

Audit Strategy Memorandum

Gateshead Council



For the year ending 31 March 2017



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Executive summary

Purpose of this report

The Audit Strategy Memorandum sets out our audit plan in respect of the audit of Gateshead Council ('the Council') for the year ending 31 March 2017, and forms the basis for discussion at the Audit and Standards Committee meeting on 6 March 2017.

The plan sets out our proposed audit approach and is prepared to assist you in fulfilling your governance responsibilities. The responsibilities of those charged with governance are defined as overseeing the strategic direction of the entity and obligations related to the accountability of the entity, including overseeing the financial reporting process. We have determined that the Accounts Committee are those charged with governance for the purpose of our audit.

Timing of our work	Our audit will be delivered in four main phases as outlined in page 8 of this report. The statutory deadline for the completion of our audit work is 30 September 2017, however we aim to give our opinion on the 2016/17 Statement of Accounts by 31 July 2017.
Financial Statements audit	Significant risks We have identified the following areas on which we will carry out specific audit procedures to mitigate the risks of material misstatements in the Council's financial statements. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management override of controls;• Revenue recognition;• Valuation of property, plant and equipment;• Valuation of the defined benefit pension scheme; and• Introduction of the new iTrent Payroll system. Materiality At the planning stage of the audit we have set materiality for the financial statements as a whole at £11.503 million. In reporting the results of our work we do not report identified misstatements below a clearly trivial level. We have set this level at £345,000.
Value for Money conclusion	The work we carry out to form a conclusion on whether the Council has proper arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources is summarised on page 10. At this stage we have identified one significant risk in respect of our VFM work. This relates to sustainable resource deployment and reflects the ongoing need for the Council to meet the challenges associated with ongoing reductions in the amount of money available to fund services.
Independence	We have considered any actual, potential or perceived threats to our independence on page 15. We have not identified any such threats at this stage of the audit.

Audit scope and approach

The scope of our work

The detailed scope of our work as your appointed auditor for 2016/17 is set out in the National Audit Office's (NAO) Code of Audit Practice. Our responsibilities and powers are derived from the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ('the 2014 Act') and are summarised below.

Opinion on the financial statements

We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements. Our audit is planned and performed so to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material error and give a true and fair view of the financial performance and position of the Council for the year.

Our audit does not relieve management or the Accounts Committee, as those charged with governance, of their responsibilities.

Value for Money conclusion

We are required to conclude whether the Council has proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We discuss our Value for Money work in greater detail later in this report.

Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)

We report to the NAO on the consistency of the Council's financial statements with its WGA submission.

Electors' rights

The 2014 Act requires us to give an elector, or any representative of the elector, the opportunity to question us about the accounting records of the Council and consider any objection made to the accounts by an elector.

We also have a broad range of reporting responsibilities and powers that are unique to the audit of local authorities in the United Kingdom.

Our response to the risk of fraud

International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) require us to obtain reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material fraud and/or error. There are a range of ways in which fraud may arise in the context of your financial statements and we formally consider the risk of fraud as part of our planning work and design appropriate procedures to mitigate risks identified. We maintain an appropriate level of professional scepticism throughout the audit and are mindful that a material misstatement due to fraud is possible, however our audit should not be relied upon to identify all such misstatements.

The Accounts Committee (as those charged with governance) and Management also have responsibilities in respect of fraud. They are responsible for safeguarding assets and for the prevention and detection of fraud, error and non-compliance with laws and regulations.

We will enquire of the Audit and Standards Committee as part of our audit. Our enquiries will focus on:

- what role the Audit and Standards Committee has in relation to fraud and how it is kept informed of fraud related matters by management;
- what anti-fraud measures you have in place and how your policies and procedures are monitored; and
- whether you are aware of any actual, alleged or suspected fraud.

Our use of experts and other auditors

Management and auditor experts

There are material entries in your financial statements which are provided by management experts. For some of these entries, we will use our own expert to provide us with the assurance we require in relation to the work of your expert.

In addition to setting out information in respect of service organisations, Appendix A also summarises management's experts and our planned audit approach to obtaining assurance over their work.

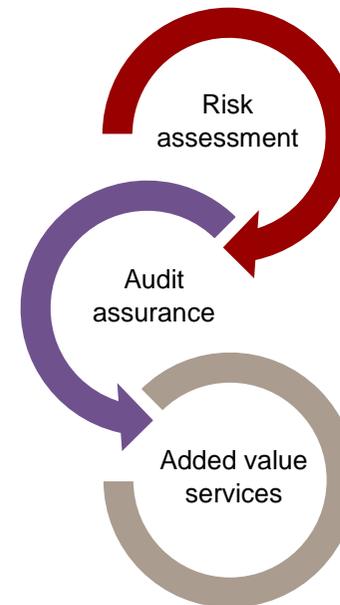
Internal audit

Where appropriate, we will seek to rely on work performed by internal audit where it provides us with the required assurance. We will meet with internal audit to discuss their work programme and findings, and factor this in when determining the most efficient testing strategy.

Where we intend to rely on the work of internal audit, we will evaluate their work and perform our own audit procedures to determine its adequacy for our audit.

Audit efficiency and our use of IT

Innovative and integrated use of IT drives the efficiency and effectiveness of our audit. Your audit team uses the latest IT-based audit solutions and is supported by a team of IT auditors each of who have extensive knowledge of the sector and providing assurance and advisory services across the public sector.



We know that all organisations are different and face different risks. Our audit platform is modern and flexible and allows us to tailor our audit approach to the specific risks relevant to the Council, while ensuring compliance with underlying auditing standards.

We focus on the risks to your business continuity and those that give rise to a risk of material misstatement in the financial statements. Your audit team has access to a full suite of data analytics tools which allow them to determine the most effective and efficient testing strategy using IT-audit techniques where appropriate.

Significant risks and key judgements

Identified significant risks

As part of our planning procedures we have considered whether there are risks of material misstatement in the Council's financial statements that require special audit consideration. Although we report identified significant risks at the planning stage of the audit, our risk assessment is a continuous process and we regularly consider whether new significant risks have arisen and how we intend to mitigate these risks. Where we identify any significant risks in addition to those set out below, we will report these to the Audit and Standards Committee as part of our Audit Completion Report.

Significant risk	How we will mitigate the risk
<p>Management override of control</p> <p>In all entities, management at various levels within an organisation are in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of their ability to manipulate accounting records and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Due to the unpredictable way in which such overrides could occur, we consider there to be a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk on all audits.</p>	<p>Our testing strategy will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review of material accounting estimates, which may be subject to management bias, included in the financial statements; • consideration and review of unusual or significant transactions outside the normal course of business; and • testing of journals recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments made in preparation of the financial statements.
<p>Revenue Recognition</p> <p>There is a risk of fraud in the financial reporting relating to revenue recognition due to the potential to inappropriately record revenue in the wrong period. Due to there being a risk of fraud in revenue recognition we consider it to be a significant risk.</p>	<p>Our testing strategy will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review of material accounting estimates, which may be subject to management bias, included in the financial statements; • consideration and review of unusual or significant transactions outside the normal course of business; and • testing of journals recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments made in preparation of the financial statements.

Significant risk	How we will mitigate the risk
<p>Pensions Estimates (IAS19) The financial statements contain material pension entries in respect of the retirement benefits. The calculation of these pension figures, both assets and liabilities, can be subject to significant volatility and includes estimates based upon a complex interaction of actuarial assumptions. This results in an increased risk of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will discuss with key contacts any significant changes to the pension estimates prior to the preparation of the financial statements. In addition to our standard programme of work in this area, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the management controls you have in place to assess the reasonableness of the figures provided by the Actuary; and • consider the reasonableness of the Actuary's output, referring to an expert's report on all actuaries nationally which is commissioned annually by the National Audit Office.
<p>Property, Plant and Equipment Valuations of these assets, in particular of land and buildings, require work from an expert valuer. Valuations of buildings must reflect both the condition of the building but also the valuation basis for that class of building as required by the CIPFA 'code'.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine the professional qualifications of your valuer; • challenge and substantiate the assumptions and the appropriateness of the date of the valuation used by your valuer in completing the valuations; • ensure that valuations and impairments have been completed on the correct basis for each item and that movements are in line with expectation; and • assess whether the report produced by the valuer has been correctly reflected in the accounts.
<p>Introduction of new Payroll system in 2016/17 (iTrent) The Council introduced a new Payroll system in April 2016. This introduction brings with it the potential for a material misstatement in the 2016/17 financial statements.</p>	<p>We will liaise with officers and carry out substantive testing in order to gain assurance that the transfer of information between payroll systems was carried out accurately and does not result in a material financial misstatement</p>

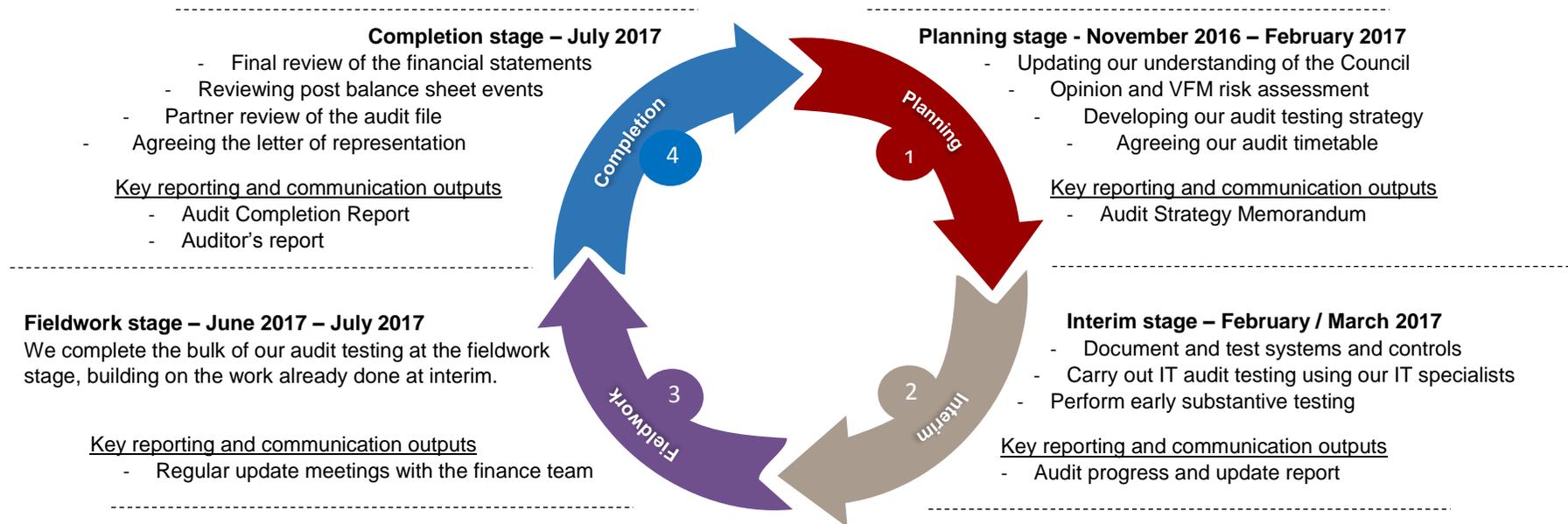
Timetable and communication

Our approach to communication

International Standards on Auditing require us to communicate a number of matters with you at various points during the audit cycle. Later in this section we outline exactly how we will communicate with the Accounts Committee as those charged with governance. As well as being an integral part of our responsibilities under auditing standards, we see two-way communication with the Audit and Standards Committee and the Council's staff as being critical to building a robust knowledge of your business, the risks and challenges you face and the plans you have in place to meet those challenges.

Audit timetable

The diagram below outlines the main phases of your audit, when each will be carried out and the outputs that you will receive at each stage. This is underpinned by a 'no surprises' approach to communication that ensures management and the Audit and Standards Committee are kept aware of significant issues on a timely basis. We intend to issue our Audit Strategy Memorandum in March 2017, our Audit Completion Report in July 2017 and our Annual Audit Letter in October 2017.



Key communication points

ISA 260 'Communication with those charged with governance' and ISA 265 'Communicating deficiencies in internal control to those charged with governance and management', require us to communicate a number of matters to you. These matters are set out below.

Matter to be communicated	Audit Strategy Memorandum	Audit Completion Report
Our responsibilities in relation to the audit of the financial statements and our wider responsibilities	✓	
Planned scope and timing of the audit	✓	
Significant audit risks and areas of management judgement	✓	
Confirmation of our independence	✓	✓
Responsibilities for preventing and detecting errors	✓	
Materiality	✓	✓
Fees for audit and other services	✓	
Significant deficiencies in internal control		✓
Significant findings from the audit		✓
Significant matters discussed with management		✓
Conclusions on the significant audit risks and areas of management judgement		✓
Summary of unadjusted misstatements		✓
Management representation letter		✓
Our proposed audit report		✓

In addition to the matters outlined above which we are required to communicate under auditing standards, we also communicate regularly with the Audit and Standards Committee through our Audit Progress Reports, presented on a quarterly basis. We also report to the Council on an annual basis to summarise our work and main conclusions through our Annual Audit Letter.

Value for Money Conclusion

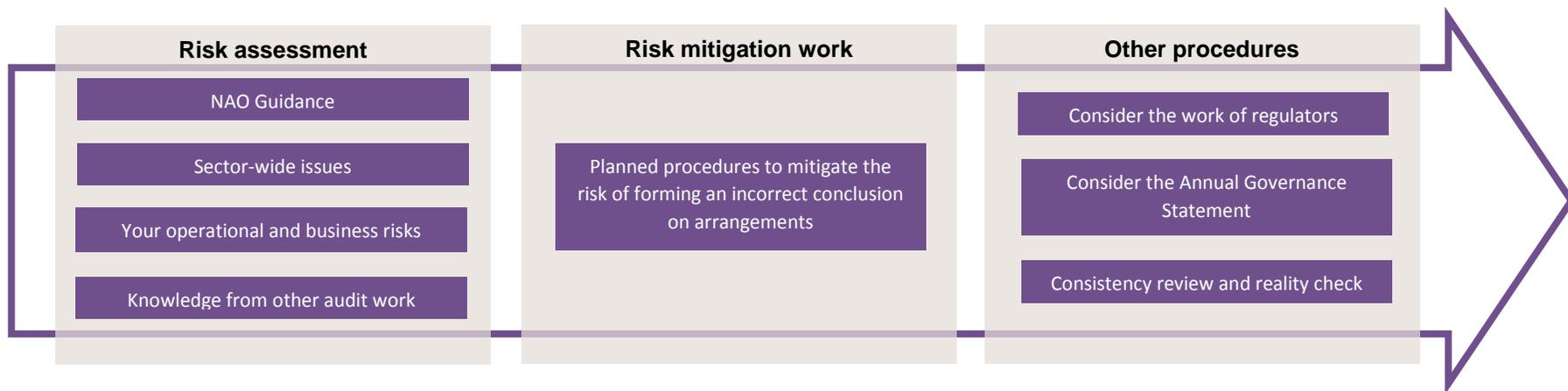
Our approach to Value for Money work

We are required to form a conclusion as to whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The NAO issues guidance to auditors that underpins the work we are required to carry out in order to form our conclusion, and sets out the criterion and sub-criteria that we are required to consider.

The overall criterion is that, 'in all significant respects, the Council had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.' To assist auditors in reaching a conclusion on this overall criterion, the following sub-criteria are provided set out by the NAO:

- Informed decision making.
- Sustainable resource deployment.
- Working with partners and other third parties.

A summary of the work we undertake to reach our conclusion is provided below.



Significant Value for Money risks

The NAO's guidance requires us to carry out work at the planning stage to identify whether or not a risk to the VFM conclusion exists. Risk, in the context of our VFM work, is the risk that we come to an incorrect conclusion rather than the risk of the arrangements in place at the Council being inadequate. As outlined above, we draw on our deep understanding of the Council and its partners, the local and national economy and wider knowledge of the public sector.

For 2016/17, we have identified a risk for our VFM conclusion. A summary of the risk and the work we intend to undertake to ensure we reach the correct conclusion is set out in the following table.

Value for Money conclusion risk	Work we intend to carry out
<p>Sustainable resource deployment: Planning finances effectively to support the sustainable delivery of strategic priorities and maintain statutory functions</p> <p>The Council continues to face financial pressures from reduced funding, increased demand and changing responsibilities. The Council is responding to the challenges by a programme of efficiencies, service reviews and developing new ways to manage demand and deliver services. Failure to have appropriate arrangements in place to identify and deliver this programme poses a significant risk to the Council's ability to deliver its strategic priorities and maintain statutory functions.</p>	<p>We will review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring and action plans for a sample of savings included in the budget; • the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy; • budget monitoring reports and other finance updates; • the progress made in identifying further savings required; and • progress on the Council's Change Programme.

Fees

Fees for work as the Council's appointed auditor

At this stage of the audit we are not planning any divergence from the scale fees set by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) as communicated to you in our fee letter on 11 April 2016.

Area of work	2016/17 proposed fee	2015/16 final fee
Code audit work	£130,298	£130,298
Housing Benefit Subsidy certification	£12,405	£10,615
Total	£142,703	£140,913

Fees for non-PSAA work

In addition to the fees outlined above in relation to our appointment by PSAA, we have been separately engaged by the Council to carry out additional work as outlined in the table below. Before agreeing to undertake any additional work we consider whether there are any actual, potential or perceived threats to our independence. Further information about our responsibilities in relation to independence is provided in Appendix B.

Area of work	2016/17 proposed fee	2015/16 final fee
Teachers' Pensions Return	£2,750	£2,750
Pooling of Housing Capital Receipts Return	£1,800	£1,800
Gateshead 3-7 School Centred Initial Teacher Training (Gateshead 3-7 SCITT)	£2,250	£2,250
Total	£6,800	£6,800

Our team

Cameron Waddell – Partner

Email: cameron.waddell@mazars.co.uk

Phone: 0191 383 6314

Cameron will be the key contact for the Audit and Standards Committee and Management. He will have overall responsibility for delivering a high quality audit to the Council. He will sign the auditor reports and liaise with the Chief Executive, Strategic Director, Corporate Resources and the Audit and Standards Committee. Along with Jim, he will attend Audit and Standards Committees and where appropriate, Council meetings and is available to Councillors.

Jim Dafter – Senior Manager

Email: jim.dafter@mazars.co.uk

Phone: 07815 876 042

Jim will manage and coordinate the audit and be the key point of contact for the Deputy Strategic Director (Corporate Finance), Strategic Finance Manager (Corporate Finance) and Group Accountant, Strategic Planning, Policy & Technical, as well as liaising with Internal Audit. Jim will attend Audit and Standards Committees and oversee completion of work to a high standard.

Campbell Dearden – Team Leader

Email: campbell.dearden@mazars.co.uk

Phone: 0191 4333 667

Campbell will be the key contact for the finance team, leading day-to-day audit work, reviewing the work of more junior members of the team and performing the audit work in more specialised areas.

In accordance with our internal policies for audit quality and risk management, we consider the audit of the Council to be a 'major audit'. As a result, and in line with the requirements of International Standards on Quality Control (ISQC) 1, the firm's Risk Management Partner has appointed an Engagement Quality Control Reviewer to the Council's audit who will bring an additional level of quality control to the engagement team.

Appendix A – Management’s Experts

Experts

The Council uses experts to provide entries in its financial statements. The table below outlines the areas of the financial statements where we expect the Council to use experts and an explanation of the approach we will take to obtaining assurance over those entries.

Financial statement area	Management’s expert	Planned audit approach
Defined benefit liability and associated IAS 19 entries and disclosures	Actuary (Aon Hewitt)	Consider the reasonableness of the actuary’s output, referring to an expert’s report on all actuaries nationally which is commissioned annually by the National Audit Office, prepared by PwC.
Property, plant and equipment valuations	BNP Paribas Real Estate (UK)	Consider the reasonableness of the valuers’ output, referring to an expert’s report on regional and national trends in property values which is commissioned annually by the National Audit Office, prepared by Gerald Eve.
Fair values	Capita	Consider the reasonableness of Capita’s output, referring to central assurances commissioned annually by the National Audit Office.

Appendix B – Independence

We are required by the Financial Reporting Council to confirm to you at least annually in writing, that we comply with the Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards. In addition we communicate any matters or relationship which we believe may have a bearing on our independence or the objectivity of the audit team.

Based on the information provided by you, and our own internal procedures to safeguard our independence as auditors, we confirm that in our professional judgement, there are no relationships between us, and any of our related or subsidiary entities, and you, and your related entities, creating any unacceptable threats to our independence within the regulatory or professional requirements governing us as your auditors.

We have policies and procedures in place which are designed to ensure that we carry out our work with integrity, objectivity and independence. These policies include:

- all partners and staff are required to complete an annual independence declaration;
- all new partners and staff are required to complete an independence confirmation and also complete computer-based ethical training;
- rotation policies covering audit engagement partners and other key members of the audit team who are required to rotate off a client after a set number of years; and
- use by managers and partners of our client and engagement acceptance system which requires all non-audit services to be approved in advance by the audit engagement partner.

We wish to confirm that in our professional judgement, as at the date of this document, we are independent and comply with UK regulatory and professional requirements. However, if at any time you have concerns or questions about our integrity, objectivity or independence please discuss these with either Cameron Waddell or Jim Dafter.

Prior to the provision of any non-audit services, Cameron will undertake appropriate procedures to consider and fully assess the impact that providing the service may have on our auditor independence. The following table outlines the potential threats to our independence and the safeguards put in place.

Area	Perceived threat	Safeguards and procedures
Services in relation to grant and returns certification and assurance.	Self -review	The review does not involve the preparation of information that has a material impact upon the financial statements subject to audit by Mazars.
	Self interest	The total fee level is not deemed to be material to the Council or Mazars. The work undertaken is not paid on a contingency basis.
	Management	The work does not involve Mazars making any decisions on behalf of management.
	Advocacy	The work does not involve Mazars advocating the Council to third parties.
	Familiarity	Work is not deemed to give rise to a familiarity threat given these pieces of assurance work used to fall under the Audit Commission's certification regime and were the responsibility of the Council's appointed auditor.
	Intimidation	The nature of the work does not give rise to any intimidation threat from management to Mazars.

Appendix C - Materiality

Materiality is an expression of the relative significance or importance of a particular matter in the context of financial statements as a whole. Misstatements in financial statements are considered to be material if they, individually or in aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

Judgements on materiality are made in light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by the size and nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both. Judgements about materiality are based on consideration of the common financial information needs of users as a group and not on specific individual users.

The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our perception of the financial information needs of the users of the financial statements. In making our assessment we assume that users:

- have a reasonable knowledge of business, economic activities and accounts;
- have a willingness to study the information in the financial statements with reasonable diligence;
- understand that financial statements are prepared, presented and audited to levels of materiality;
- recognise the uncertainties inherent in the measurement of amounts based on the use of estimates, judgement and the consideration of future events; and
- will make reasonable economic decisions on the basis of the information in the financial statements.

We consider materiality whilst planning and performing our audit.

Whilst planning our audit, we make judgements about the size of misstatements which we consider to be material and which provides a basis for determining the nature, timing and extent of risk assessment procedures, identifying and assessing the risk of material misstatement and determining the nature, timing and extent of further audit procedures.

The materiality determined at the planning stage does not necessarily establish an amount below which uncorrected misstatements, either individually or in aggregate, will be considered as immaterial.

We revise materiality for the financial statements as our audit progresses should we become aware of information that would have caused us to determine a different amount had we been aware of that information at the planning stage.

We discuss with management any significant misstatements or anomalies that we identify during the course of the audit and we report in our Audit Completion Report all unadjusted misstatements we have identified other than those which are clearly trivial, and obtain written representation that explains why these remain unadjusted.

Appendix D – Our added value

Our primary responsibilities as the Council’s external auditor are outlined in the main body of this report. As your external auditor we are ideally placed to provide added value in delivering those responsibilities and the diagram below provides a summary of how we do this.

Insight

Analysis of emerging issues shared regularly with you through our Audit Progress Reports.

Sharing knowledge from our membership of a range of professional networks including those hosted by the ICAEW and NAO.

Regular updates from our public services advisory team on lessons learned from its work across the UK public sector.

Access to our public sector governance forum allowing free and open discussion of governance issues.

Expertise

Specialist public sector financial reporting advisory service, providing expert analysis of emerging accounting issues.

A dedicated IT audit and advisory team, with expertise and experience of providing services across the public sector.

Provision of annual accounting workshops attended by your finance team.

Support for continuous improvement

Clear and open communication, allowing for a sensible basis of resolving emerging issues.

Internal control recommendations and follow-up work in conjunction with internal audit.