



Stevenage Borough Council

External audit plan

Year ended 31 March 2025

May 2025



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Introduction

Adding value through the audit

All of our clients demand of us a positive contribution to meeting their ever-changing business needs. Our aim is to add value to the Council through our external audit work by being constructive and forward looking, by identifying areas of improvement and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In this way, we aim to help the Council promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making and more effective use of resources.

Purpose

This audit plan highlights the key elements of our proposed audit strategy and provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory external audit of Stevenage Borough ('the Council') for the year ended 31 March 2025 for those charged with governance.

The core elements of our work include:

- An audit of the 2024/25 Statement of Accounts for the Council and its Group; and
- An assessment of the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (our Value for Money work).

This document also includes our indicative plans for building back assurance for the Council and its Group over the coming years following the previous disclaimed audits.

We will conduct our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK), the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the 'Act'), the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice and associated guidance. The Code of Audit Practice sets out what local auditors of relevant local public bodies are required to do to fulfil their statutory responsibilities under the Act.

Auditor responsibilities

As auditors we have been appointed to perform an audit, in accordance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office and ISAs UK. Our primary responsibility is to form and express an independent opinion on the Council's (and its Group's) financial statements, stating whether they provide a true and fair view and have been prepared properly in accordance with applicable law and the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK (the 'CIPFA Code').

We are also required to:

- Report on whether the other information included in the Statement of Accounts (including the Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement) is consistent with the financial statements;
- Report by exception if the disclosures in the Annual Governance Statement are incomplete or if the Annual Governance Statement is misleading or inconsistent with our knowledge acquired during the audit;
- Report by exception any significant weaknesses identified in arrangements for securing value for money and a summary of associated recommendations;
- Report by exception on the use of our other statutory powers and duties; and
- Certify completion of our audit.

continued....

Introduction

We will conduct our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK), the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the 'Act'), and the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice. The Code of Audit Practice sets out what local auditors of relevant local public bodies are required to do to fulfil their statutory responsibilities under the Act.

This planning letter has been prepared for the sole use of those charged with governance and management and should not be relied upon by third parties. No responsibility is assumed by Azets Audit Services to third parties.

Auditor responsibilities (....continued)

We will issue our Audit Completion Report and an Auditor's Annual Report to the Audit Committee setting out the findings from our work.

Under the Act we have a broad range of reporting responsibilities and powers that are unique to the audit of local authorities in the United Kingdom. These include:

- Reporting matters in the public interest;
- Making written recommendations to the Council;
- Making an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law;
- Issuing and advisory notice; or
- Making an application for judicial review.

The Act also requires us to give an elector, or any representative of the elector, the opportunity to question us about the accounting records of the Council and consider any objection made to the accounts.

On completion of our audit work, we will issue an Audit Completion Report (prior to the approval of the financial statements), detailing our significant findings and other matters arising from the audit on the financial statements, together with an Auditor's Annual Report including our commentary on the value for money arrangements.

If, during the course of the audit, we identify any significant adverse or unexpected findings that we conclude should be communicated, we will do so on a timely basis, either informally or in writing.

The audit does not relieve management or the Audit Committee of your responsibilities, including those in relation to the preparation of the financial statements.

Council responsibilities

The Council has responsibility for:

- Preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework and relevant legislation;
- Preparing and publishing, along with the financial statements, an annual governance statement and narrative report;
- Maintaining proper accounting records and preparing working papers to an acceptable professional standard that support its financial statements and related reports disclosures; and
- Ensuring the proper financial stewardship of public funds, complying with relevant legislation and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety and regularity.

Audit scope and general approach

This section of our letter sets out the scope and nature of our audit and should be considered in conjunction with the [Terms of Appointment](#) and [Statement of Responsibilities](#) issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA).

General approach

Our objective when performing an audit is to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement and to issue an auditor's report that includes our auditor's opinion.

As part of our risk-based audit approach, we will:

- Perform risk assessment procedures including updating our understanding of the Council and its Group, including its environment, the financial reporting framework and its system of internal control;
- Review the design and implementation of key internal controls;
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, at the financial statement level and the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures;

- Design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, to obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion; and
- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit recognising that circumstances may exist that cause the financial statements to be materially misstated.

We will undertake a variety of audit procedures which, in a normal year, are designed to provide us with sufficient evidence to give us reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. We are unlikely to be able to obtain sufficient assurance in 2024/25 to reach this conclusion due to the previously disclaimed audits.

Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.

We include an explanation in the auditor's report of the extent to which the audit was capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud and respective responsibilities for prevention and detection of fraud.

Audit scope and general approach

Materiality

We apply the concept of materiality both in planning and performing the audit, and in evaluating the effect of identified misstatements on the audit and of uncorrected misstatements.

Judgments about materiality are made in the light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by our perception of the financial information needs of users of the financial statements, and by the size or nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both. **The basis for our assessment of materiality for the year is set out on page 17.**

Any identified errors greater than:

£110,000

will be recorded and discussed with you and, if not adjusted, confirmed as immaterial as part of your letter of representation to us.

Accounting systems and internal controls

The purpose of an audit is to express an opinion on the financial statements. We will follow a substantive testing approach to gain audit assurance rather than relying on tests of controls. As part of our work, we consider certain internal controls relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such that we are able to design appropriate audit procedures. However, this work does not cover all internal controls and is not designed for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal controls. If, as part of our consideration of internal controls, we identify significant deficiencies in controls, we will report these to you in writing.

Specialised skill or knowledge required to complete the audit procedures

We will use audit specialists to assist us in our audit work in the following areas:

- The audit of the actuarial assumptions used in the calculation of the defined benefit pension liability/asset; and
- The audit of investment or property valuations, should the need arise during the course of the audit.

We will consult internally with our Technology Risk team for them to support the audit team by assessing the information technology general controls (ITGC) of your key accounting systems.

Audit scope and general approach

Significant changes in the financial reporting framework

There has been one significant change in the financial reporting framework this year, including the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024/25 (the 'CIPFA Code'). The new standard relating to IFRS 16 Leases issued in January 2016 has now been mandated for implementation from 1 April 2024 within the 2024/25 Code.

Significant changes in the Council's and Group's functions or activities

There have been no significant changes to the functions and activities of the Council or its group structure. We have not been made aware of any significant changes in the functions or activities of the other components in the Council's group.

Our group audit scope and risk assessment is set out in Appendix I.

Going concern

Management responsibility

Management is required to make and document an assessment of whether the Council and group is a going concern when preparing the financial statements. The review period should cover at least 12 months from the date of approval of the financial statements. Management are also required to make balanced, proportionate and clear disclosures about going concern within the financial statements where material uncertainties exist in order to give a true and fair view.

Going concern

Auditor responsibility

Under ISA (UK) 570, we are required to consider the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements and consider whether there are material uncertainties about the Council and group's ability to continue as a going concern that need to be disclosed in the financial statements.

In assessing going concern, we will consider the guidance published in the CIPFA Code and Practice Note 10 (PN10), which focusses on the anticipated future provision of services in the public sector rather than the future existence of the entity itself.

Audit scope and general approach

Related party transactions

ISA 550 requires that the audit process starts with the audited body providing a list of related parties to the auditor, including any entities under common control.

During our initial audit planning you have informed us of the individuals and entities that you consider to be related parties. Please advise us of any changes as and when they arise.

Additional procedures for the NAO

The National Audit Office (the 'NAO') issues group audit instructions which set out additional audit requirements. We expect the procedures for this year to be similar to previous years.

The NAO audit team for the WGA request us to undertake specific audit procedures in order to provide them with additional assurance over the amounts recorded in WGA schedules. The extent of these procedures will depend on whether the Council has been selected by the NAO as a sampled component for 2024/25. As at the date of this report, the draft instructions have not yet been issued by the NAO and the NAO has not yet confirmed which entities will be sampled components.

We will comply with the instructions and report to the NAO in accordance with their requirements once instructions have been issued.

Building back assurance

Statutory backstop dates and disclaimed audits

Statutory Instrument (2024) No. 907 - “*The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2024*”, imposed annual statutory backstop dates up to and including the 2027/28 year of account for the publication by the Council of its final Statement of Accounts. The Code of Audit Practice specifies that auditors are required to issue their auditor’s report before these dates, even if planned audit procedures are not fully complete, so that local government bodies can comply with the statutory reporting deadline.

This legislation provides the following statutory backstop dates:

- 13 December 2024 Audits from 2015/16 to 2022/23
- 28 February 2025 2023/24 audit
- 28 February 2026 2024/25 audit
- 31 January 2027 2025/26 audit
- 30 November 2027 2026/27 audit
- 30 November 2028 2027/28 audit

The statutory backstop has resulted in the audits of the Council’s accounts being disclaimed for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24. The previous clean opinion, where the closing balances were assured by the auditor, was 2020/21. The closing balances as at 31 March 2021 are therefore our required starting point for building back assurance.

Building back assurance

Government’s expectation is that auditors and councils build back assurance to enable, at some point in the future, the return to unmodified (clean) opinions. The recovery period has been designed to allow auditors to rebuild assurance for balances from disclaimed years over multiple audit cycles, reducing the risk of the backlog recurring. Because auditors will need to make prioritisation decisions to issue audit opinions ahead of the backstop dates, they may not be able to obtain sufficient evidence to support all balances nor all in-year and comparative expenditure, income, cash flow and reserves movements.

As a firm we have invested considerable resources in developing our overall response to the disclaimed periods of assurance, the impact this has on our audit responsibilities and what an indicative build-back plan may involve. Due to the complexities caused by the disclaiming of previous audits our work has required greater involvement from senior members of the audit team than would normally be the case. PSAA has made clear that this additional work is over and above the annual scale fee.

Our planning takes into account the guidance contained in the [Local Audit Reset and Recovery Implementation Guidance](#) (LARRIG), numbers 1 to 5. LARRIGs are prepared and published by the National Audit Office (NAO) on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) who has power to issue guidance to auditors under Schedule 6 paragraph 9 of the *Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014* (the Act). LARRIGs are prepared and published with the endorsement of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) and are intended to support the reset and recovery of local audit in England. The guidance in LARRIGs supports auditors in meeting their requirements under the Act and the [Code of Audit Practice](#) published by the NAO on behalf of the C&AG.

Building back assurance

Our planning also takes into account the guidance contained in the FRC's document [Local Audit Backlog Rebuilding Assurance](#). Alongside the backlog measures, the Government has announced its intention to 'overhaul the local audit system.'

The FRC's guidance states: *"Recovery from the backlog is a shared endeavour between auditors and local bodies. Accounts preparers have a vital part to play, providing good quality draft financial statements supported by comprehensive working papers and supporting evidence to auditors. The success of these proposals relies on both auditors and accounts preparers working closely together to agree jointly-owned delivery plans for each year's audit. Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) are responsible for the production of guidance to support accounts preparers. Audit Committees should ensure that they are planning and able to play their full part in the process."*

Elements of building back assurance are subject to detailed discussion within a cross-firm working group, also attended by the FRC, known as 'the Sandbox'. We will ensure our build-back approach is fully ISA compliant and, where it relies on the eventual outcome of Sandbox discussions, we will only utilise this approach where it has been endorsed by the FRC.

As part of our work in 2023/24, we began assessing what work, carried out in 2023/24, can be used to inform the process of rebuilding assurance in future years. Where work was able to be undertaken in 2023/24, we intend to accrete this work into this and future audit periods to inform the future building back of assurance. The build-back approach will require us to apply a process of rebuilding assurance over all financial years for which disclaimers of opinion have been issued.

As a result of the approach we adopted in 2023/24 we have developed our understanding of the Council's systems, processes, controls and arrangements for the preparation of the financial statements and have gathered information which may inform the process of rebuilding assurance in this and future years.

We have developed an indicative end-to-end build-back recovery plan for disclaimed audits. We set out this indicative plan for your Council here.

Our overarching approach

Our approach to your audit from 2024/25 onwards comprises three distinct phases with the ultimate objective of returning to unmodified opinions in the future.

Phase	Planned work	Timing	Included in scale fee?
1	Undertake the normal 'in-year' audit. This will provide assurance over some closing balances and most in-year movements	Annually	Yes
2	Undertake 'build-back' testing back to the last clean opinion for specified balance sheet items where full assurance over the closing balance cannot be obtained without opening assurance	To be agreed with Council	No – additional cost
3	Undertake work on prior-year disclaimed CIES entries and reserve movements back to the last clean opinion (subject to Sandbox discussions)	To be agreed with Council	No – additional cost

Building back assurance

One of the contributing factors to the existing backlog of opinions nationally was insufficient capacity across audit suppliers and, in some cases, within council finance teams. These capacity constraints continue. It is therefore not possible to rebuild all assurance within a one-year period. In terms of the work required under phases 2 and 3 – which could be considerable – we will discuss with management the appropriate timing and year(s) for such work. For 2024/25 we anticipate there will be sufficient capacity to undertake phase 1 and potentially some elements of phase 2, with the remainder of the indicative build back plan falling into future years.

Phase 1: the ‘in-year’ audit and accretion of evidence

In 2024/25 and future years, our ‘in-year’ audit will enable us to reach one of the following conclusions for each balance sheet item of account. This approach is subject to the provision of appropriate and timely evidence which fully supports the balances in question, and whether our detailed work confirms our assumptions over which balances can be fully supported independently of the missing opening assurance.

The items in the first category will be rolled forward and accreted into future years as part of the overarching indicative build-back strategy. It will take a minimum of three years for the items in this first category to be fully assured across three closing balances. By this time, no further retrospective build back should be required for these items of account.

The items in the second category will need further work to obtain full assurance, which forms phases 2 and 3 of the overarching indicative build-back approach.

Conclusion	Likely applicable balances
Assurance gained over the closing balance of the item of account (i.e. closing balance is not inherently tied to the opening position)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other land and buildings valuation• Council dwellings valuation• Investment properties• Investments• Debtors• Creditors• Cash and cash equivalents• Borrowing• Provisions
Assurance gained in-year but lack of opening assurance means the closing balance / full year balance on CIES cannot be fully assured and remains disclaimed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Property plant and equipment• Council dwellings• Pension liabilities (IAS19)• Long term debtors• Long term creditors• Long term lease liabilities• Income strip balances• All reserves

Building back assurance

Phase 2: build-back for specified balance sheet items where the closing position is inherently tied to the opening position

These closing balances can only be assured by undertaking work on these items of account in the disclaimed years, back to the last clean opinion.

We are not, at this stage, proposing to rebuild assurance for historic land and buildings, council dwelling and IAS19 pension valuations or CIES income and expenditure over the disclaimed years. This is considered further in Phase 3.

Obtaining full assurance over the pension liability valuation (IAS19) closing balance will not be possible until the completion of the next triennial valuation. This is because of missing assurance over the current position dating back to the previous triennial valuation. The next triennial valuation is due to be accounted for from 2025/26, and we will undertake work in respect of this in conjunction with the pension fund auditor during the 2025/26 audit year.

In 2024/25 we will undertake work on the IAS19 disclosures and, in particular, the Council's accounting for the pension asset ceiling and related accounting items, to assess the accuracy and disclosure of these and other factors, in readiness for 2025/26 and the triennial valuation.

Phase 3: build-back on prior year disclaimed CIES entries and reserve movements back to the last clean opinion

The approach to this is being discussed by all firms within the 'Sandbox'. Firms, including Azets, will only use this approach if it is endorsed by MHCLG and appropriate statutory guidance.

If it is endorsed, we will employ the 'Sandbox' approach back to the last clean opinion to gain full assurance over prior years' CIES and reserves movements and, therefore, reserves closing balances. This may involve selective substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions within disclaimed years.

If the 'Sandbox' approach is not endorsed, or if the risk assessment of the Council's position means the approach cannot be used, we will need to undertake full CIES testing in previously disclaimed years. This will then enable us to undertake reserves testing for each disclaimed year, enabling us to rebuild the assurance over the reserves balances and provide assurance over the general fund, earmarked reserves and unusable reserves, as well as over the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) and minimum revenue provision (MRP).

Indicative build-back planner

	Build back of specified closing balances				Recovery of closing balances	Recovery of reserves and CIES	
Item of account	Phase 1				Phase 2 (year and timing to be agreed with management)	Phase 3 (year and timing to be agreed with management)	Included in scale fee?
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28			
Income in-year <i>(fees and charges, taxation, grants, other income)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Expenditure in-year <i>(payroll, operating expenditure, other expenditure)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Other land and buildings valuation, council dwellings valuation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Closing balances not inherently tied to the opening balance <i>(includes Investment properties, investments, debtors, creditors, cash and cash equivalents, borrowing, provisions)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Pension liabilities (IAS19) <i>(triennial in 2025/26)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Reserves and reserves movements in-year <i>(general fund, earmarked reserves, unusable reserves, CFR, MRP, disclaimed year CIES movements)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Cash flow statement in-year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Collection fund and HRA in-year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
Cash flow statement and related notes full assurance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes
PPE closing balances, council dwelling closing balances <i>(recovery of additions, disposals, depreciation and other capital movements)</i>	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Closing balances inherently tied to the opening balances where prior year recovery is required <i>(Long term debtors, long term creditors, long term lease liabilities, PFI, income strip)</i>	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Collection fund surplus	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Reserves and reserves movements full assurance (including movement on HRA statement) <i>(general fund, earmarked reserves, unusable reserves, CFR, MRP, disclaimed year CIES movements)</i>	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No

Indicative assurance over build-back period

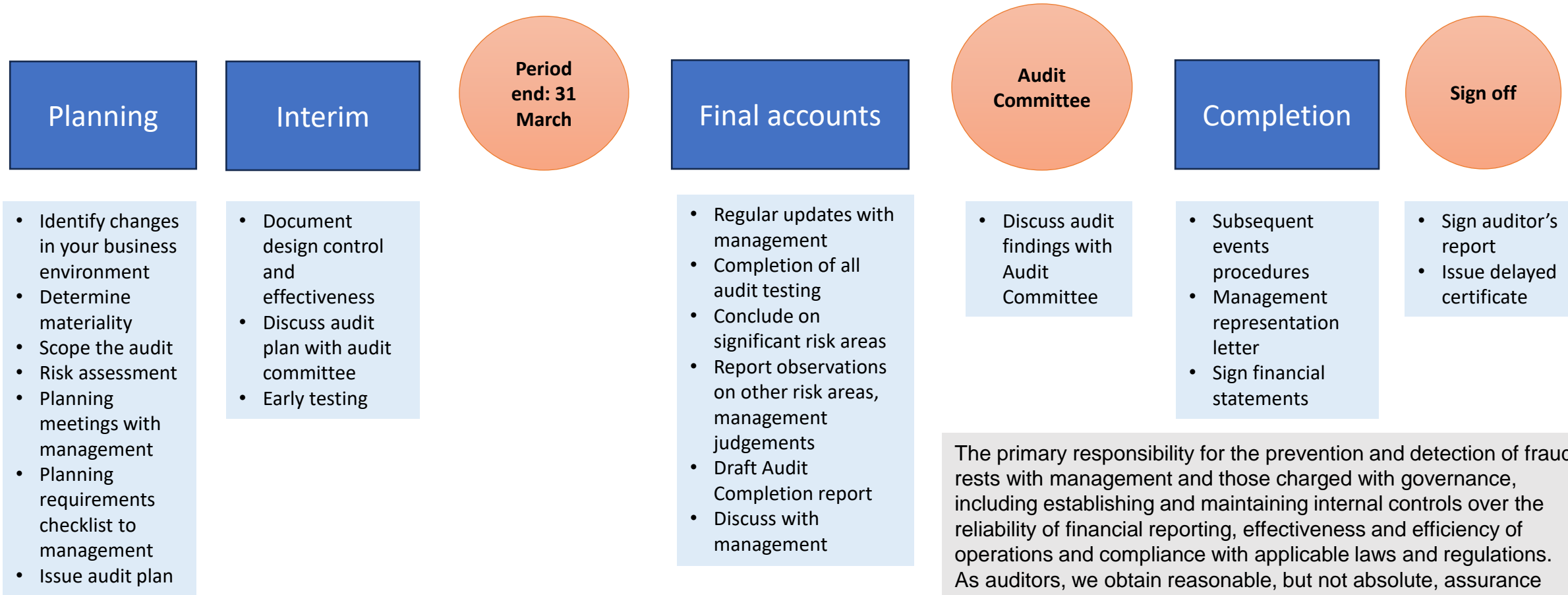
	Build back of specified closing balances through in-year audit				Recovery of closing balances	Recovery of reserves and CIES
	Phase 1				Phase 2 (year and timing to be agreed with management)	Phase 3 (year and timing to be agreed with management)
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28		
PHASE 1(A): Assurance gained over specific balance sheet closing balances which are not inherently tied to the opening balance, EXCEPT FOR pensions IAS19 balance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
PHASE 1(B): Assurance gained over specific balance sheet closing balances which are not inherently tied to the opening balance, INCLUDING pensions IAS19 balance	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
PHASE 1(C): Assurance gained over comparator closing balance for specific balance sheet items not inherently tied to the opening balance	No	No	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
PHASE 1(D): Assurance gained over comparator opening balance for specific balance sheet items not inherently tied to the opening balance	No	No	No	Yes	N/A	N/A
PHASE 2: Assurance gained over balance sheet balances which are inherently tied to the opening balance – current year closing, prior year closing, prior year opening – plus collection fund surplus	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
PHASE 3: Assurance gained over general fund, earmarked reserves, unusable reserves	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes
Full assurance gained for each phase?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is missing assurance pervasive?	YES	YES	YES	YES (phase 1 obtained only)	YES (phase 1 and 2 obtained only)	NO (provided also have full phase 1 and 2)
Anticipated opinion	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Clean
Additional fee – disclaimer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Additional fee – build back	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

Anticipated audit reports by year

Year	Assurance gained								Anticipated audit report
	Closing balances	Comparator closing balances	Comparator opening balances	Pensions IAS19 closing balance	Pensions IAS19 comparator closing balance	Pensions IAS19 comparator opening balance	Closing balances inherently tied to the opening balance	Reserves	
2024/25	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Disclaimer
2025/26	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Disclaimer
2026/27	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Disclaimer
2027/28 (phase 1 only)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Disclaimer
2027/28 * (phase 1 and 2 only)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Disclaimer
2027/28 * (phase 1, 2 and 3)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Clean

* Phase 2 (recovery of assurance back to the last clean opinion) and Phase 3 (recovery of general fund and reserves assurance) can be undertaken earlier than 2027/28 should there be sufficient capacity within the audit team and finance team, and subject to agreement of cost for this additional work.

Our financial statements audit explained



Materiality

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our audit opinion, we also report to those charged with governance and management any uncorrected misstatements of lower value errors to the extent that our audit identifies these. Under ISA (UK) 260 we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA (UK) 260 defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria.

An omission or misstatement is regarded as material if it would reasonably influence the users of the financial statements. The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our assessment of the risk profile of the Council and the needs of the users. When planning, we make judgements about the size of misstatements which we consider to be material, and which provide a basis for determining the nature and extent of our audit procedures. Materiality is revised as our audit progresses, should we become aware of any information that would have caused us to determine a different amount had we known about it during our planning.

Our assessment, at the planning stage, of materiality for the year ended 31 March 2025 was calculated as follows:

	Group £'000	Council £'000	Explanation
Overall materiality for the financial statements	2,200	2,100	Our initial assessment is based on 2% of gross revenue expenditure as disclosed in the 2023/24 annual report and accounts. We consider this to be the principal consideration for the users of the financial statements when assessing financial performance of the Council and Group. The financial statements are considered to be materially misstated where total errors exceed this value
Performance materiality	1,430	1,365	65% of materiality (adjusted to take into account the Council component materiality allocation for the group accounts) Performance materiality is the working level of materiality used throughout the audit. We use performance materiality to determine the nature, timing and extent of audit procedures carried out. We perform audit procedures on all transactions, or groups of transactions, and balances that exceed our performance materiality. This means that we perform a greater level of testing on the areas deemed to be at significant risk of material misstatement. Performance materiality is set at a value less than overall materiality for the financial statements as a whole to reduce to an appropriately low level the probability that the aggregate of the uncorrected and undetected misstatements exceed overall materiality.
Trivial threshold	110	110	5% of overall materiality for the Council and group. Trivial misstatements are matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. Individual errors above this threshold are communicated to those charged with governance.

In addition to the above, we consider any areas for specific lower materiality.

Significant risks of material misstatement

Significant risks are risks that require special audit consideration and include identified risks of material misstatement that:

- Our risk assessment procedures have identified as being close to the upper range of the spectrum of inherent risk due to their nature and a combination of the likelihood and potential magnitude of misstatement; or
- Are required to be treated as significant risks due to requirements of ISAs (UK), for example in relation to management override of internal controls.

Significant risks at the financial statement level

The table below summarises significant risks of material misstatement identified at the financial statement level. These risks are considered to have a pervasive impact on the financial statements as a whole and potentially affect many assertions for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures.

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Management override of controls (Council and group)</p> <p>Auditing Standards require auditors to treat management override of controls as a significant risk on all audits. This is because management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud by manipulating accounting records and overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.</p> <p>Although the level of risk of management override of controls will vary from entity to entity, the risk is nevertheless present in all entities.</p> <p>Specific areas of potential risk including manual journals, management estimates and judgements and one-off transactions outside the ordinary course of the business.</p> <p>Risk of material misstatement: Very High</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Documenting our understanding of the journals posting process and evaluating the design effectiveness of management controls over journals;• Analysing the journals listing and determining the criteria for selecting high risk and/or unusual journals;• Testing high risk and/or unusual journals posted during the year and after the draft accounts stage back to supporting documentation for appropriateness, corroboration and to ensure approval has been undertaken in line with the Council's journals policy;• Gaining an understanding of the key accounting estimates and critical judgements made by management. We will also challenge assumptions and consider for reasonableness and indicators of bias which could result in material misstatement due to fraud; and• Evaluating the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimate or significant unusual transactions.

Significant risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Prior year opinion on the financial statements (Council and group)</p> <p>As a result of the backstop implemented on 28 February 2025, a disclaimer audit opinion was provided on the council 2023/24 financial statements. Disclaimed audit opinions have also been provided on the Council's accounts for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 years.</p> <p>As a result of prior year disclaimed audit opinion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited assurance available over the Council's opening balances, including those balances which involve higher levels of management judgement and more complex estimation techniques (e.g. defined benefit pension valuations, land and building, council dwelling and investment property valuations, amongst others); and • Significant transactions, accounting treatment and management judgements may not have been subject to audits for one or more years – or at all. This may include management judgements and accounting treatment in respect of significant or complex schemes or transactions which came into effect during the qualified or disclaimed period/s. <p>The absence of prior year assurance raises a significant risk of material misstatement at the financial statement level that may require additional audit procedures.</p> <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement: Very High</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the findings and outcomes of prior year audits and their impact on the 2024/25 audit; • Considering the impact on our audit of qualified or disclaimed audit opinions, particularly regarding opening balances and 'unaudited' transactions and management judgements made in the previous years which continue into 2024/25; and • Considering the impact of any changes in Code requirements for financial reporting in previous and current audit years.

Significant risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Income Strip (Council and group)</p> <p>The Council has entered a complex and financially significant income strip scheme. This requires the recognition of an asset, a significant finance lease liability and management judgement on accounting for various transactions related to this scheme. The complexity of the accounting is greater as part of this transaction sits within the Council's subsidiary entity.</p> <p>The Council will also need to consider the impact of IFRS16 on the income strip arrangement and how this is accounted for within the financial statements.</p> <p>The accounting transactions of the income strip affect various assertions across multiple items of account in the CIES, balance sheet and Movement in Reserves statement. We have therefore assessed this as a financial statements level risk.</p> <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement: Very High</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing management's accounting treatment for this transaction, including revenue flows in year and the value of long and short-term assets and liabilities associated with the scheme• Assessing management's accounting treatment against the requirements of the CIPFA Code and International Financial Reporting Standards.• Assessing management's judgement on the impact of IFRS16 on the accounting for income strip transactions.

Significant risks of material misstatement

Significant risks at the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures

The table below summarises significant risks of material misstatement at the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures.

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Fraud in revenue recognition for income and expenditure (Council and group) – rebutted</p> <p>Material misstatement due to fraudulent financial reporting relating to revenue recognition is a rebuttable presumed risk in ISA (UK) 240. Having considered the nature of the revenue streams at the Council, we consider that the risk of fraud in revenue recognition can be rebutted on all income streams because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• there is little opportunity available to manipulate revenue recognition;• there is limited incentive to manipulate revenue recognition• the Council’s existing income transactions do not provide a significant opportunity to manipulate income between years in any meaningful way or to adopt aggressive recognition policies. <p>We have also considered Practice Note 10, which comments that for certain public bodies, the risk of manipulating expenditure could exceed the risk of the manipulation of revenue. We have therefore also considered the risk of fraud in expenditure at the Council, and we are satisfied that this is not a significant risk for the reasons set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• significant amount of expenditure is in relation to pay, and• non-pay expenditure reflected in the Council’s financial statements exhibits a straightforward nature, characterised by reduced subjectivity, and there is little incentive to management to manipulate expenditure. <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement (existence and occurrence): Low</p>	<p>Whilst we have rebutted the risk of fraud in income and expenditure, we will perform the below procedures based on their value within the financial statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Documenting our understanding of the Council’s systems for income and expenditure to identify significant classes of transactions, account balances and disclosures with a risk of material misstatement in the financial statements• Evaluating the Council’s accounting policies for recognition of income and expenditure and compliance with the CIPFA Code.• Substantively testing material income and expenditure streams using analytical procedures and sample testing of transactions recognised for the year

Significant risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Valuation of council dwellings, other land and buildings and investment property – key accounting estimate – (Council and group)</p> <p>Revaluation of council dwellings, other land and buildings and investment property should be performed with sufficient regularity so that carrying amounts are not materially misstated.</p> <p>The Council carries out a rolling programme of revaluations to ensure all property, plant and equipment required to be measured at fair value is revalued at each 1 April and it undertakes a full revaluation of its investment property annually.</p> <p>Management engage the services of a qualified valuer, who is a Regulated Member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) to undertake these valuations as of 31 March 2025.</p> <p>The valuations involve a wide range of assumptions and source data and are therefore sensitive to changes in market conditions. ISAs (UK) 500 and 540 require us to undertake audit procedures on the use of external expert valuers and the methods, assumptions and source data underlying the fair value estimates.</p> <p>These valuations represents a key accounting estimate made by management within the financial statements due to the size of the values involved, the subjectivity of the measurements and the sensitive nature of the estimate to changes in key assumptions. We have therefore identified the valuation of council dwellings, other land and buildings and investment property as a significant risk.</p> <p>We will further pinpoint this risk to specific assets, or asset types, on receipt of the draft financial statements and the year-end updated asset valuations to those assets where the in-year valuation movements falls outside of our expectations.</p> <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement (valuation): High</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating management processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to the valuation experts and the scope of their work; • Evaluating the competence, capabilities and objectivity of management's valuation expert; • Considering the basis on which the valuations are carried out and challenging the key assumptions applied; • Evaluating the reasonableness of the valuation movements for assets revalued during the year, with reference to market data. We will consider whether we require an auditor's expert; • For unusual or unexpected valuation movements, testing the information used by the valuer to ensure it is complete and consistent with our understanding; • Ensuring revaluations made during the year have been input correctly to the fixed asset register and the accounting treatment within the financial statements is correct; and • Evaluating the assumptions made by management for any assets not revalued during the year and how management are satisfied that these are not materially different to the current value.

Significant risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Valuation of the defined pension fund net liability/asset – key accounting estimate – (Council and group)</p> <p>An actuarial estimate of the net defined pension liability/asset is calculated on an annual basis under IAS 19 ‘Employee Benefits’, and on a triennial funding basis, by an independent firm of actuaries with specialist knowledge and experience. The triennial estimates are based on the most up to date membership data held by the pension fund and a roll forward approach is used in intervening years, as permitted by the CIPFA Code.</p> <p>The calculations involve a number of key assumptions, such as discount rates and inflation and local factors such as mortality rates and expected pay rises. The estimates are highly sensitive to changes in these assumptions. ISAs (UK) 500 and 540 require us to undertake audit procedures on the use of external experts (the actuary) and the methods, assumptions and source data underlying the estimates.</p> <p>This represents a key accounting estimate made by management within the financial statements due to the size of the values involved, the subjectivity of the measurement and the sensitive nature of the estimate to changes in key assumptions. We have therefore identified the valuation of the net pension liability/asset as a significant risk.</p> <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement (valuation): High</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating managements processes for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to management’s expert (the actuary) and the scope of their work; • Evaluating the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary; • Assessing the controls in place to ensure that the data provided to the actuary by the Council and their pension fund was accurate and complete; • Evaluating the methods, assumptions and source data used by the actuary in their valuations, with the support of an auditors’ expert; • Evaluating whether any asset ceiling was appropriately considered (if applicable) when determining the value of any pension asset included in the financial statements; • Assessing the impact of any significant differences between the estimated gross asset valuations included in the financial statements and the Council’s share of the investment valuations in the audited pension fund accounts’; and • Ensuring pension valuation movements for the year and related disclosures have been correctly reflected in the financial statements.

Other risks of material misstatement

Other identified risks

Other identified risks are those which, although not considered to be significant, will require specific consideration during the audit.

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Implementation of IFRS 16 – key accounting estimate – (Council and group)</p> <p>IFRS 16 was adopted and implemented by local government bodies under the Code of Audit Practice from 1 April 2024. Under IFRS 16 a lessee is required to recognise a right of use asset and associated lease liability in its Balance Sheet. This will result in significant changes to the accounting for leased assets and the associated disclosures within the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025.</p> <p>As of 31 March 2024, the Council does not have any material operating leases. We are currently waiting for the Council’s confirmation of the impact for 2024/25.</p> <p>The Council will also need to consider the impact of IFRS16 on the income strip arrangement and how this is accounted for within the financial statements.</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessing the appropriateness of the Council’s approach to identification of leases captured within the scope of IFRS 16, with a particular focus on ensuring completeness of leases;• Performing a walkthrough of the Council’s systems and processes to capture the data required to account for right of use (RoU) lease assets and associated liability in accordance with IFRS 16;• Reviewing the Council’s accounting policies for the year ended 31 March 2025 to reflect the requirements of the new accounting standard;• Assessing the existence, valuation, accuracy and completeness of the right of use assets and associates lease liabilities, and the related disclosures within the financial statements;• Assessing and testing Council’s method of valuing the lease liability attributed to the Queensway income strip scheme; and• Evaluating whether Right of Use assets and lease liabilities have been appropriately remeasured in line with the requirements of IFRS 16 as set out in the CIPFA Code.

Other risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Minimum revenue provision (MRP) – (Council)</p> <p>Linked to the risk of ‘misstatements due to fraud and error’, we consider specific areas where management makes significant judgements that impact charges to the General Fund balance. Local authorities are required to charge a ‘Minimum Revenue Provision’ (MRP) to the General Fund in each financial year related to borrowing. The calculation of this charge is based on the Capital Financing Requirement. Local authorities have flexibility in how they calculate MRP but need to ensure the calculation is prudent. In calculating a prudent provision, local authorities are required to have regard to statutory guidance. There is a risk that the Council may not been appropriately prudent in its calculation of MRP and/or not followed the relevant statutory guidance.</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining an understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to calculate the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) • Assessing and reviewing the calculation of the Capital Financing Requirement to ensure it is appropriate and consistent with other notes in the financial statements • Reviewing the MRP Policy statement and confirming consistency with prior year or any changes thereof • Evaluating the appropriateness of the Council’s MRP policy • Evaluating whether the MRP has been appropriately calculated in accordance with the latest statutory guidance.
<p>Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – (Council)</p> <p>Expenditure by the HRA is tightly controlled by legislative requirements. HRA monies are ring-fenced and cannot be used for general fund purposes. Funds can also not be appropriated from the HRA and moved to the general fund.</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing expenditure incurred by the HRA to assess whether it is correctly accounted for within the HRA boundary

Other risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Valuation of Debtors (Council)</p> <p>The Council's accounts hold long term debtors of circa £34m owed by the Council's subsidiary entities: Queensway (Stevenage) LLP and Marshgate Ltd. However, their ability to pay this is not certain based on their audited reported financial positions. It is important that the Council undertakes an expected credit loss assessment in line with International Financial Reporting Standard 9 (IFRS9) and requirements within the CIPFA Code of Practice on local authority accounting, to assess whether this £34m debtor should be impaired.</p> <p>The Council should ensure the financial risks related to both companies are fully considered and reflected in the financial statements of the Council, as the ultimate beneficial owner, ensuring any expected credit loss which may require recognition is included within the Council's annual financial position.</p> <p>The Council should also consider, if any guarantee is given to the subsidiaries to support their going concern, the impact this may have on the Council's financial statements and ensure it is appropriately accounted for within the Council's accounts.</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining an understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure compliance with the requirements of IFRS9 • Gaining an understanding of any guarantees provided by the Council to the subsidiaries and assessing whether these have been correctly accounted for within the Council's financial statements

Other risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Impact on going concern of the performance of the income strip – (Council and group)</p> <p>We have reviewed the most recent set of audited accounts for Queensway (Stevenage) LLP and noted ongoing losses reported by the subsidiary (£0.71m in 2023/24 and £0.53m in 2022/23). The subsidiary also has reported a negative balance sheet position of £4.89m. These ongoing losses and the net liability position of the company as a whole indicate financial strain.</p> <p>If the LLP continues to make losses and is not generating sufficient income in the medium to longer term to cover the lease payments to the Council, this could create a mismatch between the Council's liabilities to Aviva and its income from the LLP. This could in turn negatively impact the Council's overall financial position.</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing cashflow forecasts, ongoing performance of the income strip and the impact on the Council of continued underperformance• Obtaining and reviewing management's going concern assessment

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 those adopted for the risks identified in this report.

Value for money

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we must satisfy ourselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (referred to here as “Value for Money”, or “VFM”).

NAO Auditor Guidance Note 03 ‘Auditors’ Work on Value for Money Arrangements’ (“AGN 03”) was updated and issued on 14 November 2024 and requires us to provide an annual commentary on arrangements, which will be published as part of the Auditor’s Annual Report. Such commentary will highlight any significant weaknesses in arrangements, along with recommendations for improvements.



When reporting on such arrangements, the Code of Practice requires us to structure our commentary under three specified reporting criteria:

Financial sustainability	How the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services
Governance	How the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	How the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services

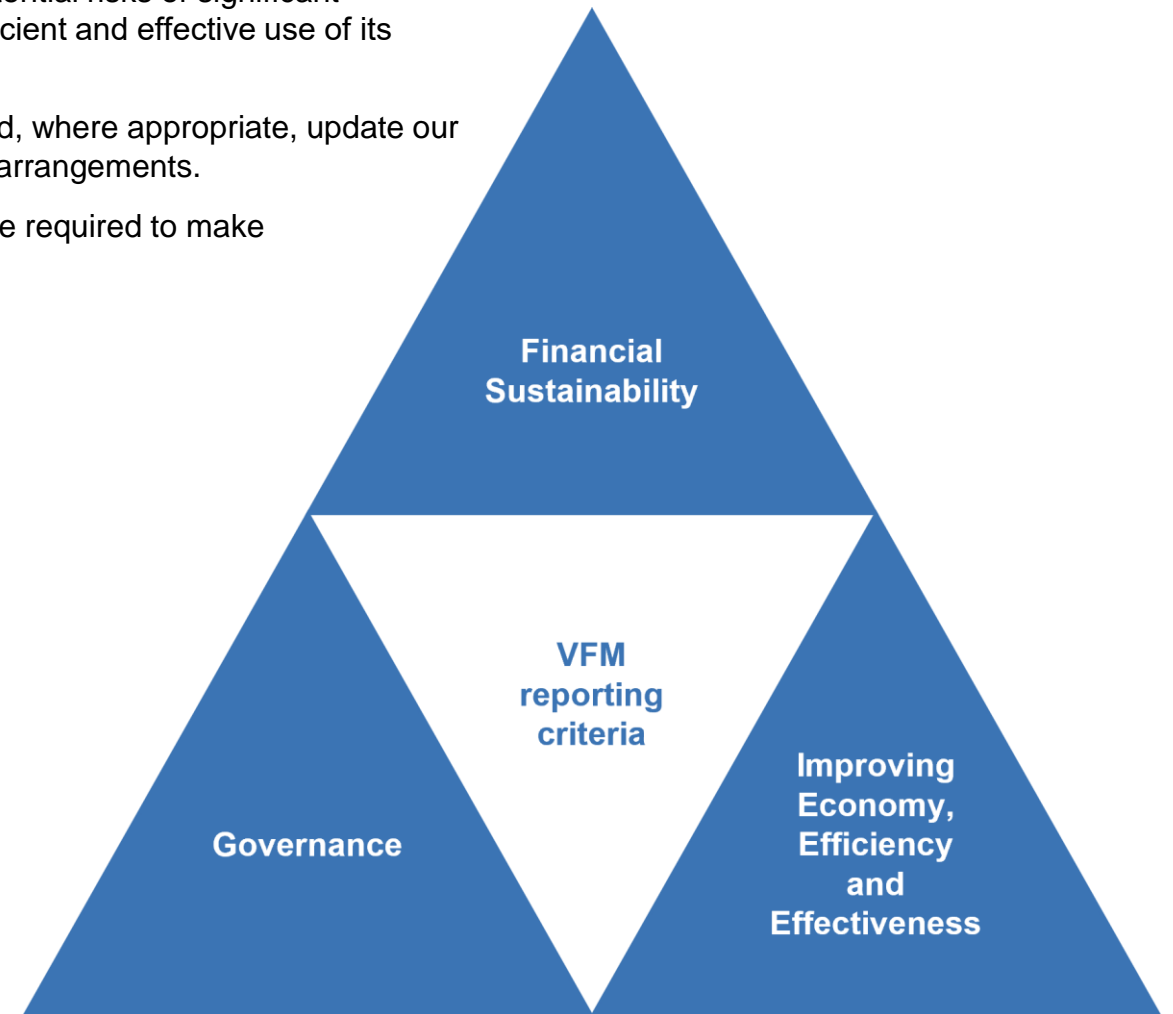
Value for Money

As part of the planning process, we are required to perform procedures to identify potential risks of significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements to secure VFM through the economic, efficient and effective use of its resources.

We are required to re-evaluate this risk assessment during the course of the audit and, where appropriate, update our work to reflect emerging risks or findings that may suggest a significant weakness in arrangements.

Where we identify significant weaknesses in arrangements as part of our work, we are required to make recommendations setting out:

- Our judgement on the nature of the weakness identified;
- The evidence on which our view is based;
- The impact on the local body; and
- The action the body needs to take to address the weakness.



Value for Money

Risks of significant weakness in VFM arrangements

We have carried out an initial risk assessment to identify any risks of significant weakness in respect of the three specific areas of proper arrangements using the guidance contained in AGN 03. A significant weakness is a risk requiring audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood that proper arrangements are not in place at the body to deliver value for money.

We will re-evaluate this risk assessment during the course of the audit and, where appropriate, update our work to reflect emerging risks or findings that may suggest a significant weakness in arrangements.

When considering the Council's arrangements, we will have regard to the three reporting criteria set out in AGN03, as well as performing additional work in the areas identified below which are the potential areas of significant weaknesses, we have identified at the planning stage.

Criteria	Potential risk of significant weakness	Our risk based procedures and evaluation approach includes (but is not limited to)
Financial sustainability	None identified	We have not identified any risks of significant weakness at this stage. However, there are financial risks present which, if not managed effectively over the short to medium term, could introduce significant weakness in future years. These relate primarily to the financial performance of the income strip scheme. We reported these issues in our Auditor's Annual Report in 2023/24 and will follow up on the recommendations raised from the prior year.
Governance	None identified	We have not identified any significant risks of weakness at this stage. We raised one recommendation in the prior year to strengthen the reporting arrangements for the income strip and performance of the subsidiary companies. We will follow up on progress in this area as part of our audit.
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	None identified	We have not at this stage identified any risks of significant weakness that require specific audit procedures

Weaknesses or risks identified by auditors are only those which have come to their attention during their normal audit work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice and may not be all that exist.

Audit team and logistics

Your audit team

Role	Name	Contact details
Key Audit Partner	Paul Grady	Paul.Grady@azets.co.uk
Engagement Manager	Martha Charima	Martha.Charima@azets.co.uk
Assistant Manager	CJ Abellera	CJ.Abellera@azets.co.uk
In-charge auditor	Ava Campbell	Ava.Campbell@azets.co.uk

Timetable

Event	Date
Planning and risk assessment	Dec – Mar 2025
Reporting of plan to Audit Committee	June 2025
Publication of draft accounts	30 June 2025
Year end audit	Sep – Nov 2025
Auditor's Annual Report (AAR)	Nov 2025
Reporting of Audit Findings (ISA260)	Feb 2026
Target date of approval of accounts	Feb 2026
Accounts publication deadline (as specified in the Accounts and Audit (Amendments) Regulations 2024)	27 Feb 2026

Our expectations and requirements

For us to be able to deliver the audit in line with the agreed fee and timetable, we require the following:

- Draft financial statements to be produced to a good quality by the deadlines you have agreed with us. These should be complete including all notes, the Narrative Statement and the Annual Governance Statement;
- The provision of good quality working papers at the same time as the draft financial statements. These will be discussed with you in advance to ensure clarity over our expectations;
- The provision of agreed data reports at the start of the audit, fully reconciled to the values in the accounts, to facilitate our selection of samples for testing;
- Ensuring staff are available and on site (as agreed) during the period of the audit;
- Prompt and sufficient responses to audit queries within two working days (unless otherwise agreed) to minimise delays.

The audit process is underpinned by effective project management to ensure that we co-ordinate and apply our resources efficiently to meet your deadlines. It is therefore essential that the audit team and the Council's finance team work closely together to achieve this timetable.

Independence, objectivity and other services provided

Auditor independence

We confirm that we comply with the Financial Reporting Council’s (FRC) Ethical Standard and are able to issue an objective opinion on the financial statements. We have also complied with the NAOs Auditor Guidance Note 01, issued in September 2022, which contains supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies. We have considered our integrity, independence and objectivity in respect of audit services provided and we do not believe that there are any significant threats or matters which should be brought to your attention

Other services

We have detailed in the table below any other services provided to the Council (and the Group), the threats to our independence these present and the safeguards we have put in place to mitigate these threats

Service	Provided to	Fee	Safeguards to mitigate threats to independence
Audit related: Certification of Housing Benefit Assurance Process (HBAP) claim (2024/25)	Council	£28,000 plus per diem rate for additional work required	<p>Self-interest: Given this is likely to be a recurring fee, we consider a threat present. However, the fee is not significant to Azets Audit Services or Stevenage Borough Council. The fee is fixed (apart from an additional £2,000 for each additional 40+ workbook) and not contingent in nature.</p> <p>Self-review: Whilst housing benefit revenue and expenditure streams are within the financial statements, we do not complete the claim form. The focus of our work is solely testing the data in the claim form prepared by the management.</p> <p>Management: As above, the claim form is completed by management and any adjustments or amendments identified to the form during the certification work are discussed and agreed by management prior to submission of the certification report. We therefore consider these risks sufficiently mitigated.</p>

Fees

PSAA set a fee scale for each audit that assumes the audited body has sound governance arrangements in place, has been operating effectively throughout the year, prepares comprehensive and accurate draft accounts and meets the agreed timetable for audit. This fee scale is reviewed by PSAA each year and adjusted, if necessary, based on auditors' experience, new requirements, or significant changes to the audited body. The fee may be varied above the fee scale to reflect the circumstances and local risks within the audited body.

Our estimated fee (excluding VAT) is as follows. This fee is estimated based on our understanding at this point in time and may be subject to change. Our planned fee is on the basis that our expectations set out on pages 4 and 31 are met.

Audit fee	2024/25 £
Scale fee: base fee for the audit of the Council (and Group's) financial statements (as set out in the fee scales issued by PSAA)	219,875
IFRS16: work needed to audit the new standard. PSAA have confirmed this work is not included in the above scale fee	TBC
Disclaimer work (note 1)	TBC
Build back work (note 2)	TBC
Total audit fee for Stevenage Borough Council	TBC

Note 1: this includes the additional annual work required to consider the disclaimed audits from prior years, development of revised approach for the Council in response to the missing assurance, the production, agreement and reporting of additional interim progress reports to management and the Audit Committee, the development and reporting of a revised 'Audit Completion Report' for reporting the additional considerations arising from the disclaimers, the drafting of a disclaimed audit report and the various risk, compliance and technical consultations arising as a result of this unique and unprecedented situation.

Note 2: this includes all work for phases 2 and 3 which require building back assurance to the last clean opinion

It is our policy to bill for overruns or scope extensions e.g., where we have incurred delays, deliverables have been late or of poor quality, where key personnel have not been available, or we have been asked to do extra work.

Our policy is to raise fees to account at appropriate stages of the audit in line with specified milestones set out by PSAA. All fee variations are subject to determination by PSAA.

The approximate total fees charged to the Council and group for the provision of services in 2024/25 is as follows:

Audit fee	2024/25 £
Audit of the Council (scale fee)	219,875
IFRS16	TBC
Certification of the HBAP Claim (Excluding additional workbooks)	28,000
Additional certification work on HBAP claim (additional workbooks)	TBC
Total fees for the Council	TBC

Appendix I: Group audit scope and risk assessment

As Group auditor under ISA (UK) 600 (Revised September 2022) we are required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the financial information of the components and the consolidation process to express an opinion on whether the group financial statements are prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework.

The auditing standard for group engagements has been revised, as a result the key changes that you may see reflected in the audit plan are:

- Revisions to the definitions of a group and component extend the scope of the ISA to encompass a wider range of group scenarios. This means that a single legal entity could fall under the scope of the group's ISA based on its internal structure, while multiple legal entities may sometimes be defined as a single component;
- There is increased leadership responsibilities and involvement requirements for the group engagement leader, particularly when component auditors are utilised;
- There is a specific requirement for all component auditors to confirm their ability and willingness to comply with the FRC's Ethical Standard;
- The analytical/desktop review designation has been removed from the scope of procedures performed over a component in response to risk.

Group audit scope

The Group consists of the following entities:

Component	Nature and extent of further audit procedures	Planned audit approach
Stevenage Borough Council	Full Scope	Full scope statutory audit, as set out in this audit plan.
Queensway Properties (Stevenage) LLP	Specific Scope	Specific scope procedures to be performed by the group engagement team
Marshgate Plc	Specific Scope	Specific scope procedures to be performed by the group engagement team
Joint Venture with Mace Development	Specific scope	Procedures to Ensure Accurate Treatment of the Council's share in the Joint Venture

Full Scope Design and perform further audit procedures on the entire financial information of the component.

Specific Scope Design and perform further audit procedures on one or more classes of transactions, account balances or disclosures.

None No further audit procedures required.



We are an accounting, tax, audit, advisory and business services group that delivers a personal experience both digitally and at your door.

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