

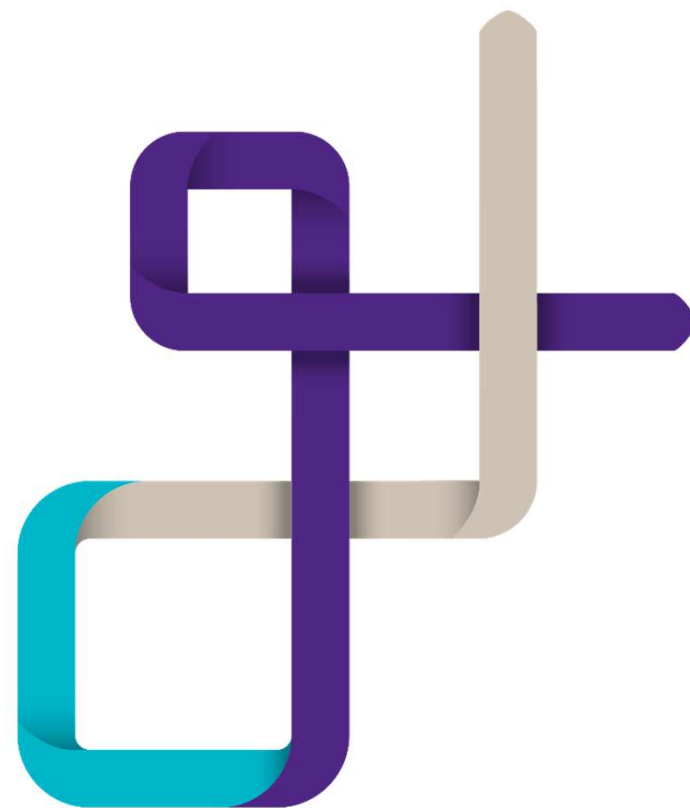
# External Audit Plan

*Year ending 31 March 2019*

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Blackburn with Darwen Council

5 April 2019



# Contents



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## Section

1. Introduction & headlines
2. Key matters impacting our audit approach
3. Significant risks identified
4. Other matters
5. Materiality
9. Value for Money arrangements
10. Audit logistics, team & fees
11. Early Close
12. Independence & non-audit services

## Appendices

- 1: Audit approach

## Page

- 3
- 4
- 5
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14

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 Authority 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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# Introduction & headlines

## Purpose

This document provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council ('the Authority') 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 Terms of Appointment and Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), the body responsible for appointing us as auditor of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. We draw your attention to both of these documents on the [PSAA website](#). 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 :

- Authority's financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Audit and Governance Committee); and
- Value for Money arrangements in place at the Authority for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources.

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or the Audit and Governance Committee of your responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the Authority 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 Authority is fulfilling these responsibilities.

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

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## 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 pension fund net liability
- Valuation of land and buildings

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.

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## Materiality

We have determined planning materiality to be £7.2m (PY £8.0m), which equates to 1.8% of your prior year gross expenditure for the year. 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 £360k (PY £395k).

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## Value for Money arrangements

Our risk assessment regarding your arrangements to secure value for money have identified the following VFM significant risk:

- Financial sustainability

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## Audit logistics

Our interim visit will take place in February and our final visit will take place in June and July. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan and our Audit Findings Report.

Our fee for the audit will be £83,186 (PY: £106,839) for the Authority, subject to the Authority meeting our requirements set out on page 12.

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## Independence

We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard 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.

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# Key matters impacting our audit

## External Factors

### The wider economy and political uncertainty

Local Government funding continues to be stretched with increasing cost pressures and demand from residents. The Council reported that portfolio controllable budgets were overspent by almost £0.6 million at 31st March 2018, when compared to the revised budget approved by the Executive Board in February 2018.

The Q3 Revenue Monitoring Report for 2018-19 indicates that an overspend by the year end of £1.2m within Children, Young People and Education and £1.0m within Environment, with cost pressures totalling approximately £1.1m across Leisure and Culture, Neighbourhood & Prevention Schemes, and Regeneration having also been identified. Each of these will need to be addressed in order to deliver a balanced outturn position at the year end.

At a national level, the government continues its negotiation with the EU over Brexit, and future arrangements remain uncertain at this time. The Authority will need to ensure that it is prepared for all outcomes, including in terms of any impact on contracts, service delivery, and support for local people and businesses.

### Changes to the CIPFA 2018/19 Accounting Code

The most significant changes relate to the adoption of:

- IFRS 9 Financial Instruments which impacts on the classification and measurement of financial assets and introduces a new impairment model.
- IFRS 15 Revenue from Contracts with Customers which introduces a five step approach to revenue recognition.

### New audit methodology

We will be using our new audit methodology, LEAP, for the 2018/19 audit. It will enable us to be more responsive to changes that may occur in your organisation and more easily incorporate our knowledge of the Authority into our risk assessment and testing approach.

## Internal Factors

### Local issues

An LGA review has been undertaken in the year, following which some recommendations have been raised in relation to meeting the challenges of the future and determining a “compelling vision for the Borough’s future”.

The Authority changed its financial ledger system to Civica in the prior year. Any such change does bring challenges, however it has created opportunities for efficiencies. In the current year there has been a change in your Fixed Asset Register system.

## Our response

- We will consider your arrangements for managing and reporting your financial resources as part of our work in reaching our Value for Money conclusion.
- We will consider whether your financial position leads to material uncertainty about the going concern of the Authority and will review related disclosures in the financial statements.
- We will continue to meet with senior managers and consider the Authority’s financial position and delivery of a balanced outturn position.

- We will keep you informed of changes to the financial reporting requirements for 2018/19 through on-going discussions and invitations to our technical update workshops.
- As part of our opinion on your financial statements, we will consider whether your financial statements reflect the financial reporting changes in the 2018/19 CIPFA Code.

- You will see changes in the terminology we use in our reports that will align more closely with the ISAs
- We will be reviewing more of your controls over operating expenditure.
- We will ensure that our resources and testing are best directed to address your risks in an effective way.

- We will consider any impacts from the transfer of the Fixed Asset Register system in our audit of the Property, Plant and Equipment balance at year end.
- We will review the results of the LGA review as part of our VFM conclusion and consider whether there are any impacts that affect our conclusion.

# 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
<p><b>The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions (rebutted)</b></p>	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue. 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 the Authority, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited</li> <li>• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable</li> </ul> <p>Therefore we do not consider this to be a significant risk for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.</p>	<p>As we do not consider this to be a significant risk for the Authority, we will not be undertaking any specific work in this area other than our normal audit procedures.</p>
<p><b>Management over-ride of controls</b></p>	<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 Authority faces external scrutiny of its spending 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"> <li>• evaluate the design effectiveness of management controls over journals</li> <li>• analyse the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals</li> <li>• test unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration</li> <li>• gain an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence</li> <li>• evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.</li> </ul>

# Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<b>Valuation of the pension fund net liability</b>	<p>The Authority's pension fund net liability, as reflected in its balance sheet as the net defined benefit liability, represents a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p> <p>The pension fund net liability is considered a significant estimate due to the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• size of the numbers involved, with the pension scheme liability estimated at £249.2m as at 31 March 2018; and</li><li>• the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.</li></ul> <p>We therefore identified valuation of the Authority's pension fund net liability as a significant risk.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• update our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Authority's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluate the design of the associated controls;</li><li>• evaluate the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work;</li><li>• assess the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Authority's pension fund valuation;</li><li>• assess the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Authority to the actuary to estimate the liability;</li><li>• test the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary;</li><li>• undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; and</li><li>• obtain assurances from the auditor of Lancashire County Council Pension Fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements.</li></ul>

# Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<b>Valuation of land and buildings</b>	<p>The Authority revalues its land and buildings on a rolling five-yearly basis. This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• size of the numbers involved, for example the net book value of land and buildings as at 31 March 2018 was £227.3m; and</li><li>• the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</li></ul> <p>Additionally, management will need to ensure the carrying value in the Authority financial statements is not materially different from the current value or the fair value for surplus assets at the financial statements date, where a rolling programme is used.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of land and buildings, particularly revaluations and impairments, as a significant risk..</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• evaluate and challenge management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work</li><li>• evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert</li><li>• write to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out</li><li>• challenge the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding</li><li>• test revaluations made during the year to see if they had been input correctly into the Authority's asset register</li><li>• evaluate 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 at year end.</li></ul>

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 Report in July 2019.

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# Other matters

## Other work

In addition to our responsibilities under the Code of Practice, we have a number of other audit responsibilities, as follows:

- We read your Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement to check that they are consistent with the financial statements on which we give an opinion and consistent with our knowledge of the Authority.
- We carry out work to satisfy ourselves that disclosures made in your Annual Governance Statement are in line with the guidance issued by CIPFA.
- We carry out work on your consolidation schedules for the Whole of Government Accounts process in accordance with NAO group audit instructions.
- We consider our other duties under legislation and the Code, as and when required, including:
  - Giving electors the opportunity to raise questions about your 2018/19 financial statements, consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the 2018/19 financial statements;
  - issue of a report in the public interest or written recommendations to the Authority under section 24 of the Act, copied to the Secretary of State.
  - Application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 or for a judicial review under Section 31 of the Act; or
  - Issuing an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Act.
- We certify completion of our audit.

## 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.

## 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 Authority's ability to continue as a going concern" (ISA (UK) 570). We will review management's assessment of the going concern assumption and evaluate the disclosures in the financial statements.



# Materiality

## The concept of materiality

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. 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

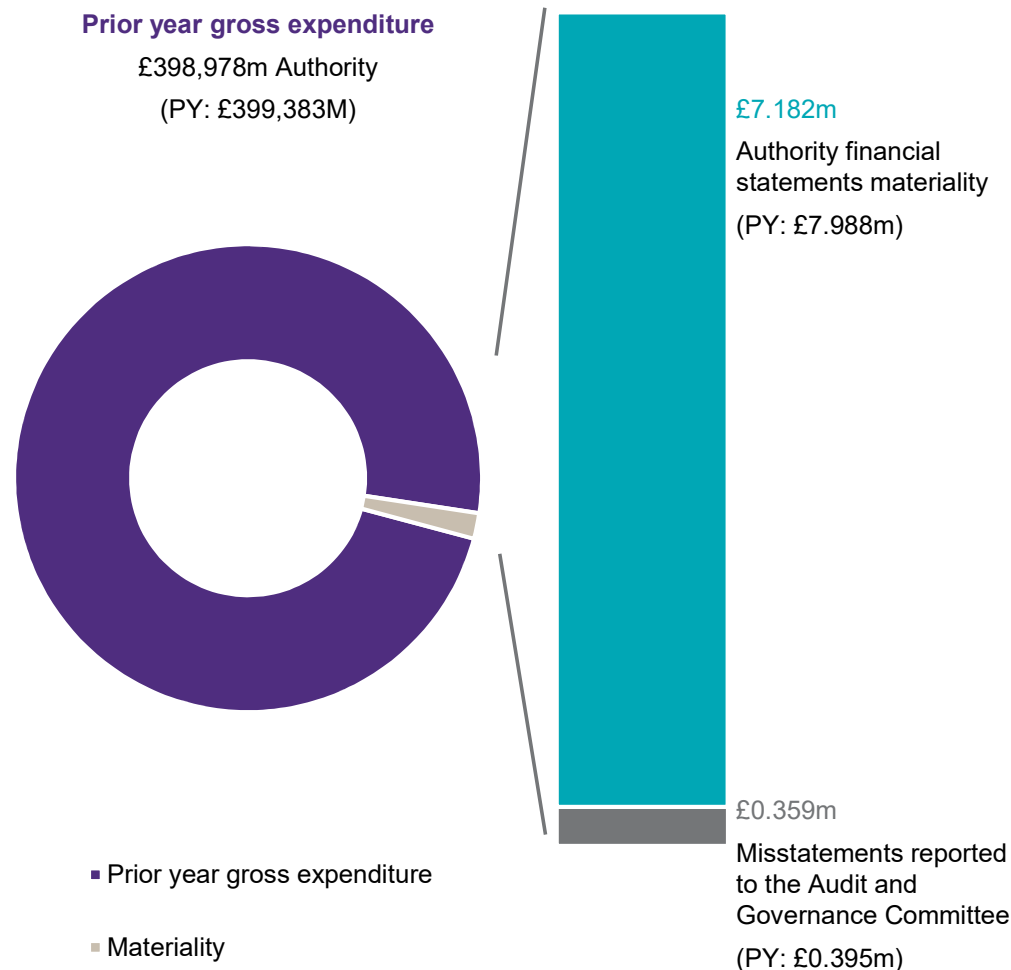
We have determined financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the gross expenditure of the Authority for the financial year. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. Materiality at the planning stage of our audit is £7.182m (PY £7.988m), which equates to 1.8% of your prior year gross expenditure for the year.

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 Audit 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 Audit 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 Authority, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £0.359m (PY £0.395m).

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



# Value for Money arrangements

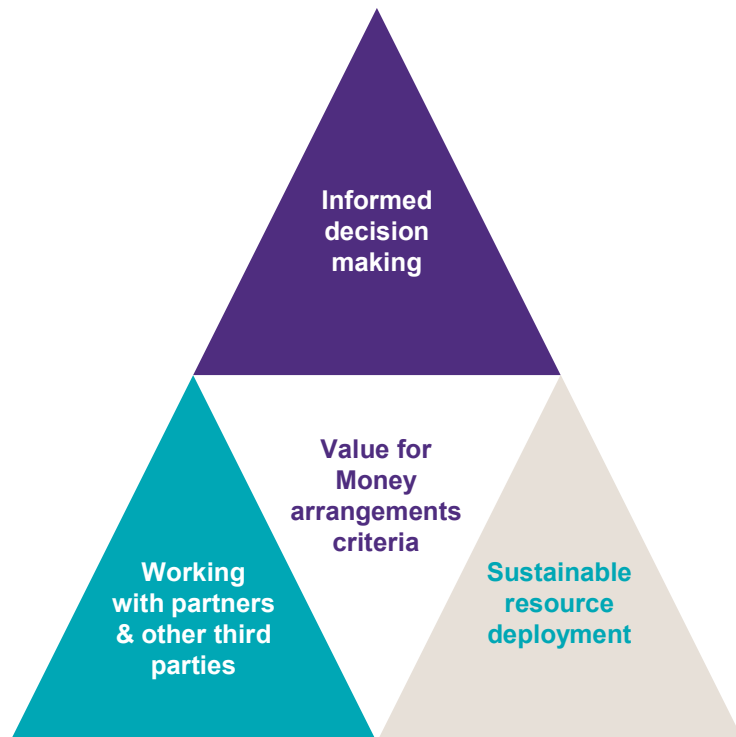
## Background to our VFM approach

The NAO issued its guidance for auditors on Value for Money work in November 2017. The guidance states that for Local Government bodies, auditors are required to give a conclusion on whether the Authority has proper arrangements in place to secure value for money.

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 below:



## Significant VFM risks

Those risks requiring audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood that proper arrangements are not in place at the Authority to deliver value for money.



### Financial sustainability

Blackburn with Darwen, in line with other authorities, continues to operate under significant financial pressures. The Council has currently identified two directorates with projected overspends, and cost pressures within three others.

We will continue to monitor the Authority's financial position through regular meetings with senior management and review of key documents including:

- the Medium Term Financial Strategy
- budget monitoring reports.

We will consider how the Authority manages budget delivery and also the key assumptions made to financial plans to meet the challenges ahead.

We will link the VfM work to our audit of your financial statements. By doing this we will be able to consider the consistency of the messages in your budget monitoring reports and the year-end financial statements.

We will assess progress in the identification and delivery of plans to address the funding gaps into 2019/20 and beyond.

We will also review whether the Authority has considered the potential impact of Brexit on its future financial position.

# Audit logistics, team & fees



## John Farrar, Engagement Lead

John will be the main point of contact for the Chief Executive and Senior Officers. John will share his wealth of knowledge and experience across the sector providing challenge and acting as a sounding board with Senior Officers and the Audit and Governance Committee. John will ensure our audit is tailored specifically to you and is delivered efficiently. John will review all reports and the team's work, focussing his time on the key risk areas to your audit.



## Simon Hardman, Audit Manager

Simon will work with the senior members of the finance team ensuring early delivery of testing and agreement of accounting issues on a timely basis. Simon will attend Audit Committees, undertake reviews of the team's work and draft reports, ensuring they remain clear, concise and understandable to all.



## Chloe Edwards, Audit Incharge

Chloe will lead the onsite team and will be the day to day contact for the audit. Chloe will monitor the deliverables, manage the query log with your finance team and highlight any significant issues and adjustments to senior management. Chloe will undertake the more technical aspects of the audit, coach the junior members of the team and assist in reviewing the team's work.

## Audit fees

The planned audit fees are £83,186 (PY: £106,839) for the financial statements audit completed under the Code, which are based on the scale fee published by PSAA and an additional £4,000 as the Council is a Public Interest Entity requiring an enhanced audit report. In setting your fee, we have assumed that the scope of the audit, and the Authority and its activities, do not significantly change.

## Our requirements

To ensure the audit is delivered on time and to avoid any additional fees, we have detailed our expectations and requirements in the following section 'Early Close'. If the requirements detailed overleaf are not met, we reserve the right to postpone our audit visit and charge fees to reimburse us for any additional costs incurred.

Any proposed fee variations, including the £4,000 referred to above, will need to be approved by PSAA.

# Early close

## Meeting the 31 July audit timeframe

In the prior year, the statutory date for publication of audited local government accounts was brought forward to 31 July, across the whole sector. This was a significant challenge for local authorities and auditors alike. For authorities, the time available to prepare the accounts was curtailed, while, as auditors we had a shorter period to complete our work and faced an even more significant peak in our workload than previously.

We have carefully planned how we can make the best use of the resources available to us during the final accounts period. As well as increasing the overall level of resources available to deliver audits, we have focused on:

- bringing forward as much work as possible to interim audits
- starting work on final accounts audits as early as possible, by agreeing which authorities will have accounts prepared significantly before the end of May
- seeking further efficiencies in the way we carry out our audits
- working with you to agree detailed plans to make the audits run smoothly, including early agreement of audit dates, working paper and data requirements and early discussions on potentially contentious items.

We are satisfied that, if all these plans are implemented, we will be able to complete your audit and those of our other local government clients in sufficient time to meet the earlier deadline.

## Client responsibilities

Where individual clients 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 clients. We will therefore conduct audits in line with the timetable set out in audit plans (as detailed on page 12). 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 by the statutory deadline. Such audits are unlikely to be re-started until very close to, or after the statutory deadline. In addition, it is highly likely that these audits will incur additional audit fees.

## Our requirements

To minimise the risk of a delayed audit or additional audit fees being incurred, we will work together with you so that you are able to:

- produce draft financial statements of good quality by the deadline you have agreed with us, including all notes, the narrative report and the Annual Governance Statement
- 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
- 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.

In return, we will ensure that:

- the audit runs smoothly with the minimum disruption to your staff
- you are kept informed of progress through the use of an issues tracker and weekly meetings during the audit
- we are available to discuss issues with you prior to and during your preparation of the financial statements.

# Independence & 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 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.

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard 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 December 2017 and PSAA's Terms of Appointment which set out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

## Other services provided by Grant Thornton

For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Authority. The following other services were identified:

Service	£	Threats	Safeguards
<b>Non-audit related</b>			
Certification of Housing Benefit	7,500	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	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 £7,500 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £83,186 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. 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.
CFO Insights Subscription	10,000	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	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 £10,000 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £83,186 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. 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.  CFO Insights does not provide any advice; the tool provides only information and insight that help to inform decision-making by officers. It is the responsibility of your officers who use this service to undertake informed interpretation of the information provided.
Place Analytics License	14,000	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	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 £14,000 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £83,186 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. 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.  The license does not provide any advice; it is an online software service offering providing key data relating to the financial performance of a local authority. It is the responsibility of your officers who use this service to undertake informed interpretation of the information provided.

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 Authority's policy on the allotment of non-audit work to your auditors. All services have been approved by the Audit and Governance Committee. 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.

# Appendix 1: Audit approach

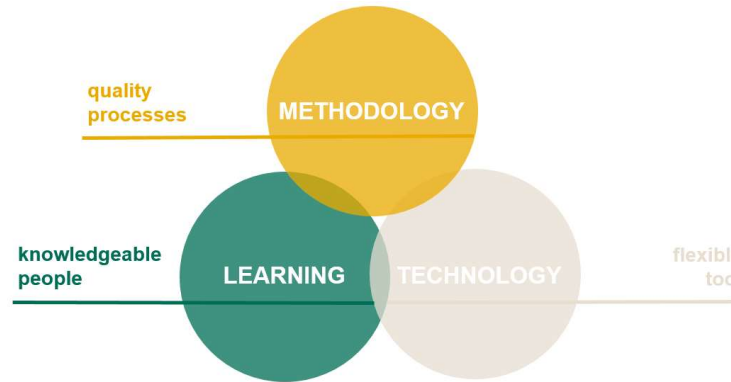
## Use of audit, data interrogation and analytics software

LEAP

LEAP

### Audit methodology

- A globally developed ISA-aligned methodology that aims to re-engineer our audit approach to fundamentally improve quality and efficiency
- LEAP empowers our engagement teams to deliver even higher quality audits, enables our teams to perform cost effective audits which are scalable to any client, enhances the work experience for our people and develops further insights into our clients' businesses



IDEA  
Data Analytics Software

IDEA

- We use one of the world's leading data interrogation software tools, called 'IDEA' which integrates the latest data analytics techniques into our audit approach
- We have used IDEA since its inception in the 1980's and we were part of the original development team. We still have heavy involvement in both its development and delivery which is further enforced through our chairmanship of the UK IDEA User Group
- In addition to IDEA, we also use other tools like ACL and Microsoft SQL server
- Analysing large volumes of data very quickly and easily enables us to identify exceptions which potentially highlight business controls that are not operating effectively

Appian

Appian

### Business process management

- Clear timeline for account review:
  - disclosure dealing
  - analytical review
- Simple version control
- Allow content team to identify potential risk areas for auditors to focus on



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