

External Audit Plan

Year ending 31 March 2018

Maidstone Borough Council

19 March 2018



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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit planning process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect the Council or any 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 Maidstone Borough Council ('the Council') 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 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 Maidstone Borough Council. We draw your attention to both of these documents on the [PSAA website](#).

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:

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

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee of your 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 audit approach is based on a thorough understanding of the Council's business and is risk based.

Significant risks

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

- The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions
- Management override of controls
- Valuation of Property, Plant and Equipment
- Valuation of the Pension Fund Net Liability

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

Materiality

We have determined planning materiality to be £1.813m (PY £1.787m), which equates to 2% of your forecast 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 £90,700 (PY £89k).

We have determined Cash to be 'material by nature' and have set a lower separate materiality of £500k for this area.

Value for Money arrangements

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

- Overall financial position – Medium Term Financial Plan

Audit logistics

Our interim visit will take place in February/March and our final visit will take place in June/July 2018. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan and our Audit Findings Report.

Our fee for the audit will be no less than £50,475 (PY: £50,475) for the Council.

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

Deep business understanding

Changes to service delivery		Changes to financial reporting requirements		Key challenges	
<p>Commercialisation</p> <p>The scale of investment activity, primarily in commercial property, has increased as local authorities seek to maximise income generation. These investments are often discharged through a company, partnership or other investment vehicle. The Council has set up a property company to manage the properties it is purchasing to enable it to generate market rents from these to support its financial position.</p> <p>Local authorities need to ensure that their commercial activities are presented appropriately, in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice and statutory framework, such as the Capital Finance Regulations. Where borrowing to finance these activities, local authorities need to comply with CIPFA's Prudential Code. A new version of the Code was published in December 2017.</p>	<p>Business Rate Pooling</p> <p>In September 2017, the government launched a prospectus inviting local authorities to submit proposals to pilot 100% business rates retention in 2018/19. Kent councils worked together to submit a bid proposing 70% of the monies being retained to support financial sustainability of the authorities involved and 30% being used to fund future growth initiatives. It was announced in December 2017 that Kent will be one of the 10 new pilots. The retained monies will be distributed to each authority on the basis of their population and growth.</p>	<p>Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (the Regulations)</p> <p>The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is currently undertaking a review of the Regulations, which may be subject to change. The date for any proposed changes has yet to be confirmed, so it is not yet clear or whether they will apply to the 2017/18 financial statements.</p> <p>Under the 2015 Regulations local authorities are required to publish their accounts along with the auditors opinion by 31 July 2018.</p>	<p>Narrative Reporting</p> <p>The 2017/18 Code has introduced a 'principles-based approach' to preparing the Narrative Report. The aim of this is to bring in the requirements of the Strategic Report from the HM Treasury Financial Reporting Manual (FRoM).</p> <p>The new guidance is not overly prescriptive and thus the aim is for Local Authorities to use this section to tell the story of what matters to the readers of their Accounts, and thus should focus on the items which are going to have a significant impact on the Council's operations.</p>	<p>Financial Pressures</p> <p>The Council has a good track record of delivering against its budgets, and has set a balanced budget for 2018-19, with the aim of delivering a small surplus at the end of that year.</p> <p>There is still a need to identify a small level of savings for 2019-20, but past this date the savings gap is in the region of £2.5m over the last three years of the Medium Term Financial Plan. There is of course a lot of uncertainty still over this period given the next Local Government Spending Review will take effect from 2020, but the Council should look to be proactive in looking for savings for this period so they are in a strong position irrespective of what the Review delivers.</p>	<p>Temporary Housing</p> <p>The demand for Temporary Housing in the Borough remains a challenge for the Council, with this area again generating an overspend during the course of the year.</p> <p>The Council is undertaking considerable work to try to tackle the causes of homelessness in the Borough, which is having some success as more properties are being brought into use to house some of the people who have been made homeless. The Council has also received some homelessness grants which are also going to be used to try and reduce the financial burden this is placing on the Council.</p>
		<p>Changes to the CIPFA 2017/18 Accounting Code</p> <p>CIPFA have introduced other minor changes to the 2017/18 Code which confirm the going concern basis for local authorities, and updates for Leases, Service Concession arrangements and financial instruments.</p>			

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 uncertainty about the going concern assumption and will review any related disclosures in the financial statements.
- We will keep you informed of changes to the Regulations and any associated changes to financial reporting or public inspection requirements for 2017/18 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 2017/18 CIPFA Code, and the impact of impairment assessments and the adequacy of any provisions included within the Accounts.

Significant risks identified

Significant risks are defined by professional standards as risks that, in the judgement of the auditor, require special audit consideration because they have a higher risk of material misstatement. Such risks often relate to significant non-routine transactions and judgmental matters. In identifying risks, audit teams consider the nature of the risk, the potential magnitude of misstatement, and its likelihood.

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<p>The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions</p>	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.</p> <p>This presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue recognition.</p>	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the 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 Maidstone Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable <p>Therefore we do not consider this to be a significant risk for Maidstone Borough Council.</p>
<p>Management over-ride of controls</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. .</p> <p>Management over-ride of controls is a risk requiring special audit consideration.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gain an understanding of the accounting estimates, judgements applied and decisions made by management and consider their reasonableness • obtain a full listing of journal entries, identify and test unusual journal entries for appropriateness • evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies or significant unusual transactions.

Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Valuation of property, plant and equipment	<p>The Council revalues its land and buildings on an quinquennial basis to ensure that carrying value is not materially different from fair value. This represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements.</p> <p>We identified the valuation of land and buildings revaluations and impairments as a risk requiring special audit consideration.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review management's processes and assumptions for their calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work • consider the competence, expertise and objectivity of any management experts used; • discuss with the valuer the basis on which the valuation is carried out and challenge of the key assumptions; • review and challenge the information used by the valuer to ensure it is robust and consistent with our understanding; • test revaluations made during the year to ensure they are input correctly into the Council's asset register; and • 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.
Valuation of pension fund net liability	<p>The Council's pension fund asset and liability as reflected in its balance sheet represents a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p> <p>We identified the valuation of the pension fund net liability as a risk requiring special audit consideration.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Evaluate 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 • Undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made. • Check the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in notes to the financial statements with the actuarial report from your actuary

Reasonably possible 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 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.

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<p>Employee remuneration</p>	<p>Payroll expenditure represents a significant percentage (16%) of the Council's operating expenses.</p> <p>As the payroll expenditure comes from a number of individual transactions and an interface with a sub-system there is a risk that payroll expenditure in the accounts could be understated. We therefore identified completeness of payroll expenses as a risk requiring particular audit attention</p>	<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the Council's accounting policy for recognition of payroll expenditure for appropriateness; • gain an understanding of the Council's system for accounting for payroll expenditure and evaluate the design of the associated controls; • agree that payroll costs are complete within the financial statements via review of the reconciliations between the payroll system and the General Ledger; and • gain assurances via a trend analysis and detailed analytics to ensure that pay included within the accounts is materially complete. If this is not possible we will undertake further substantive testing of a sample of employees.
<p>Operating expenses</p>	<p>Non-pay expenses on other goods and services also represents a significant percentage (39%) of the Council's operating expenses. Management uses judgement to estimate accruals of un-invoiced costs.</p> <p>We identified completeness of non- pay expenses as a risk requiring particular audit attention:</p>	<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the Council's accounting policy for recognition of non-pay expenditure for appropriateness; • gain an understanding of the Council's system for accounting for non-pay expenditure and evaluate the design of the associated controls; • perform detailed substantive testing on operating expenditure recorded for the financial year; and • test operating expenditure to ensure cut-off has been correctly applied.

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 carry out work to satisfy ourselves that disclosures made in your Annual Governance Statement are in line with the guidance issued 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 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 the Act and the Code, as and when required, including:
 - giving electors the opportunity to raise questions about your 2017/18 financial statements, consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the 2017/18 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.

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 entity'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

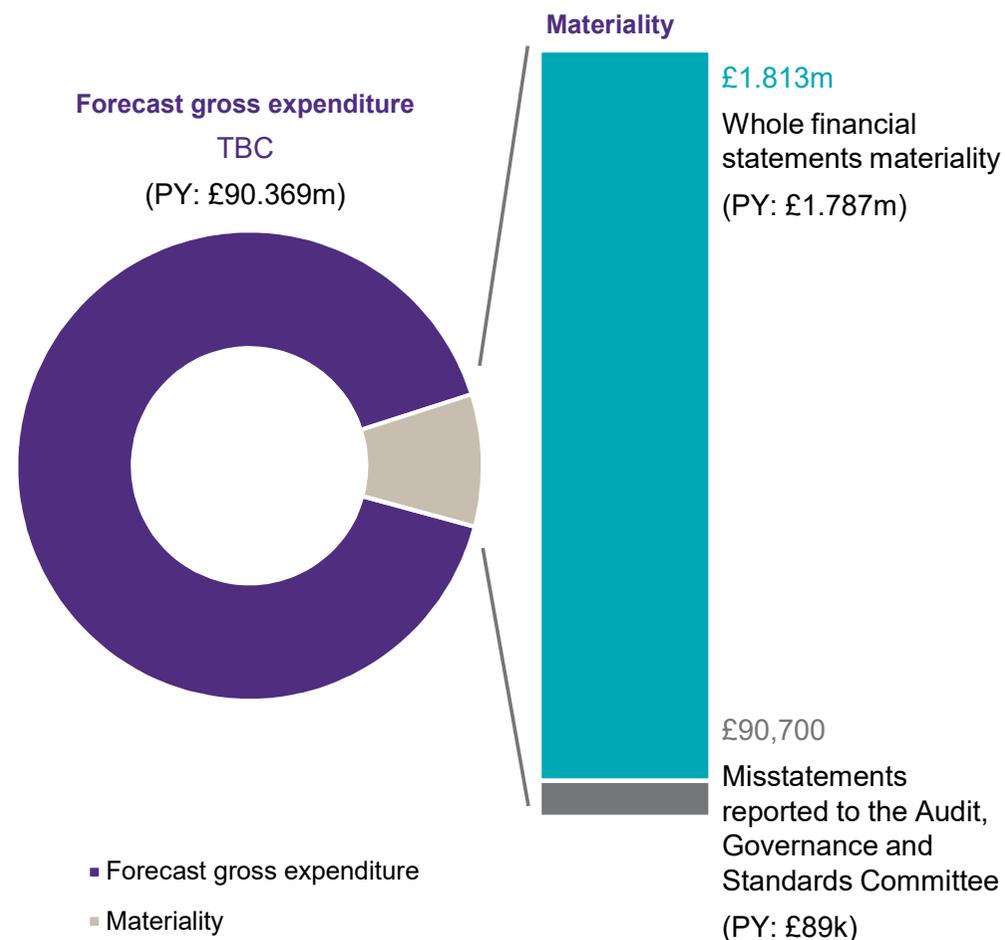
We propose to calculate financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the gross expenditure of the Council for the financial year. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. We have determined planning materiality (the financial statements materiality determined at the planning stage of the audit) to be £1.813m (PY £1.787m), which equates to 2% of your forecast gross expenditure for the year. We design our procedures to detect errors in specific accounts at a lower level of precision.

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. As mentioned on Page 3, we have determined Cash to be 'material by nature' and have set a lower separate materiality of £500k for this area.

Matters we will report to the Audit, Governance and Standards 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, Governance and Standards 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 Council, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £90,700 (PY £89k).

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, Governance and Standards Committee to assist it in fulfilling its governance responsibilities.



Value for Money arrangements

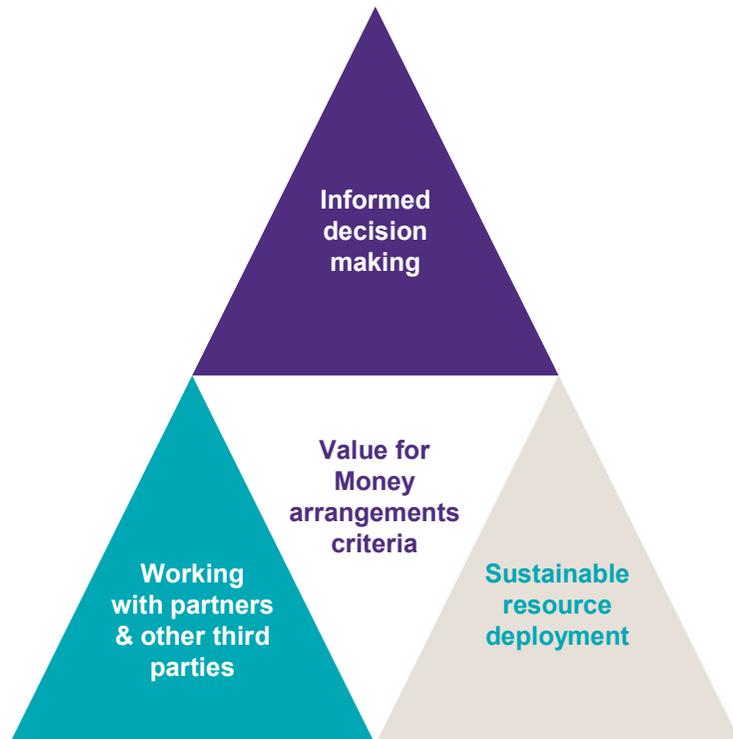
Background to our VFM approach

The NAO issued its guidance for auditors on Value for Money work for 2017/18 in November 2017. 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 below:



Significant VFM risks

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



Overall Financial Position – Medium Term Financial Plan

Risk

Whilst the Council has been able to set a balanced budget over the short term, currently there is a requirement for a considerable level of savings of the life of the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This is largely to do with the uncertainty over the next Local Government Finance Settlement, which will take effect from 2020, but the Council should be looking to take steps to mitigate any negative impact from the Settlement where possible.

Response

We propose to:

- review the assumptions behind the latest MTFP, covering the period up to March 2023;
- consider the 2017-18 budget outturn, and any implications this may have for the MTFP, along with the latest outturn against the 2018-19 budget
- review the savings proposals which have been identified to date in respect of the savings requirements, along with the plans that the Council has to identify the additional savings currently required for the life of the MTFP.

Audit logistics, team & audit fees



Darren Wells, Engagement Lead

Darren will be the main point of contact for the Chief Executive, the Section 151 Officer and Members. Darren will share his wealth of knowledge and experience across the sector providing challenge, sharing good practice, providing pragmatic solutions and acting as a sounding board with Members and the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. Darren will ensure our audit is tailored specifically to you and is delivered efficiently. Darren will review all reports and the team's work.



Matt Dean, Audit Manager

Matt will work with the senior members of the finance team ensuring early delivery of testing and agreement of accounting issues on a timely basis. Matt will attend Governance and Audit Committees, undertake reviews of the team's work and draft reports ensuring they remain clear, concise and understandable to all. Matt will work with Internal Audit to secure efficiencies and avoid any duplication, providing assurance for your Annual Governance Statement.

Audit fees

The planned audit fees are no less than £50,475 (PY: £50,475) for the financial statements audit. Our fees for grant certification cover only housing benefit subsidy certification, which falls under the remit of Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited. The indicative fee for our on the housing benefit subsidy certification for 2017-18 is no less than £11,418 (PY: £10,433). Fees in respect of other grant work, such as reasonable assurance reports, are shown under 'Fees for other services'.

In setting your fee, we have assumed that the scope of the audit, and the Council 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.

Early close

Meeting the early close timeframe

Bringing forward the statutory date for publication of audited local government accounts to 31 July this year, across the whole sector, is a significant challenge for local authorities and auditors alike. For authorities, the time available to prepare the accounts is curtailed, while, as auditors we have a shorter period to complete our work and face 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 the previous page). 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, you need to ensure that you:

- 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. Further, we have complied with the requirements of the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 01 issued in December 2016 which sets out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

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

Non-audit services

No non-audit services were identified.

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.

Appendix

A. Revised ISAs

Appendix A: Revised ISAs

Detailed below is a summary of the key changes impacting the auditor's report for audits of financial statement for periods commencing on or after 17 June 2016.

Section of the auditor's report	Description of the requirements
Conclusions relating to going concern	We will be required to conclude and report whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The directors use of the going concern basis of accounting is appropriate• The directors have disclosed identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the Council's ability to continue as a going concern.
Material uncertainty related to going concern	We will need to include a brief description of the events or conditions identified that may cast significant doubt on the Council's ability to continue as a going concern when a material uncertainty has been identified and adequately disclosed in the financial statements. Going concern material uncertainties are no longer reported in an Emphasis of Matter section in our audit report.
Other information	We will be required to include a section on other information which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsibilities of management and auditors regarding other information• A statement that the opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information unless required by law or regulation• Reporting inconsistencies or misstatements where identified
Additional responsibilities for directors and the auditor	We will be required to include the respective responsibilities for directors and us, as auditors, regarding going concern.
Format of the report	The opinion section appears first followed by the basis of opinion section.



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