



AUDIT COMMITTEE

Item 7 External Audit Plan

Tuesday, 30th June, 2015

7.00 pm

Town Hall, Watford

Publication date: 24 June 2015

CONTACT

If you require further information or you would like a copy of this agenda in another format, e.g. large print, please contact Sandra Hancock in Democracy and Governance on 01923 278377 or by email to legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk .

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor I Brown (Chair)
Councillor T Williams (Vice-Chair)
Councillors A Khan, B Mauthoor and S Silver

AGENDA

PART A - OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

7. EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN (Pages 5 - 26)

Report of the Acting Head of Finance Shared Services

This report asks the Committee to note the External Audit Plan.

Agenda Item 7

Report to: Audit Committee

Date of meeting: 30 June 2015

Report of: Acting Head of Finance Shared Services

Title: External Audit Plan

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To receive the External Audit Plan prepared by Grant Thornton UK LLP the Council's appointed external auditors.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That members note the contents of the External Audit Plan.

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact: -
Nigel Pollard, Acting Head of Finance, Shared Services
telephone extension: 7198
email: nigel.pollard@threerivers.gov.uk

Report approved by: Joanne Wagstaffe, Director of Finance

3.0 DETAILS

- 3.1 Attached at Appendix 1 is the External Audit Plan for 2013/14. The Audit Plan covers:-
- Understanding your business,
 - Developments relevant to the Council's business and the audit,
 - The audit approach,
 - Audit focused on risk,
 - Significant risks identified,
 - Other risks,
 - Group scope and risk assessment,
 - Value for Money,
 - Results of interim work,
 - Key dates,
 - Fees and independence,
 - Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance.
- 3.2 The Interim Audit included key areas and was carried out in April 2015. There are no significant weaknesses to bring to Members attention.
- 3.3 A representative from Grant Thornton UK LLP will be at the meeting to present the plan and answer questions.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

- 4.1.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 None Specific.

4.3 Equalities

None Specific.

4.4 Potential Risks

There are no risks associated with the decisions members are being asked to make.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 The Audit Plan for Watford Borough Council – Year ended 31 March 2015 (June 2015) – Grant Thornton UK LLP



Grant Thornton

The Audit Plan for Watford Borough Council

This version of the report is a draft. Its contents and subject matter remain under review and its contents may change and be expanded as part of the finalisation of the report.

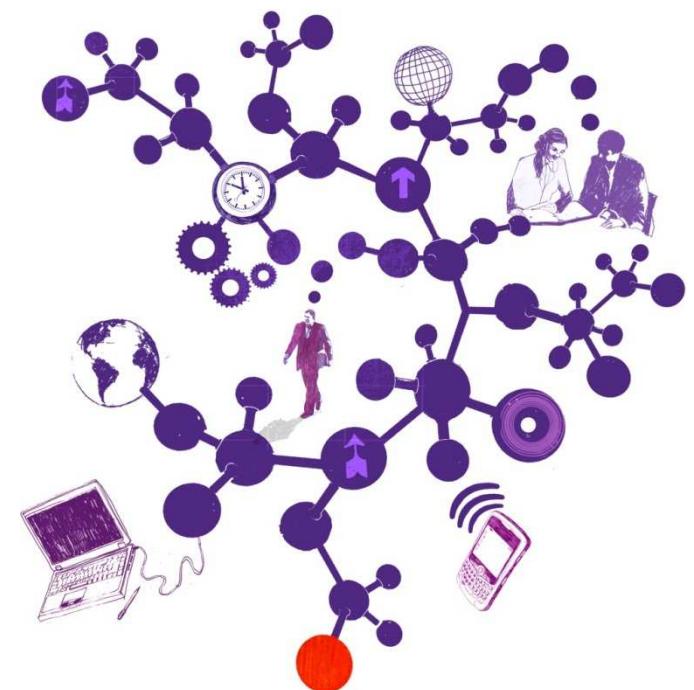
Year ended 31 March 2015

June 2015

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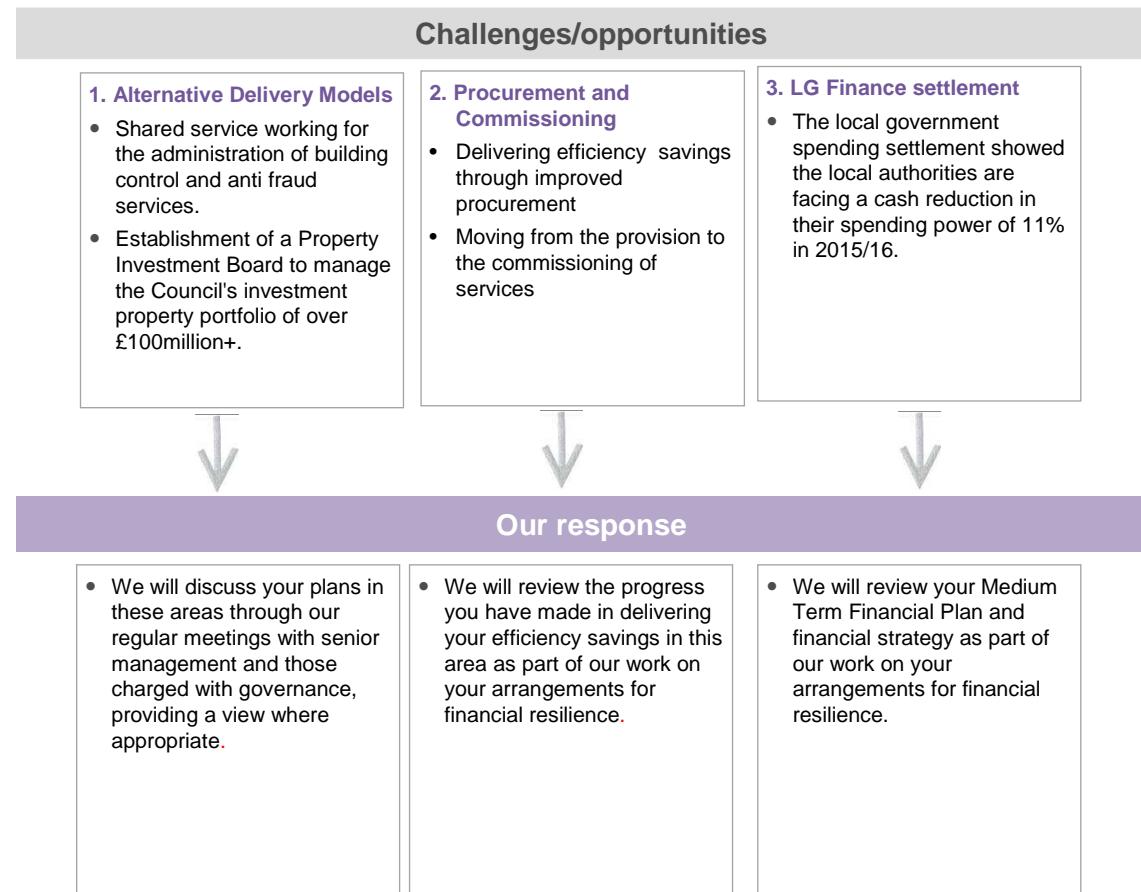
1. Understanding your business
2. Developments relevant to your business and the audit
3. Our audit approach
4. An audit focused on risks
5. Significant risks identified
6. Other risks
7. Group scope and risk assessment
8. Value for Money
9. Results of interim work
10. Key dates
11. Fees and independence
12. Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance

Appendices

- A. Action plan

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

1. Financial reporting

- 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)

2. Legislation

- Local Government Finance settlement

3. Corporate governance

- Annual Governance Statement (AGS)
- Explanatory foreword

4. Financial Pressures

- Managing service provision with less resource
- Progress against savings plans

5. Other requirements

- 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

Our response

We will ensure that

- the Council complies with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice through discussions with management and our substantive testing

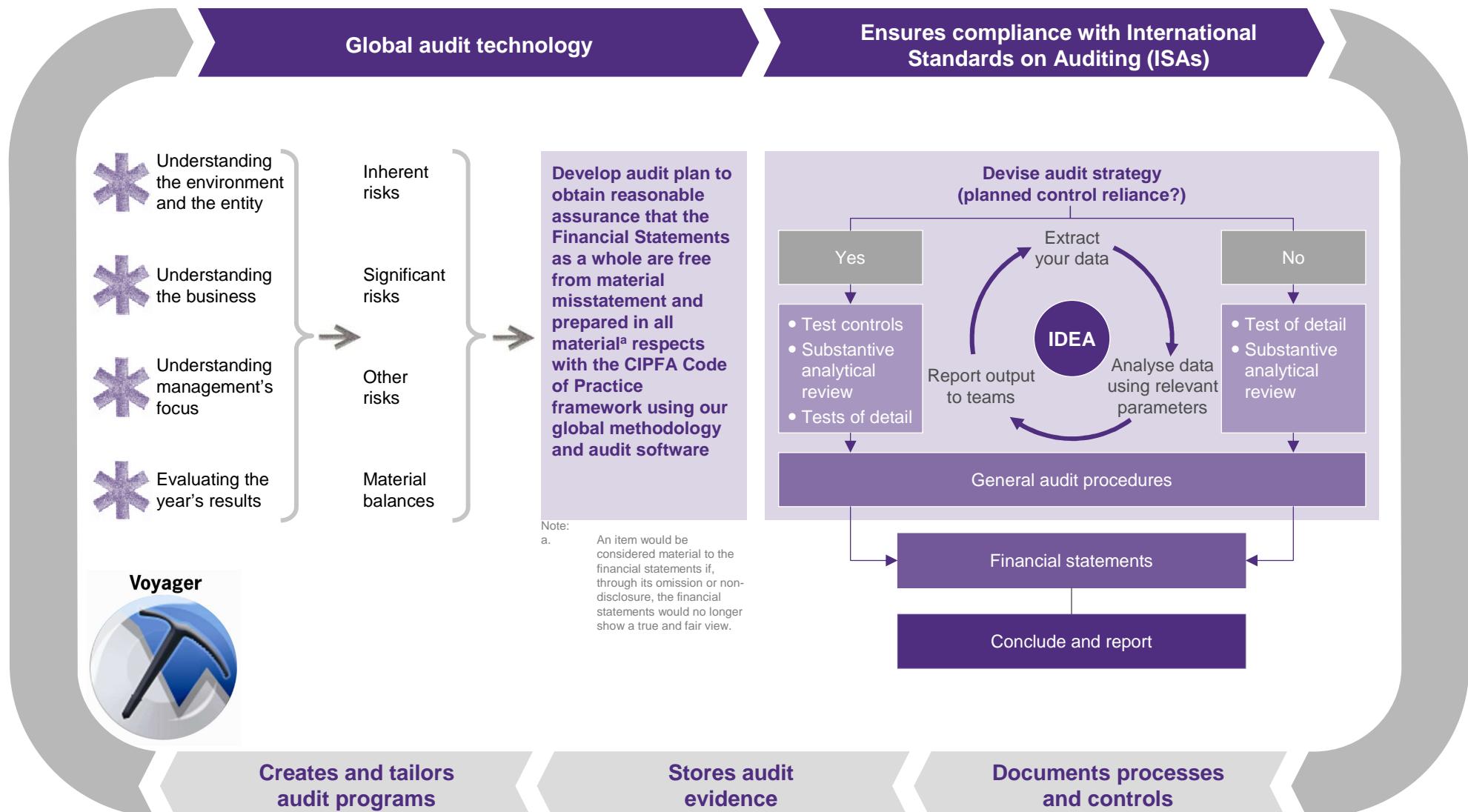
- We will discuss the impact of the legislative changes with the Council through our regular meetings with senior management and those charged with governance, providing a view where appropriate

- 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

- 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

- 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 will take over the Audit Commission's responsibilities for housing benefit grant certification from 1 April 2015.

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 Watford Borough 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 with no relevant stakeholder reliance or management bonuses t in respect of the financial statement outturn. •opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited •the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Watford Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.
Management over-ride of controls	Under ISA 240 the presumption that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities.	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Testing of months 1 – 10 journal entries <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Review of accounting estimates, judgments and decisions made by management •Testing of months 11 and 12 journal entries •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 performed at interim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•We performed a walkthrough to gain assurance that the in-year controls were operating in accordance with our documented understanding.•We tested journal entries from months 1 – 10 on a sample basis to gain assurance that there are adequate controls in place over inputting and processing and that these have operated effectively through the financial year. <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•We will review large and unusual items and test a sample of these.•We will test a sample of items of expenditure to gain assurance that expenditure has been correctly classified and for occurrence and allocation.•We will perform tests of journals from months 11 – 12.
Employee remuneration	Employee remuneration accruals understated (Remuneration expenses not correct)	<p>Work performed at interim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•We performed a walkthrough to gain assurance that the in-year controls were operating in accordance with our documented understanding.•We tested a sample of payroll payments made during months 1 – 10 to gain assurance that employees have been remunerated at the correct rates during 2014/15. <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•We will perform tests of payroll from months 11 – 12.•We will perform cut-off testing to ensure that transactions have been recorded in the correct accounting period.•In addition to a review of the work of the pension fund actuary, we will perform substantive tests on the cost of pensions.

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 undertake a risk assessment of the Council's VfM arrangements to identify areas of risk to our VfM conclusion.

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.

Results of interim audit work

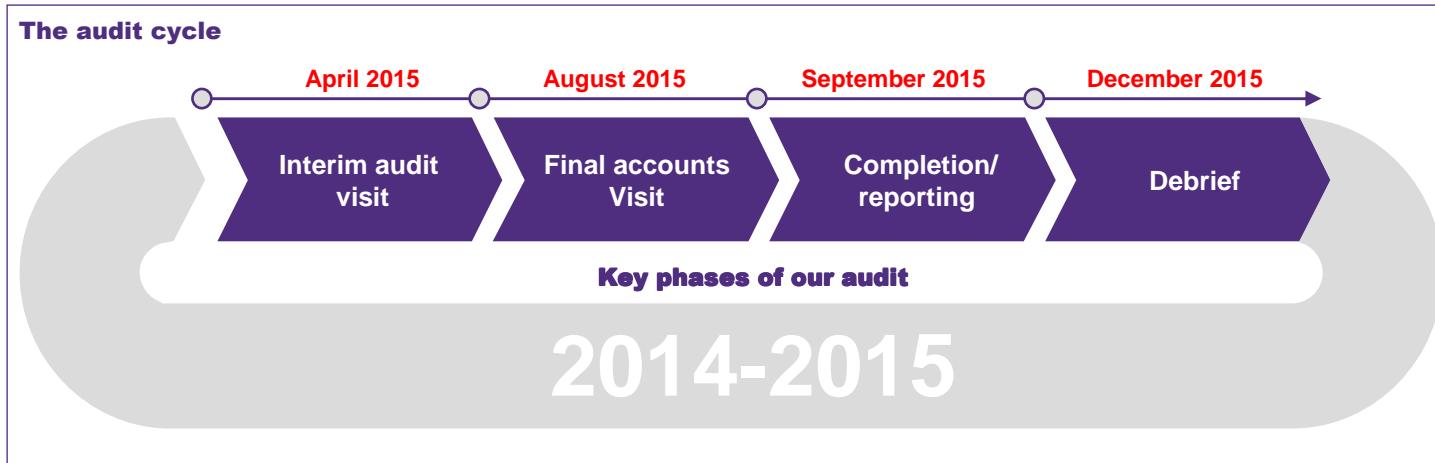
The findings of our interim audit work, and the impact of our findings on the accounts audit approach, are summarised in the table below:

	Work performed and findings	Conclusion
Internal audit	We have reviewed internal audit's work on the Council's key financial systems to date. We have not identified any significant weaknesses impacting on our responsibilities.	Our review of internal audit work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.
Walkthrough testing	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. 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.	Our work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.
Entity level controls	We have obtained an understanding of the overall control environment relevant to the preparation of the financial statements including: <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 	Our work has identified no material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements

Results of interim audit work cont'd

	Work performed	Conclusion
Review of information technology controls	<p>We performed a high level review of the general IT control environment, as part of the overall review of the internal controls system. We have also performed a follow up of the issues that were raised last year.</p> <p>IT (information technology) controls were observed to have been implemented in accordance with our documented understanding.</p>	<p>Our work has identified no material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements. We have re-raised the points from the prior year and these have been included as part of our action plan in the appendices to this plan.</p>
Journal entry controls	<p>We have reviewed the Council's journal entry policies and procedures as part of determining our journal entry testing strategy and have not identified any material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's control environment or financial statements.</p> <p>To date we have undertaken detailed testing on journal transactions recorded for the first ten months of the financial year, by extracting 'unusual' entries for further review. No issues have been identified that we wish to highlight for your attention.</p>	<p>Our work to date has identified no material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements. We will complete our testing during our final accounts visit and report the results to the September 2015 audit committee.</p>
Early substantive testing	<p>We have performed attribute testing on 10 months of payroll transactions with no issues to report.</p> <p>The testing will be completed during our final accounts visit.</p>	<p>Our work has identified no material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements.</p>

Key dates



Date	Activity
March 2015	Planning
April 2015	Interim site visit
June 2015	Presentation of audit plan to Audit Committee
August 2015	Year end fieldwork
September 2015	Audit findings clearance meeting with Director of Finance
September 2015	Report audit findings to those charged with governance Audit Committee
September 2015	Sign financial statements opinion

Fees and independence

Fees

	£
Council audit	68,400
Grant certification	12,600
Total fees (excluding VAT)	81,000

Fees for other services

Service	Fees £
None	Nil

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

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.

Our communication plan	Audit plan	Audit findings
Respective responsibilities of auditor and management/those charged with governance	✓	
Overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit. Form, timing and expected general content of communications	✓	
Views about the qualitative aspects of the entity's accounting and financial reporting practices, significant matters and 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		✓

Appendices

Action plan

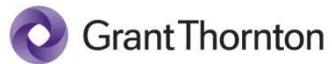
Priority

High - Significant effect on control system

Medium - Effect on control system

Low - Best practice

Rec No.	Recommendation	Priority	Management response	Implementation date & responsibility
1	Lack of user access rights review – Network A review of user management processes identified that user accounts and associated permissions within network and network folders were not being routinely reviewed for appropriateness. In the absence of formalised users access rights reviews, access to information resources and system functionality may not be restricted on the basis of legitimate business need. Users access rights may become disproportionate to their responsibilities.	L		
2	Logical Access Settings Active Directory parameters are not configured to log out the system if it is inactive for certain period, hence, there is an increased risk of unauthorised access to systems which could affect the privacy and integrity of financial data.	L		



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