



The Audit Plan for Halton Council

Year ended 31 March 2015

May 2015

Mark Heap
Director
T 0161 234 6375
E mark.r.heap@uk.gt.com

Liz Temple-Murray
Manager
T 0161 214 6370
E liz.m.temple-murray@uk.gt.com

John Padfield
Executive
T 0161 214 6378
E john.padfield@uk.gt.com



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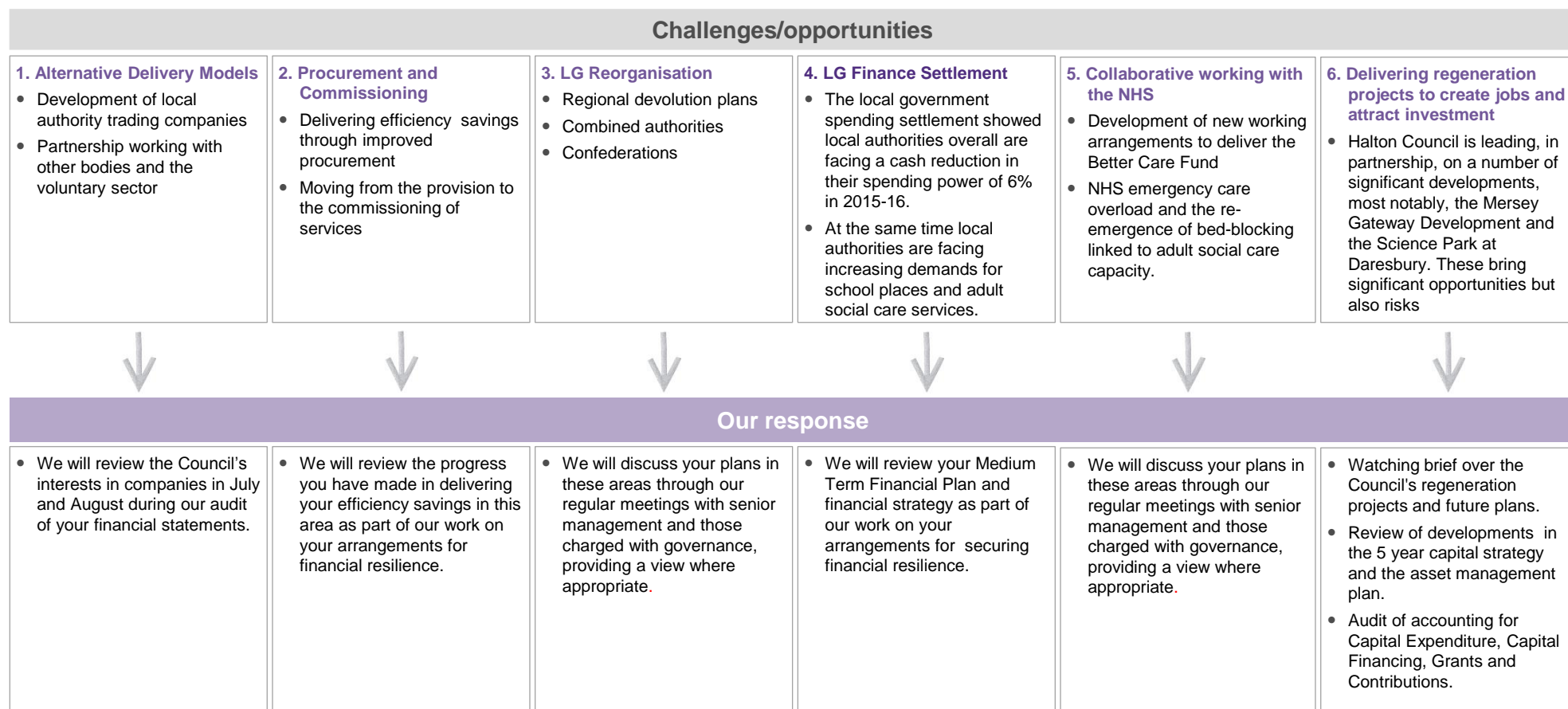
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Understanding your business

In planning our audit we need to understand the challenges and opportunities the Council is facing. We set out a summary of our understanding below.



Developments relevant to your business and the audit

In planning our audit we also consider the impact of key developments in the sector and take account of national audit requirements as set out in the Code of Audit Practice ('the code') and associated guidance.

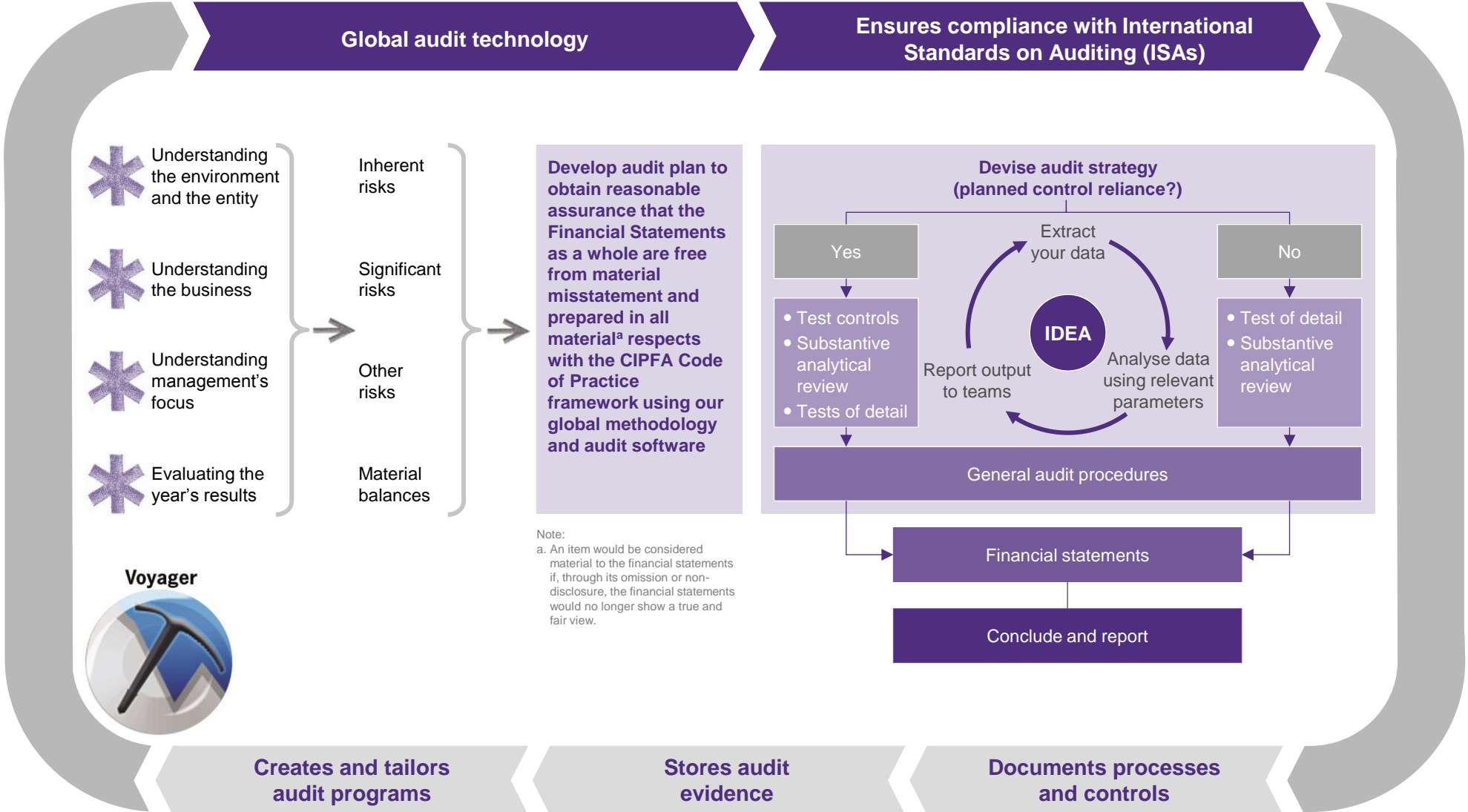
Developments and other requirements

<p>1. Financial reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to the CIPFA Code of Practice • Changes to the recognition of school land and buildings on local authority balance sheets • Adoption of new group accounting standards (IFRS 10,11 and 12) 	<p>2. Regional Devolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationally there is a move for greater devolution and a push for the agreement of City region devolution deals 	<p>3. Corporate governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Governance Statement (AGS) • Explanatory foreword 	<p>4. Better Care Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Care Fund (BCF) plans and the associated pooled budgets will be operational from 1 April 2015 	<p>5. Financial Pressures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing service provision with less resource • Progress against savings plans 	<p>6. Other requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is required to submit a Whole of Government accounts pack on which we provide an audit opinion • The Council completes grant claims and returns on which audit certification is required
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Our response

<p>We will review whether</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Council complies with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice through discussions with management and our substantive testing • schools are accounted for correctly and in line with the latest guidance • the group boundary is recognised in accordance with the Code and joint arrangements are accounted for correctly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority was established on 1 April 2014. We will discuss your plans in these areas through our regular meetings with senior management and those charged with governance, providing a view where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will review the arrangements the Council has in place for the production of the AGS • We will review the AGS and the explanatory foreword to consider whether they are consistent with our knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will consider whether the BCF is a risk in the context of our VfM conclusion and will carry out further work if required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will review the Council's performance against the 2014/15 budget, including consideration of performance against the savings plan • We will undertake a review of Financial Resilience as part of our VfM conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will carry out work on the WGA pack in accordance with requirements • We will certify the housing benefit subsidy claim in accordance with the requirements specified by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd. This company took over the Audit Commission's responsibilities for housing benefit grant certification from 1 April 2015.
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Our audit approach



Significant risks identified

'Significant risks often relate to significant non-routine transactions and judgmental matters. Non-routine transactions are transactions that are unusual, either due to 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 315).

In this section we outline the significant risks of material misstatement which we have identified. There are two presumed significant risks which are applicable to all audits under auditing standards (International Standards on Auditing – ISAs) which are listed below:

Significant risk	Description	Substantive audit procedures
The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions	<p>Under ISA 240 there is a presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.</p> <p>This presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue recognition.</p>	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at Halton 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 Halton Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.
Management over-ride of controls	<p>Under ISA 240 the presumption is 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"> • Documentation of journal entry policy and procedures • Testing of journal entries in periods 1 to 9 and review of unusual significant transactions <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of accounting estimates, judgments and decisions made by management • Testing of journal entries for periods 10 to 12 and closedown • Review of unusual significant transactions

Other risks identified

The auditor should evaluate the design and determine the implementation of the entity's controls, including relevant control activities, over those risks for which, in the auditor's judgment, it is not possible or practicable to reduce the risks of material misstatement at the assertion level to an acceptably low level with audit evidence obtained only from substantive procedures (ISA 315).

In this section we outline the other risks of material misstatement which we have identified as a result of our planning.

Other risks	Description	Audit Approach
Operating expenses	Creditors understated or not recorded in the correct period (Operating expenses understated)	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation of processes and controls in place in the accounts payable system • Walkthrough testing to confirm the operation of controls is in line with our understanding <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the accruals process, and review and testing of any significant estimates made • Cut-off testing to obtain assurance that creditors have been accounted for in the correct financial year.
Employee remuneration	Employee remuneration and benefit obligations and expenses understated (Remuneration expenses not correct)	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation and identification of the processes and key controls within the employee remuneration cycle. • Walkthrough testing to confirm the operation of controls is in line with our understanding <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantive testing of payments made to employees during the 2014-15 financial year. • Use of analytical techniques to compare expected payroll costs with actual. • Reconciliation of payroll charged in the general ledger to the payroll system.

Value for money

Value for money

The Code requires us to issue a conclusion on 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.

Our VfM conclusion is based on the following criteria specified by the Audit Commission:

VfM criteria	Focus of the criteria
The organisation has proper arrangements in place for securing financial resilience	The organisation has robust systems and processes to manage financial risks and opportunities effectively, and to secure a stable financial position that enables it to continue to operate for the foreseeable future
The organisation has proper arrangements for challenging how it secures economy, efficiency and effectiveness	The organisation is prioritising its resources within tighter budgets, for example by achieving cost reductions and by improving efficiency and productivity

We will carry out a risk assessment to identify areas of risk to our VfM conclusion and then a more detailed risk assessment. We will undertake work in the following areas to address the risks identified:

- performance against financial targets
- arrangements relating to financial governance, strategic financial planning and financial control.
- arrangements for prioritising resources, improving efficiency and productivity.
- proper arrangements to secure economy efficiency and effectiveness, stewardship and governance and reviewing the adequacy of those arrangements

Specifically we will:

- follow-up any issues raised or recommendations made in previous reports issued by the external auditor, including our work last year on the Better Care Fund
- review your Annual Governance Statement
- review the results of other relevant regulatory bodies or inspectorates
- carry out a review of Financial Resilience.

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 agree any additional reporting to the Council on a review-by-review basis.

Results of interim audit work

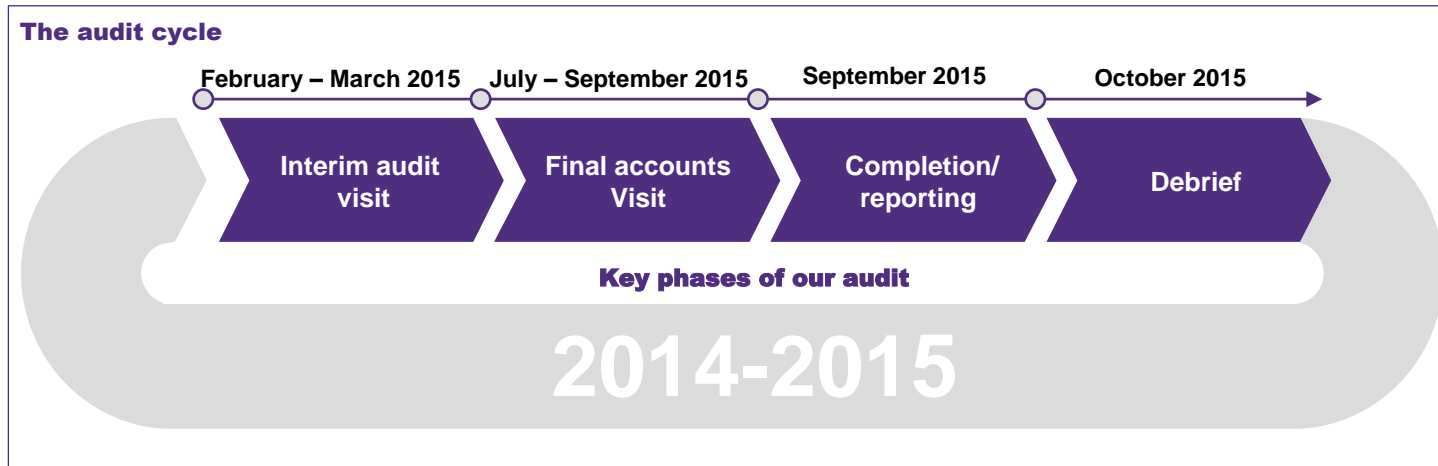
The findings of our interim audit work, and the impact of our findings on the accounts audit approach, are summarised in the table below:

	Work performed and findings	Conclusion
Internal audit	<p>We have completed a high level review of internal audit's overall arrangements.</p> <p>We also reviewed internal audit's work on the Council's key financial systems to date.</p>	<p>Our work has not identified any issues which we wish to bring to your attention.</p> <p>Our review of internal audit work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.</p>
Walkthrough testing	<p>We have completed walkthrough tests of controls operating in areas where we consider that there is a risk of material misstatement to the financial statements.</p> <p>Our work has not identified any issues which we wish to bring to your attention. Internal controls have been implemented in accordance with our documented understanding.</p>	<p>Our work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.</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 • Human resource policies and practices 	<p>Our work has identified no material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements</p>

Results of interim audit work cont'd

	Work performed	Conclusion
Review of information technology controls	Our information systems specialist is performing a high level review of the general IT control environment as part of the overall review of the internal controls system.	Our work is still in progress.
Journal entry controls	<p>We have reviewed the Council's journal entry policies and procedures as part of determining our journal entry testing strategy..</p> <p>To date we have undertaken detailed testing on journal transactions recorded for the first nine months of the financial year, by extracting 'unusual' entries for further review.</p>	<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>No issues have been identified that we wish to highlight for your attention.</p> <p>We will review and test journals raised in periods 10-12 and closedown once the annual accounts are prepared.</p>
Judgements and estimates	<p>The CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting for 2014/15 includes new requirements for schools in local authorities. It is likely that the accounting treatment will require significant judgements based on the circumstances of individual schools.</p> <p>The Council has a number of interests in companies and has previously prepared annual group financial statements. It is considering not doing so in 2014/15 on grounds of materiality.</p>	<p>We have discussed the issue with the finance team and shared our assessment of what local authorities need to do to meet the requirements of the Code. It is clear that this is a complex issue involving judgement and we will look to complete our review of your assessment of the accounting treatment of individual schools' assets at our interim audit visit.</p> <p>We have discussed the issue with the finance team and will review the team's key judgements, considering whether the resulting accounts submitted for audit are sufficiently informative in all material respects.</p>

Key dates



Date	Activity
Dec 2014 – Mar 2015	Planning
February – March 2015	Interim site visit
May 2015	Presentation of audit plan to Audit Committee
July – September 2015	Year end fieldwork
September 2015	Audit findings clearance meeting with Operational Director, Financial Management
September 2015	Report audit findings to those charged with governance (Business Efficiency Board)
By 30 September 2015	Sign financial statements opinion

Fees and independence

Fees 2014/15

	£
Council audit	140,392
Grant certification	10,740
Total fees (excluding VAT)	151,132

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

Grant certification

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

Fees for other services 2014/15

Service	Fees £
Independent report on Teachers' Pensions return (PEN)	4,200
Independent report on Regional Growth Fund claim (RGF)	3,110
Tax (Employee Solutions) work for the Council:	8,750
VAT; agreed fee £25,800 - £27,800	25,800 - £27,800

Fees for other services

Fees for other services 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.

Independence and ethics

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 therefore we confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

Full details of all fees charged for audit and non-audit services will be included in our Audit Findings report at the conclusion of the audit.

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

Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance

International Standards on Auditing (ISA) 260, as well as other ISAs, 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

This plan has been prepared in the context of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission (www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

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. 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 Audit Commission and includes nationally prescribed and locally determined work. Our work considers the Council's key risks when reaching our conclusions under the Code.

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.

	Audit plan	Audit findings
Our communication plan		
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 issue 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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