial statements;
 - issue of a report in the public interest; and
 - making a written recommendation to the Council, copied to the Secretary of State
- We certify completion of our audit.
- Members are aware that we are yet to certify completion of our 2015/16 audit due to the on going review of an objection relating to Lender Option Borrower Options (LOBO) loans held by the Council. We will keep Members informed of progress on this review.

Results of interim audit work

The findings of our interim audit work, and the impact of our findings on the accounts audit approach, are summarised in the table below:

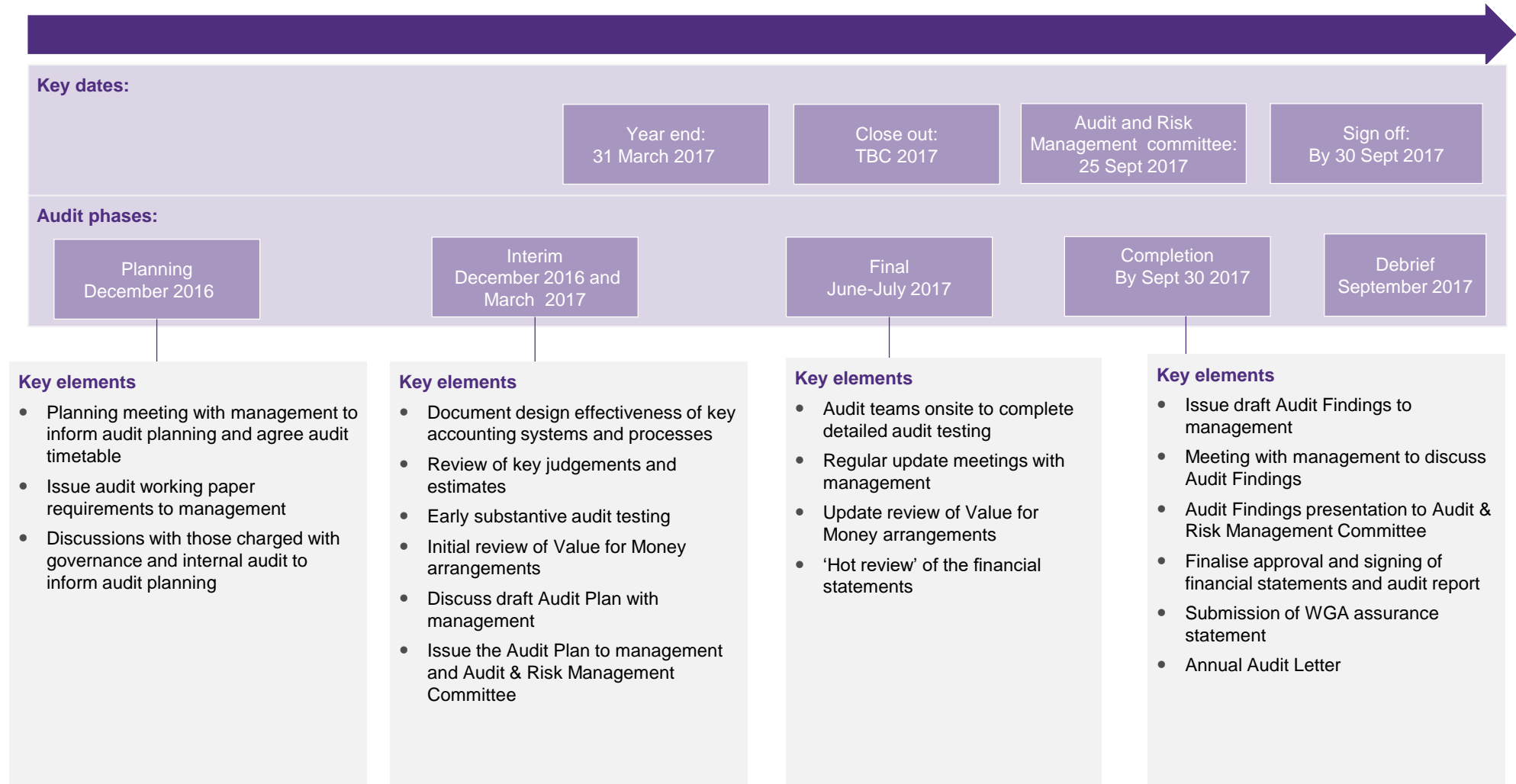
	Work performed	Conclusion
Internal audit	<p>We have completed a high level review of internal audit's overall arrangements. Our work has not identified any issues which we wish to bring to your attention.</p> <p>We will also consider the findings from internal audit's work on the Council's key financial systems</p>	<p>Overall, we have concluded that the internal audit service provides an independent and satisfactory service to the Council and that internal audit work contributes to an effective internal control environment.</p>
Entity level controls	<p>We have obtained an understanding of the overall control environment relevant to the preparation of the financial statements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and enforcement of integrity and ethical values • Commitment to competence • Participation by those charged with governance • Management's philosophy and operating style • Organisational structure • Assignment of authority and responsibility 	<p>Our work has not identified any weaknesses which we consider are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements.</p>
Walkthrough testing	<p>We have completed walkthrough tests of the Council's controls operating in areas where we consider that there is a risk of material misstatement to the financial statements. This includes the payroll and accounts payables systems.</p> <p>Our work has not identified any issues which we wish to bring to your attention.</p>	<p>Our work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.</p>
Review of information technology controls	<p>Our information systems specialist will complete a high level review of the general IT control environment, as part of the overall review of the internal controls system.</p>	<p>We will monitor progress in this area leading up to our audit on the financial statements.</p>

Results of interim audit work (continued)

	Work performed/Audit procedures	Conclusion
Journal entry controls	We have reviewed the Council's journal entry policies and procedures as part of determining our journal entry testing strategy and have not identified any material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's control environment or financial statements.	<p>We have not identified any material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's control environment or financial statements.</p> <p>We will extract a listing of all journals posted in the general ledger for 2016/17 and interrogate this to identify large or unusual journals to test substantively.</p>
Consideration of Group accounts assessment	We will review the assessment that the Council completes annually to determine whether there have been any changes within the group boundary that would require the production of group accounts.	We will review this assessment and will update the Audit and Risk Management Committee on our planned approach if group accounts are required.

The audit cycle

The audit timeline



Audit Fees

Fees

	£
Council audit	159,863
Grant Certification	23,850
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	183,713

Our fee assumptions include:

- Supporting schedules to all figures in the accounts are supplied by the agreed dates and in accordance with the agreed upon information request list
- The scope of the audit, and the Council and its activities, have not changed significantly
- The Council will make available management and accounting staff to help us locate information and to provide explanations
- The accounts presented for audit are materially accurate, supporting working papers and evidence agree to the accounts, and all audit queries are resolved promptly.

Grant certification

- Our fees for grant certification cover only housing benefit subsidy certification, which falls under the remit of Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited
- Fees in respect of other grant work, such as reasonable assurance reports, are shown under 'Fees for other services'.

Fees for other services

Fees for other services detailed on the following page, reflect those agreed at the time of issuing our Audit Plan. Any changes will be reported in our Audit Findings Report and Annual Audit Letter.

What is included within our fees

- A reliable and risk-focused audit appropriate for your business
- Feed back on your systems and processes, and identifying potential risks, opportunities and savings
- Invitations to events hosted by Grant Thornton in your sector, as well as the wider finance community
- Regular sector updates
- Ad-hoc telephone calls and queries
- Technical briefings and updates
- Internal benchmarking of key controls including IT systems
- Regular contact to discuss strategy and other important areas
- A review of accounting policies for appropriateness and consistency
- Annual technical updates for members of your finance team
- Regular Audit Committee Progress Reports

Independence and non-audit services

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 Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards and we confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards.

For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to Client Name. The following audit related and non-audit services were identified for the Council for 2016/17:

Fees for other services

Service	Fees £	Planned outputs
Audit related		
Teachers Pensions Agency	4,200	Reasonable Assurance Report
Report on Skills Funding Agency sub contracting arrangements	3,950	Factual Findings Report
Non-audit related		
None at this stage		

The amounts detailed are fees agreed to-date for audit related and non-audit services (to be) undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP (and Grant Thornton International Limited network member Firms) in the current financial year. Full details of all fees charged for audit and non-audit 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.

The above services are consistent with the Council's policy on the allotment of non-audit work to your auditors.

Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance

International Standard on Auditing (UK and Ireland) (ISA) 260, as well as other ISAs (UK and Ireland) prescribe matters which we are required to communicate with those charged with governance, and which we set out in the table opposite.

This document, The Audit Plan, outlines our audit strategy and plan to deliver the audit, while The Audit Findings will be issued prior to approval of the financial statements and will present key issues and other matters arising from the audit, together with an explanation as to how these have been resolved.

We will communicate any adverse or unexpected findings affecting the audit on a timely basis, either informally or via a report to the Council.

Respective responsibilities

As auditor we are responsible for performing the audit in accordance with ISAs (UK and Ireland), which is directed towards forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance.

This plan has been prepared in the context of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (<http://www.psa.co.uk/appointing-auditors/terms-of-appointment/>)

We have been appointed as the Council's independent external auditors by the Audit Commission, the body responsible for appointing external auditors to local public bodies in England at the time of our appointment. As external auditors, we have a broad remit covering finance and governance matters.

Our annual work programme is set in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice ('the Code') issued by the NAO and includes nationally prescribed and locally determined work (<https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/about-code/>). Our work considers the Council's key risks when reaching our conclusions under the Code.

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities.

It is the responsibility of the Council 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 Council is fulfilling these responsibilities.

Our communication plan	Audit Plan	Audit Findings
Respective responsibilities of auditor and management/those charged with governance	✓	
Overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit. Form, timing and expected general content of communications	✓	
Views about the qualitative aspects of the entity's accounting and financial reporting practices, significant matters and issues arising during the audit and written representations that have been sought		✓
Confirmation of independence and objectivity	✓	✓
A statement that we have complied with relevant ethical requirements regarding independence, relationships and other matters which might be thought to bear on independence. Details of non-audit work performed by Grant Thornton UK LLP and network firms, together with fees charged. Details of safeguards applied to threats to independence	✓	✓
Material weaknesses in internal control identified during the audit		✓
Identification or suspicion of fraud involving management and/or others which results in material misstatement of the financial statements		✓
Non compliance with laws and regulations		✓
Expected modifications to the auditor's report, or emphasis of matter		✓
Uncorrected misstatements		✓
Significant matters arising in connection with related parties		✓
Significant matters in relation to going concern	✓	✓



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