



The Audit Plan for Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council

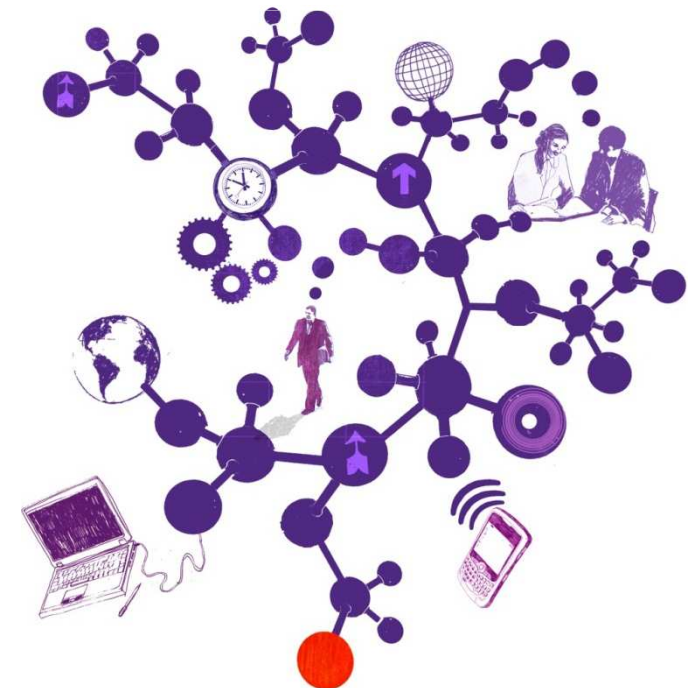
Year ended 31 March 2015

February 2015

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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 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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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.

Challenges/opportunities

1. Innovative service delivery

- Improved procurement to deliver efficiency savings.
- Moving from the provision to the commissioning of services where financially more advantageous.
- Growing income generation in new areas to counteract the impact of the economic downturn.

2. Financial Pressure

- There are shortfalls in the Medium Term Financial Plan and budget savings need to be identified within the next year.
- There is a risk regarding the Collection Fund Balance with a deficit accumulating which falls as a cost on the General Fund. The new local Council Tax Support Scheme reduces the collection rates.

3. LG Finance Settlement

- The local government spending settlement showed local authorities are facing a cash reduction in their spending power of 6% in 2015-16.
- Increasing demand for services when resources are fixed.

4. Pension Contributions

- You made a prepayment of pension contributions in 2014/15 for contributions up to 2017.



Our response

- We will review the progress you have made in delivering your efficiency savings through innovative service delivery and increasing income generation.
- Our work on the value for money conclusion in 2014/15 will consider the longer term implications of decisions made for service delivery.

- 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.

- We will review your Medium Term Financial Plan and financial strategy as part of our work on your arrangements for financial resilience.

- We will review the accounting transactions and disclosures.

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
- Consideration 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

5. Financial Pressures

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

6. 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
- the group boundary is recognised in accordance with the Code and joint arrangements are accounted for correctly

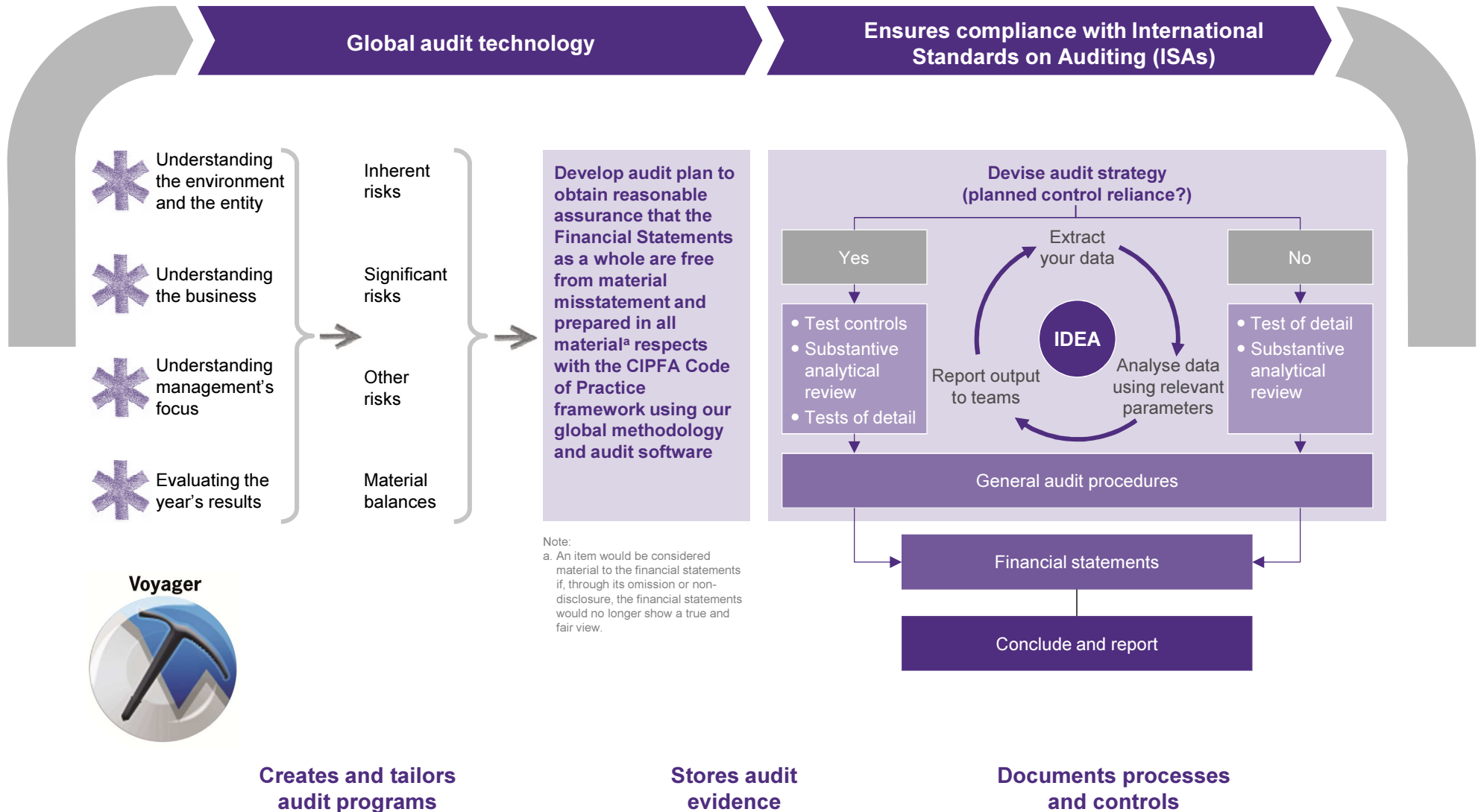
- We will discuss the impact of the legislative changes with the Council through our regular meetings with senior management and those charged with governance, providing a view where appropriate

- 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



Note:
a. An item would be considered material to the financial statements if, through its omission or non-disclosure, the financial statements would no longer show a true and fair view.

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 Newcastle under Lyme 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• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.
Management over-ride of controls	<p>Under ISA 240 the presumption that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities.</p>	<p>Work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of accounting estimates, judgments and decisions made by management• Testing of 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 completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Documented the processes and controls in place around accounting for operating expenses.• Walkthrough tests completed to confirm the operation of the controls in relation to the completeness assertion which we consider to present a risk of material misstatement to the financial statements. <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Test a sample of transactions throughout the year in relation to the Existence/occurrence and Rights/Obligations assertions.• Cut off testing on purchase orders and goods received notes (both before and after year end).• Review of the accruals process.
Employee remuneration	Employee remuneration accruals understated (Remuneration expenses not correct)	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Documented the processes and controls in place around the accounting for employee remuneration.• Walkthrough tests completed to confirm the operation of the controls in relation to the completeness assertion which we consider to present a risk of material misstatement to the financial statements.

Other risks identified cont'd

Other risks	Description	Audit Approach
Employee remuneration cont'd	Employee remuneration accruals understated (Remuneration expenses not correct)	<p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test a sample of payroll transactions throughout the year • Test the payroll reconciliation to ensure that information from the payroll system can be agreed to the ledger and financial statements. • Test a sample of payments made in April and May to ensure payroll expenditure is recorded in the correct year. • Review monthly trend analysis of total payroll.
Welfare Expenditure	Welfare benefit expenditure improperly computed	<p>Work completed to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented the processes and controls in place around the accounting for welfare expenditure. • Walkthrough tests completed to confirm the operation of controls in relation to the Valuation assertion which we consider to present a risk of material misstatement to the financial statements. <p>Further work planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the benefits system reconciliation to ensure that information from the benefits system can be agreed to the general ledger and financial statements. • Carry out procedures in accordance with the HB COUNT methodology required to certify the housing benefit subsidy claim

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 have undertaken a risk assessment to identify areas of risk to our VfM conclusion. We will undertake work in the following area to address the risks identified:

- Review the Council's financial resilience, as reflected in the medium term financial strategy and the savings factored into the annual budgets.

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

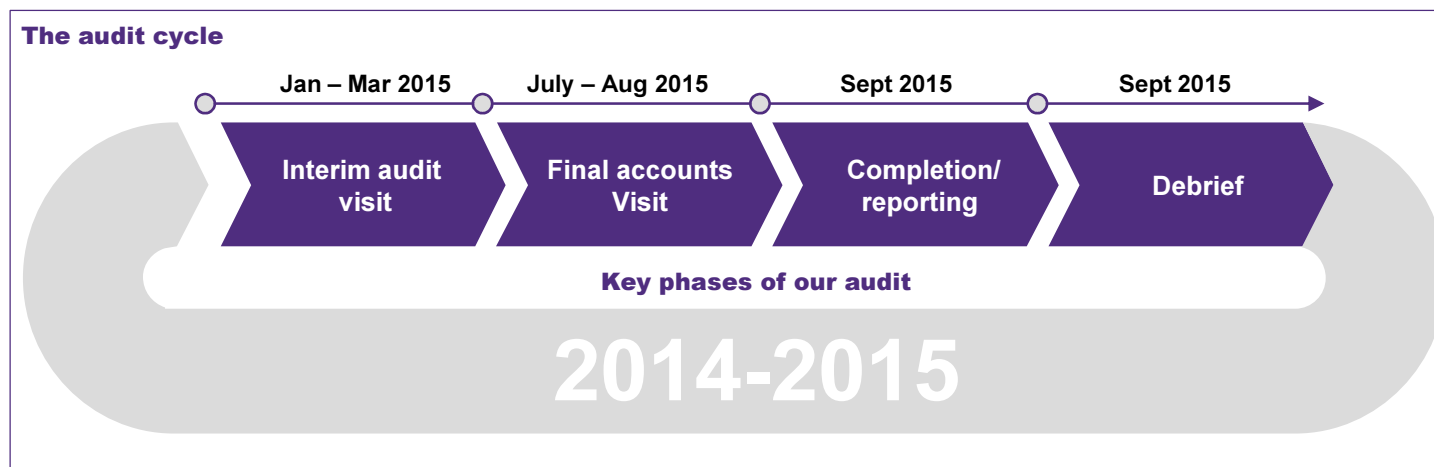
The findings of our interim audit work, and the impact of our findings on the accounts audit approach, are summarised in the table below:

	Work performed and findings	Conclusion
Internal audit	<p>We have completed a high level review of internal audit's overall arrangements. Our work has not identified any issues which we wish to bring to your attention.</p> <p>We also 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</p>	<p>Overall, we have concluded that the internal audit service continues to provide an independent and satisfactory service to the Council and that internal audit work contributes to an effective internal control environment at the Council</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	<p>We have 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.</p>
Value for money	<p>We have carried out an initial review of the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources,</p>	<p>The work informs our conclusion on the arrangements to secure value for money.</p>

Key dates



Date	Activity
January 2015	Planning
January – March 2015	Interim site visit
April 2015	Presentation of audit plan to Audit & Risk Committee
July – August 2015	Year end fieldwork
August 2015	Audit findings clearance meeting
X September 2015	Report audit findings to the Audit & Risk Committee
30 th September 2015	Sign financial statements opinion

Fees and independence

Fees

	£
Council audit	73,336
Grant certification	8,280
Total fees (excluding VAT)	81,616

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, would be shown under 'Fees for other services.'

Fees for other services

Service	Fees £
None	Nil

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		✓

Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance (cont)

In addition to the areas covered on the previous page, we are required to consider the following in our discussions with those charged with governance (the Audit and Risk Committee)

Area of consideration	Current understanding based on planning and interim work to date
Awareness of fraud or suspected fraud	There are no material instances of fraud that have been identified during the year. Any significant suspected or alleged fraud are investigated by Internal Audit and reported to the Audit and Risk Committee on a regular basis.
Views about the risks of fraud	Although there is an ongoing risk of fraud being committed against the Council, arrangements are in place to both prevent and detect fraud. These include the regular review of arrangements and work carried out by Internal Audit as part of their annual plan. The risk of material misstatement of the accounts due to undetected fraud is low and this is consistent with the risk management processes that are in place within the Council.
Awareness of whistleblower tips or complaints	Internal Audit are involved in the investigation of whistleblower referrals or complaints with a potential financial impact. There are no material instances of fraud that have been identified during the year arising from whistleblower tips or complaints.
How the Audit and Risk Committee provide oversight of management's fraud risk assessment process	<p>The Annual Governance Statement and Head of Internal Audit Opinion are formally presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on an annual basis.</p> <p>The system of internal control is reviewed annually as part of the annual governance statement. The work plan of Internal Audit includes reviewing the operation of internal controls and appropriate segregation of duties. Internal Audit include fraud risk in their planning process.</p>



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