

Watford Borough Council

Annual Audit Letter for the year ended 31 March 2016

OCTOBER 2016

Ernst & Young LLP



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In April 2015 Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) issued ‘Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies 2015-16’. It is available from the Chief Executive of each audited body and via the PSAA website (www.psaa.co.uk)

The Statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between appointed auditors and audited bodies. It summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas.

The ‘Terms of Appointment from 1 April 2015’ issued by PSAA sets out additional requirements that auditors must comply with, over and above those set out in the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice (the Code) and statute, and covers matters of practice and procedure which are of a recurring nature.

This Annual Audit Letter is prepared in the context of the Statement of responsibilities. It is addressed to the Members of the audited body, and is prepared for their sole use. We, as appointed auditor, take no responsibility to any third party.

Our Complaints Procedure - If at any time you would like to discuss with us how our service to you could be improved, or if you are dissatisfied with the service you are receiving, you may take the issue up with your usual partner or director contact. If you prefer an alternative route, please contact Steve Varley, our Managing Partner, 1 More London Place, London SE1 2AF. We undertake to look into any complaint carefully and promptly and to do all we can to explain the position to you. Should you remain dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, you may of course take matters up with our professional institute. We can provide further information on how you may contact our professional institute.

A hand with white nail polish is writing on a document with a blue pen. In the background, there is a calculator, a laptop, and a white mug. A yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

We are required to issue an annual audit letter to Watford Borough Council (the Council) following completion of our audit procedures for the year ended 31 March 2016.

Below are the results and conclusions on the significant areas of the audit process.

Area of Work	Conclusion
Opinion on the Council's: ▶ Financial statements	Unqualified - the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2016 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended.
▶ Consistency of other information published with the financial statements	Other information published with the financial statements was consistent with the Annual Accounts.
Concluding on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness	We concluded that you have put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in your use of resources

Area of Work	Conclusion
Reports by exception:	
▶ Consistency of Governance Statement	The Governance Statement was consistent with our understanding of the Council.
▶ Public interest report	We had no matters to report in the public interest.
▶ Written recommendations to the Council, which should be copied to the Secretary of State	We had no matters to report.
▶ Other actions taken in relation to our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014	We had no matters to report.

Area of Work	Conclusion
Reporting to the National Audit Office (NAO) on our review of the Council's Whole of Government Accounts return (WGA).	The Council is below the specified audit threshold of £350 million. Therefore, we did not perform any audit procedures on the consolidation pack.

As a result of the above we have also:

Area of Work	Conclusion
Issued a report to those charged with governance of the Council communicating significant findings resulting from our audit.	Our Audit Results Report was issued on 29 th September 2016.
Issued a certificate that we have completed the audit in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice.	Our certificate was issued on 29 th September 2016.

In December 2016 we will also issue a report to those charged with governance of the Council summarising the certification work we have undertaken.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council's staff for their assistance during the course of our work.

Andrew Brittain

Executive Director
For and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP

Purpose



Purpose

The Purpose of this Letter

The purpose of this annual audit letter is to communicate to Members and external stakeholders, including members of the public, the key issues arising from our work, which we consider should be brought to the attention of the Council.

We have already reported the detailed findings from our audit work in our 2015/16 Audit Results Report to the 29th September 2016 Audit Committee, representing those charged with governance. We do not repeat those detailed findings in this letter. The matters reported here are the most significant for the Council.



Responsibilities

Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the Appointed Auditor

Our 2015/16 audit work has been undertaken in accordance with the Audit Plan that we issued on 14 March 2016 and is conducted in accordance with the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland), and other guidance issued by the National Audit Office.

As auditors we are responsible for:

- ▶ Expressing an opinion:
 - ▶ On the 2015/16 financial statements; and
 - ▶ On the consistency of other information published with the financial statements.
- ▶ Forming a conclusion on the arrangements the Council has to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- ▶ Reporting by exception:
 - ▶ If the annual governance statement is misleading or not consistent with our understanding of the Council;
 - ▶ Any significant matters that are in the public interest;
 - ▶ Any written recommendations to the Council, which should be copied to the Secretary of State; and
 - ▶ If we have discharged our duties and responsibilities as established by thy Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and Code of Audit Practice.

Alongside our work on the financial statements, we also review and report to the National Audit Office (NAO) on you Whole of Government Accounts return. The Council is below the specified audit threshold of £350 million. Therefore, we did not perform any audit procedures on the return.

Responsibilities of the Council

The Council is responsible for preparing and publishing its statement of accounts accompanied by an Annual Governance Statement. In the AGS, the Council reports publicly each year on how far it complies with its own code of governance, including how it has monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in year, and any changes planned in the coming period.

The Council is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

A blurred office desk with a laptop, glasses of water, and financial documents. The scene is brightly lit, likely from a window with blinds in the background. A yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Financial Statement Audit'.

Financial Statement Audit

Financial Statement Audit

Key Issues

The Council's Statement of Accounts is an important tool for the Council to show how it has used public money and how it can demonstrate its financial management and financial health.

We audited the Council's Statement of Accounts in line with the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland), and other guidance issued by the National Audit Office and issued an unqualified audit report on 29th September 2016.

Our detailed findings were reported to the September 2016 Audit Committee.

The key issues identified as part of our audit were as follows:

Significant Risk	Conclusion
<p>Management override of controls</p> <p>A risk present on all audits is that management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of its ability to manipulate accounting records directly or indirectly, and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.</p> <p>Auditing standards require us to respond to this risk by testing the appropriateness of journals, testing accounting estimates for possible management bias and obtaining an understanding of the business rationale for any significant unusual transactions.</p>	<p>We selected a number of journals to review based on our risk assessment. We have agreed these to other areas of our audit work or other supporting evidence. We have no concerns to raise.</p> <p>We have reviewed the most significant accounting estimates. We have not identified any evidence of management bias.</p> <p>We have not identified any unusual business transactions.</p>
<p>Risk of error in Property Valuations</p> <p>Auditing standards (ISA 620) require us to gain particular assurances when an expert has been engaged by an audited body and where this influences material figures in the financial statements. The Authority engages a professional valuer to provide it with asset valuations. These assets represent a material figure in the</p>	<p>We reviewed the information provided by the authority to the valuer and the valuations provided by the valuer to ensure that they have been correctly reflected in the financial statements, and that the valuations has been made on appropriate basis. We also reviewed the valuer's competency and objectivity. We audited the prior period adjustment identified by the Council that resulted in investment properties being reclassified as land and buildings as they were not held for</p>

Authority's Accounts.

From 2015/16, the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom adopted IFRS 13 for assets and liabilities included in the financial statements that either permit or require measurement at fair value.

The 2014/15 balance showed a balance of £120 million for Investment Property, and therefore this change in approach will impact on material disclosures in the financial statements.

As this is an initial audit engagement for us, we will also review the classification of assets in the balance sheet to gain assurance that Investment Property and other fixed assets are appropriately classified and valued.

investment purposes. There were no issues arising as a result of our work on property valuation.

Other Key Findings	Conclusion
Business rates appeals provision	<p>Our audit of the Business Rates Appeals provision found that it was made up of three specific elements</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. An analysis of known appeals on the Valuation Office Agency list completed by Analyse Local, industry experts. We performed procedures that enabled us to be able to rely on management's experts' estimation to provide us with assurance over this element of the provision.<li>2. A provision for appeals that have not yet been lodged. This was included as the Council has past experience of the Valuation Office settling appeals that are not included on the list above. We reviewed the methodology for compiling this element, tested the source data used in constructing it and performed a series of reasonableness tests of the estimation to provide us with assurance over this element of the provision.<li>3. A contingency. On enquiry with management we found that this element was included to be prudent in protecting the Council from any further exposures not covered by the two elements above. In our opinion the contingency has no specific basis which meets the requirement of the relevant accounting standard on provisions, IAS 37. Therefore we raised this as a judgemental audit difference which has been corrected by management (see Appendix A). <p>In line with best practice we recommend that the methodology for the calculation of this provision is reviewed each year to ensure the calculation basis is suitable, that it provides a reasonable basis for the provision and that all elements can be evidenced as reliable estimates in accordance with IAS37.</p>

A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a stack of coins. The coins are stacked vertically, with the edges of several coins visible. The lighting is warm, highlighting the metallic texture and the ridges on the edges. A bright yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "Value for Money".

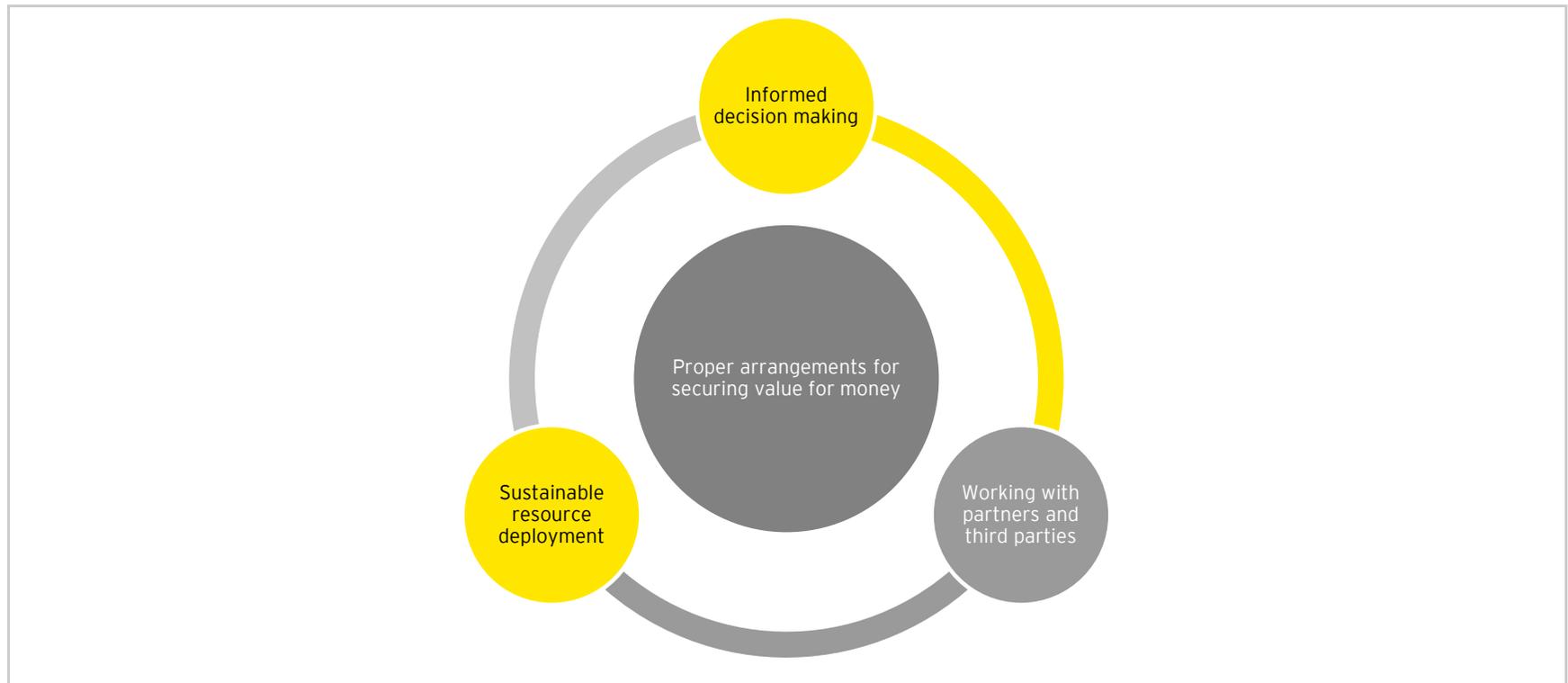
Value for Money

Value for Money

We are required to consider whether the Council has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources. This is known as our value for money conclusion.

Proper arrangements are defined by statutory guidance issued by the National Audit Office. They comprise your arrangements to:

- Take informed decisions;
- Deploy resources in a sustainable manner; and
- Work with partners and other third parties.



We issued an unqualified value for money conclusion on 29th September 2016.

We did not identify any significant matters in relation to the Council's arrangements.



Other Reporting Issues

Other Reporting Issues

Whole of Government Accounts

The Council is below the specified audit threshold of £350 million. Therefore, we did not perform any audit procedures on the consolidation pack.

Annual Governance Statement

We are required to consider the completeness of disclosures in the Council's annual governance statement, identify any inconsistencies with the other information of which we are aware from our work, and consider whether it is misleading.

We completed this work and identified a small number of areas where further disclosure was required to reflect the position at the Council. The Council amended the annual governance statement to include these areas.

Report in the Public Interest

We have a duty under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to consider whether, in the public interest, to report on any matter that comes to our attention in the course of the audit in order for it to be considered by the Council or brought to the attention of the public.

We did not identify any issues which required us to issue a report in the public interest.

Written Recommendations

We have a duty under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to designate any audit recommendation as one that requires the Council to consider it at a public meeting and to decide what action to take in response.

We did not identify any issues which required us to issue a written recommendation.

Objections Received

We did not receive any objections to the 2015/16 financial statements from member of the public.

Other Powers and Duties

We identified no issues during our audit that required us to use our additional powers under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Independence

We communicated our assessment of independence in our Audit Results Report to the Audit Committee on 29th September 2016. In our professional judgement the firm is independent and the objectivity of the audit engagement partner and audit staff has not been compromised within the meaning regulatory and professional requirements.

Control Themes and Observations

As part of our work, we obtained an understanding of internal control sufficient to plan our audit and determine the nature, timing and extent of testing performed. Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control, we are required to communicate to you significant deficiencies in internal control identified during our audit.

The matters reported are shown below and are limited to those deficiencies that we identified during the audit and that we concluded are of sufficient importance to merit being reported.

Description	Impact
Authorisation of journals - subsequent to authorisation of journals finance staff then amend the coding without further authorisation being obtained.	Allocation of expenditure on the wrong cost centre leading to misinformed decision making.
Accounts receivable controls - monthly monitoring of debt levels by management is not evidenced	Debt levels can go unchallenged if the review is not happening, exposing the Council to bad debt risk. Note that the absence of evidence meant we were not able to rely on this control so had to undertake additional substantive testing of year-end debtors.
Housing Benefit overpayments - invoices raised to landlords are not followed up in a timely manner. (Invoices were passed to bailiff's as a result of audit queries)	Delays the receipt of income for the Council

A close-up photograph of a person's face as they look through a pair of black binoculars. The person's eyes are behind the eyepieces, and their hands are holding the binoculars. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white. A bright yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "Focused on your future".

Focused on your
future

Focused on your future

Area	Issue	Impact
<p>Earlier deadline for production and audit of the financial statements from 2017/18</p>	<p>The Accounts and Audit Regulations Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 were laid before Parliament in February 2015. A key change in the regulations is that from the 2017/18 financial year the timetable for the preparation and approval of accounts will be brought forward. As a result, the Council will need to produce draft accounts by 31 May and these accounts will need to be audited by 31 July in 2018.</p>	<p>These changes provide challenges for both the preparers and the auditors of the financial statements. The Council is aware of this challenge and the need to start planning for the impact of these changes. This will include the need to review the current processes for the production of the accounts and the associated supporting working papers, including areas such as the production of estimates, particularly in relation to pensions and the valuation of assets, and the year-end closure processes.</p>
<p>Appointment of auditors</p>	<p>The current audit contracts expire on the completion of the 2017/18 audit. The expiry of contracts also marks the end of the current mandatory regime for auditor appointments. After this, the Council can exercise choice about whether it decides to opt in to the authorised national scheme, or whether to make other arrangements to appoint its own auditors. In July 2016, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government specified Public Sector Audit Appointments limited (PSAA) as an appointing person under regulation 3 of the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015. PSAA will be able to appoint an auditor to relevant authorities that choose to opt into its national collective scheme.</p>	<p>Appointment of auditors for the 2018/19 financial year is required by 31 December 2017. The council should consider whether they intend to opt into the appointed person scheme to appoint your auditors from 2018/19 or if the council should make its own arrangements following the legislative requirements.</p>

Appendix A

Audit Fees



Appendix A Audit Fees

Our fee for 2015/16 is in line with the scale fee set by the PSAA and reported in our 29th September 2016 Annual Results Report.

Description	Final Fee 2015/16 £	Planned Fee 2015/16 £	Scale Fee 2015/16 £
Total Audit Fee - Code work	59,001	51,975	51,975
Total Audit Fee - Certification of claims and returns*	TBC	8,316	8,316

**Our certification of the Housing Benefit claim will be completed to the 30 November 2016 deadline, and the final fee concluded at that time.*

We have completed additional work in respect of;

- review and consultation on seven proposed prior period adjustments
- audit of two prior period adjustments (investment properties and cash flow statement)
- the additional significant risk on PPE valuation
- additional testing and reporting due to not being able to rely on the IT control environment
- additional accounts receivable testing due to not being able to rely on controls
- additional journal testing due to the issues highlighted above

We have discussed and agreed an additional fee for the above which has been agreed with management and is subject to approval from PSAA.

We confirm we have not undertaken any non-audit work outside of the PSAA's requirements.

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ED None

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