

# The Audit Plan for Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council

**Year ending 31 March 2016**

March 2016

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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.

Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
Merrial Street  
Newcastle-under-Lyme  
ST5 2AG

March 2016

Dear Members of the Audit and Risk Committee

### **Audit Plan for Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council for the year ending 31 March 2016**

This Audit Plan sets out for the benefit of those charged with governance (in the case of Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council, the Audit and Risk Committee), an overview of the planned scope and timing of the audit, as required by International Standard on Auditing (UK & Ireland) 260. This document is to help you understand the consequences of our work, discuss issues of risk and the concept of materiality with us, and identify any areas where you may request us to undertake additional procedures. It also helps us gain a better understanding of the Council and your environment. The contents of the Plan have been discussed with management.

We are required to perform our audit in line with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General in April 2015.

Our responsibilities under the Code are to:

- give an opinion on the Council's financial statements
- satisfy ourselves the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

As auditors we are responsible for performing the audit, in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland), which is directed towards forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance. The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities for the preparation of the financial statements.

Yours sincerely

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#### **Chartered Accountants**

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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. Autumn Statement 2015 and financial health

- The Chancellor proposed that local government would have greater control over its finances, although this was accompanied by a 24% reduction in central government funding to local government over 5 years.
- Despite the increased ownership, the financial health of the sector is likely to become increasingly challenging.



### 2. Devolution

- The Autumn Statement 2015 also included proposals to devolve further powers to localities
- The Council is a member of the Stoke-On-Trent & Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SSLEP).
- 



### 3. Earlier closedown of accounts

- The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require councils to bring forward the approval and audit of financial statements to 31 May and 31 July respectively by the 2017/18 financial year.



## Our response

- We will consider the Council's plans for addressing its financial position as part of our work to reach our VFM conclusion.

- We will consider your plans as part of the local devolution agenda as part of our work in reaching our VFM conclusion.
- We are able to provide support and challenge to your plans based on our knowledge of devolution elsewhere in the country.

- We will work with you to identify areas of your accounts production where you can learn from good practice in other authorities.
- We aim to complete all substantive work in our audit of your financial statements by 31 August 2016 as a 'dry run'

# Developments and other requirements relevant to your 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 and associated guidance.

## Developments and other requirements

### 1. Fair value accounting

- A new accounting standard on fair value (IFRS 13) has been adopted and applies for the first time in 2015/16.
- This will have a particular impact on the valuation of surplus assets within property, plant and equipment which are now required to be valued at fair value in line with IFRS 13 rather than the existing use value of the asset.
- Investment property assets are required to be carried at fair value as in previous years.
- There are a number of additional disclosure requirements of IFRS 13.



### 2. Corporate governance

- The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require local authorities to produce a Narrative Statement, which reports on your financial performance and use of resources in the year, and replaces the explanatory foreword.
- You are required to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) as part of your financial statements.



### 4. Other requirements

- The Council is required to submit a Whole of Government account pack on which we provide an audit opinion.
- The Council completes grant claims and returns on which audit certification is required



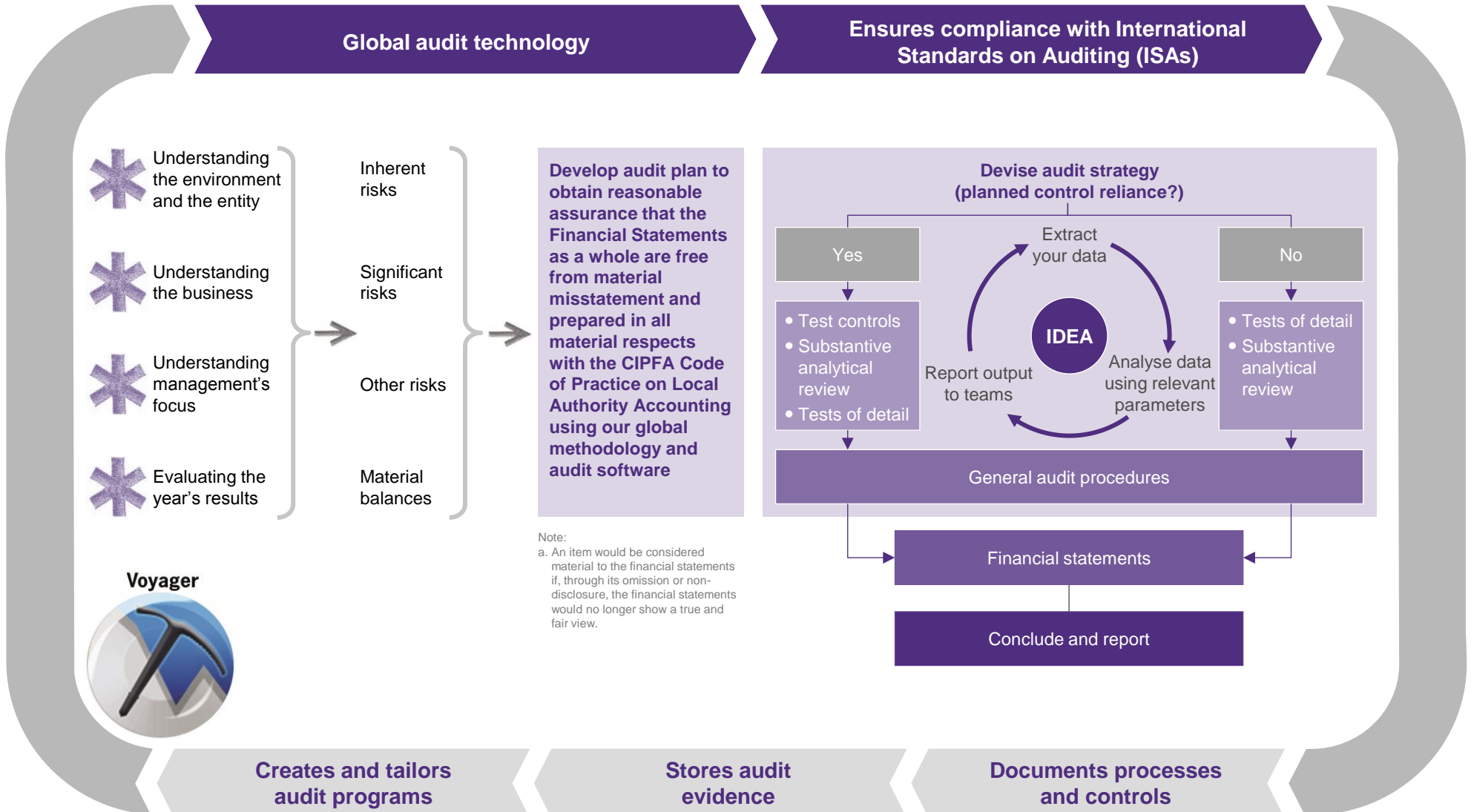
## Our response

- We will keep the Council informed of changes to the financial reporting requirements for 2015/16 through ongoing discussions and invitations to our technical update workshops.
- We will discuss this with you at an early stage, including reviewing the basis of valuation of your surplus assets and investment property assets to ensure they are valued on the correct basis.
- We will review your draft financial statements to ensure you have complied with the disclosure requirements of IFRS 13.

- We will review your Narrative Statement to ensure it reflects the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice when this is updated, and make recommendations for improvement.
- We will review your arrangements for producing the AGS and consider whether it is consistent with our knowledge of the Council and the requirements of CIPFA guidance.

- 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 the Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd.

# 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.

# Materiality

In performing our audit, we apply the concept of materiality, following the requirements of International Standard on Auditing (UK & Ireland) (ISA) 320: Materiality in planning and performing an audit.

The standard states that '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'.

As is usual in public sector entities, we have determined materiality for the statements as a whole as a proportion of the gross revenue expenditure of the Council. For purposes of planning the audit we have determined overall materiality to be £1,176k (being 2% of gross revenue expenditure). We will consider whether this level is appropriate during the course of the audit and will advise you if we revise this.

Under ISA 450, auditors also set an amount below which misstatements would be clearly trivial and would not need to be accumulated or reported to those charged with governance because we would not expect that the accumulation of such amounts would have a material effect on the financial statements. "Trivial" matters are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any criteria of size, nature or circumstances. We have defined the amount below which misstatements would be clearly trivial to be £58k.

ISA 320 also requires auditors to determine separate, lower, materiality levels where there are 'particular classes of transactions, account balances or disclosures for which misstatements of lesser amounts than materiality for the financial statements as a whole could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users'.

We have identified the following items where separate materiality levels are appropriate.

Balance/transaction/disclosure	Explanation	Materiality level
Disclosures of officers' remuneration, salary bandings and exit packages in notes to the statements	Due to public interest in these disclosures and the statutory requirement for them to be made.	£10k
Disclosure of auditors' remuneration in notes to the statements	Due to public interest in these disclosures and the statutory requirement for them to be made.	£10k
Disclosure of member allowances in the notes to the statements	Due to public interest in these disclosures and the statutory requirement for them to be made.	£10k



# 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"> <li>• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited</li> <li>• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.</li> </ul>
Management over-ride of controls	Under ISA 240 it is presumed that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities.	<p><b>Work planned:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of accounting estimates, judgments and decisions made by management</li> <li>• Testing of journal entries</li> <li>• Review of unusual significant transactions</li> </ul>
Valuation of pension fund net liability	The Council's pension fund asset and liability as reflected in its balance sheet represent significant estimates in the financial statements.	<p><b>Work planned:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will 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.</li> <li>• We will review 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.</li> <li>• We will undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made.</li> <li>• We will review the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in notes to the financial statements with the actuarial report from your actuary.</li> </ul>

## Significant risks identified (continued)

We have also identified the following significant risks of material misstatement from our understanding of the entity. We set out below the work we have completed to date and the work we plan to address these risks.

Significant risk	Description	Substantive audit procedures
Valuation of property, plant and equipment	The Council revalues its assets on a rolling basis over a five year period. The Code requires that the Council ensures that the carrying value at the balance sheet date is not materially different from current value. This represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements.	<p><b>Work planned:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate.</li> <li>• Review of the competence, expertise and objectivity of any management experts used.</li> <li>• Review of the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work</li> <li>• Discussions with valuer about the basis on which the valuation is carried out and challenge of the key assumptions.</li> <li>• Review and challenge of the information used by the valuer to ensure it is robust and consistent with our understanding.</li> <li>• Testing of revaluations made during the year to ensure they are input correctly into the Council's asset register</li> <li>• Evaluation of 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.</li> </ul>

# 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 (UK & Ireland) 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	<p>We have documented our understanding of the operating expenses system and completed walkthroughs where we have identified that the controls are operating effectively.</p> <p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review and test the reconciliation between the creditors ledger and the general ledger.</li> <li>• gain an understanding of the accruals process and any assumptions used.</li> <li>• substantively test post year end payments to ensure expenditure is recorded in the correct period.</li> </ul>
Employee remuneration	Employee remuneration and benefit obligations and expenses understated.	<p>We have documented our understanding of the employee remuneration system and completed walkthroughs where we have identified that the controls are operating effectively.</p> <p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review and test the reconciliation between payroll and the general ledger.</li> <li>• perform analytical procedures of the payroll on a month by trend analysis.</li> <li>• undertake testing of payroll expenditure from a sample of employees.</li> </ul>
Welfare expenditure	Welfare benefit expenditure improperly computed	<p>We have documented our understanding of the welfare benefits system and completed walkthroughs where we have identified that the controls are operating effectively.</p> <p>We will perform detailed testing of benefits expenditure by following the HBCOUNT methodology.</p>

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# Other risks identified (continued)

## 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 the previous section but will include:

- Property, plant and equipment
- Heritage assets
- Investments (long term and short term)
- Cash and cash equivalents
- Borrowing and other liabilities (long term and short term)
- Provisions
- Usable and unusable reserves
- Movement in Reserves Statement and associated notes
- Statement of cash flows and associated notes
- Financing and investment income and expenditure
- Taxation and non-specific grants
- Segmental reporting note
- Officers' remuneration note
- Leases note
- Related party transactions note
- Capital expenditure and capital financing note
- Financial instruments note
- Collection Fund and associated notes

## Other audit responsibilities

- We will undertake work to satisfy ourselves that disclosures made in the Annual Governance Statement are in line with CIPFA/SOLACE guidance and consistent with our knowledge of the Council.
- We will read the Narrative Statement and check that it is consistent with the statements on which we give an opinion and disclosures are in line with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice.
- We will carry out work on consolidation schedules for the Whole of Government Accounts process in accordance with NAO instructions to auditors.
- We will give electors the opportunity to raise questions about the accounts and consider and decide upon objections received in relation to the accounts

# Value for Money

## Background

The Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014 ('the Act') and the NAO Code of Audit Practice ('the Code') require us to consider 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.

The National Audit Office (NAO) issued its guidance for auditors on value for money work in November 2015 [here](#).

The Act and NAO guidance state that for local government bodies, auditors are required to give a conclusion on whether the Council has put proper arrangements in place.

The guidance identifies one single criterion for auditors to evaluate:

*In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.*

This is supported by three sub-criteria as set out below:

Sub-criteria	Detail
Informed decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acting in the public interest, through demonstrating and applying the principles and values of good governance</li> <li>Understanding and using appropriate cost and performance information to support informed decision making and performance management</li> <li>Reliable and timely financial reporting that supports the delivery of strategic priorities</li> <li>Managing risks effectively and maintaining a sound system of internal control.</li> </ul>
Sustainable resource deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning finances effectively to support the sustainable delivery of strategic priorities and maintain statutory functions</li> <li>Managing assets effectively to support the delivery of strategic priorities</li> <li>Planning, organising and developing the workforce effectively to deliver strategic priorities.</li> </ul>
Working with partners and other third parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with third parties effectively to deliver strategic priorities</li> <li>Commissioning services effectively to support the delivery of strategic priorities</li> <li>Procuring supplies and services effectively to support the delivery of strategic priorities.</li> </ul>

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# Value for Money (continued)

## **Risk assessment**

We completed an initial risk assessment based on the NAO's guidance. In our initial risk assessment, we considered:

- our cumulative knowledge of the Council, including work performed in previous years in respect of the VfM conclusion and the opinion on the financial statements.
- the findings of other inspectorates and review agencies.
- any illustrative significant risks identified and communicated by the NAO in its Supporting Information.
- any other evidence which we consider necessary to conclude on your arrangements.

We have identified significant risks which we are required to communicate to you. The NAO's Code of Audit Practice defines 'significant' as follows:

*A matter is significant if, in the auditor's professional view, it is reasonable to conclude that the matter would be of interest to the audited body or the wider public. Significance has both qualitative and quantitative aspects.*

It is important to note that identifying an area as a significant risk in these terms does not necessarily indicate that we have identified a problem in this area – an area which is important in the context of our VfM responsibilities can be identified as a significant risk simply because we do not currently have enough knowledge of it to form a safe conclusion.

We have set out overleaf the risk we have identified, how it relates to the Code sub-criteria, and the work we propose to undertake to address these risks. This is a risk which we have designated due to our lack of knowledge of the Council's arrangements in this area rather than any view that there is a particular problem.

## Value for money (continued)

We set out below the significant risks we have identified as a result of our initial risk assessment and the work we propose to address these risks.

Significant risk	Link to sub-criteria	Work proposed to address
<b>Working with Partners</b> The Council has already developed working partnerships such as Staffordshire County Council to develop a civic hub in Newcastle and Aspire Housing in relation to housing within Newcastle. We need to understand how these and other partnerships help the Council to achieve its strategic priorities.	This links to the Council's arrangements for working effectively with third parties to deliver strategic priorities.	We will hold discussions with Key Officers (Executive Director Resources and Support Services, IA Manager/Monitoring Officer) to gain their views on Partnership working. Review Committee Minutes, MTPS, Council Plan to obtain evidence to support Partnership working.

### Reporting

The results of our VfM audit work and the key messages arising will be reported in our Audit Findings Report and Annual Audit Letter.

We will include our conclusion as part of our report on your financial statements which we will give by 30 September 2016.

# 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:

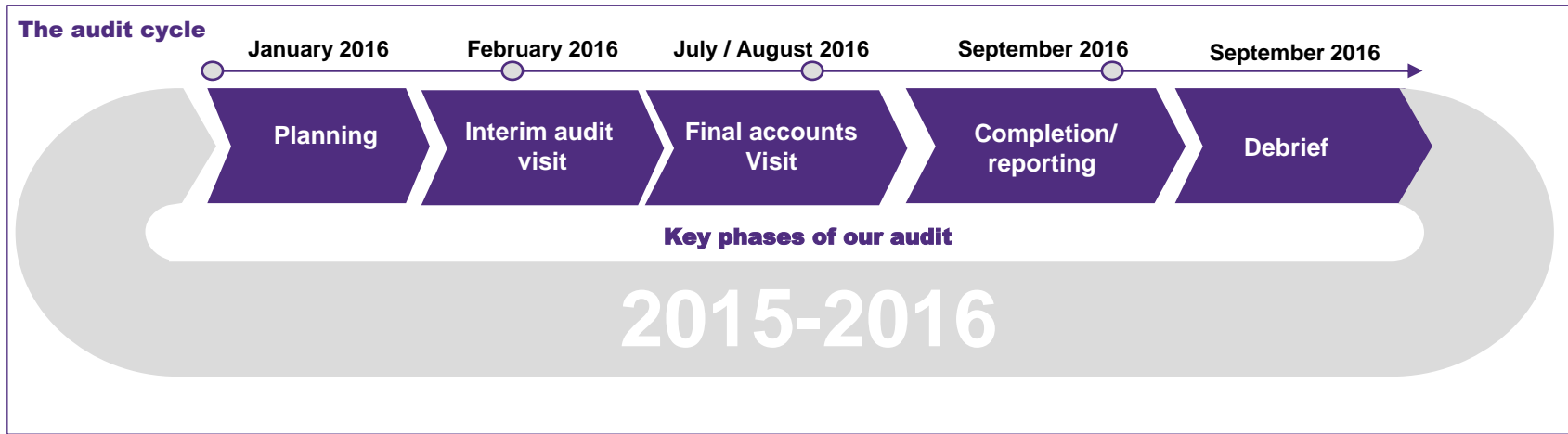
	<b>Work performed</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>Internal audit</b>	<p>We have completed a high level review of internal audit's overall arrangements. Our work has not identified any issues which we wish to bring to your attention.</p> <p>We have also reviewed internal audit's work on the Council's key financial 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 provides an independent and satisfactory service to the Council and that internal audit work contributes to an effective internal control environment.</p> <p>Our review of internal audit work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.</p>
<b>Entity level controls</b>	<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"> <li>• Communication and enforcement of integrity and ethical values</li> <li>• Commitment to competence</li> <li>• Participation by those charged with governance</li> <li>• Management's philosophy and operating style</li> <li>• Organisational structure</li> <li>• Assignment of authority and responsibility</li> <li>• Human resource policies and practices</li> </ul>	<p>Our work has identified no material weaknesses which are likely to adversely impact on the Council's financial statements</p>
<b>Review of information technology controls</b>	<p>We performed a high level review of the general IT control environment, as part of the overall review of the internal controls system.</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>



## Results of interim audit work (continued)

	<b>Work performed</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>Walkthrough testing</b>	<p>We have completed walkthrough tests of the Council's 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 by the Council in accordance with our documented understanding.</p>	<p>Our work has not identified any weaknesses which impact on our audit approach.</p>
<b>Journal entry controls</b>	<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>Our work on the Council's journal control environment will inform our testing strategy in this area.</p> <p>During our final accounts visit we will undertake detailed testing on journals transactions recorded for the financial year.</p>
<b>Early substantive testing</b>	<p>We have undertaken early testing the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating expenditure</li> <li>• Employee remuneration</li> <li>• Welfare benefits</li> <li>• Property, Plant and Equipment</li> </ul>	<p>Our early work has not identified any issues we wish to bring to your attention.</p>

# Key dates



<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>January 2016</b>	Planning
<b>February 2016</b>	Interim site visit
<b>April 2016</b>	Presentation of audit plan to Audit and Ethics Committee
<b>July / August 2016</b>	Year end fieldwork
<b>August 2016</b>	Audit findings clearance meeting with Executive Director of Resources
<b>September 2016</b>	Report audit findings to those charged with governance (Audit and Ethics Committee)
<b>September 2016</b>	Sign financial statements opinion

# Fees and independence

## Fees

	£
Council audit	55,002
Grant certification	8,052
<b>Total audit fees (excluding VAT)</b>	<b>63,054</b>

## 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.
- The accounts presented for audit are materially accurate, supporting working papers and evidence agree to the accounts, and all audit queries are resolved promptly.

## Grant certification

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

## Fees for other services

Service	Fees £
<b>Audit related services</b>	<b>Nil</b>
<b>Non-audit services</b>	<b>Nil</b>

## 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 requirements of the Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards.

# Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance

International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) (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 Report 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 Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (<http://www.psa.co.uk/appointing-auditors/terms-of-appointment/>)

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 at the time of our appointment. 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 NAO and includes nationally prescribed and locally determined work (<https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/about-code/>). 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 issues arising during the audit and written representations that have been sought		✓
Confirmation of independence and objectivity	✓	✓
A statement that we have complied with relevant ethical requirements regarding independence, relationships and other matters which might be thought to bear on independence. Details of non-audit work performed by Grant Thornton UK LLP and network firms, together with fees charged. Details of safeguards applied to threats to independence	✓	✓
Material weaknesses in internal control identified during the audit		✓
Identification or suspicion of fraud involving management and/or others which results in material misstatement of the financial statements		✓
Non compliance with laws and regulations		✓
Expected modifications to the auditor's report, or emphasis of matter		✓
Uncorrected misstatements		✓
Significant matters arising in connection with related parties		✓
Significant matters in relation to going concern		✓



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