

To Members of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee

Cllr. Mark Jackson (Chairman)
Cllr. Mike Shirley (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr. Lee Breckon JP
Cllr. Alex DeWinter

Cllr. Richard Holdridge
Cllr. Dillan Shikotra

Cllr. Roger Stead

Dear Councillor,

A meeting of the **AUDIT AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** will be held in the Council Chamber - Council Offices, Narborough on **MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2024 at 5.30 p.m.** Please find attached a number of supplemental items that are required for the meeting and are in addition to the agenda and report pack that has already been circulated.

Yours faithfully



Louisa Horton
Monitoring Officer

SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS

7. External Audit Plan 2023/24 (Azets) (Pages 3 - 26)

To consider the report of the Finance Group Manager (enclosed).



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Blaby District Council

Audit & Corporate Governance Committee

Date of Meeting 12 February 2024
Title of Report External Audit Plan 2023/24
Report Author Finance Group Manager

1. What is this report about?

- 1.1 The report enables the Council's external auditors, Azets, to present Members with their annual Audit Planning Report for 2023/24.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Azets' Audit Planning Report for 2023/24 is noted and approved.

3. Reason for Decision(s) Recommended

- 3.1 The Audit Planning Report sets out the proposed audit approach and the scope of the work to be carried out by Azets, and their fees for undertaking that work.

4. Matters to consider

4.1 Background

Azets have set out their proposals for the planned audit work in respect of the 2023/24 financial year in the document attached at Appendix A. The coverage of the External Audit Plan includes the following key elements:

- Audit scope and general approach
- Significant and other risk of material misstatement
- Value for money arrangements
- Audit team and logistics
- Independence, objectivity and other services provided
- Fees
- Materiality

Representatives from Azets will attend the meeting to present their report.

5. What will it cost and are there opportunities for savings?

- 5.1 The base fee for the audit has been set at £139,897 by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA). In addition to this, there is a fee for work relating to ISA 315, also determined by PSAA, and a proposed fee for the Housing Benefit Assurance Process (HBAP) of £28,000.

Currently this means a total audit fee of £194,309 for 2023/24, although there may also be additional costs in relation to IFRS 16 (leasing), and any further work required dependent upon the impact of the prior year audit backlog.

6. What are the risks and how can they be reduced?

6.1

Current Risk	Actions to reduce the risks
Risks are incorporated within the Audit Plan at Appendix A.	See Appendix A.
Given the existing audit backlog, with EY still not having completed the audits for 2020/21 to 2022/23, there are limitations to the amount of work that Azets will be able to complete.	Government is proposing a backstop date by which all outstanding audits must be complete. Provisionally this has been set at 30 th September 2024 but is subject to consultation. It is expected that the audits for 2021/22 and 2022/23 will be a much lighter touch than usual, in order to meet the deadline. This also means that the audit opinion will contain caveats to reflect this.

7. Other options considered

- 7.1 None. It is considered good practice to make the Audit and Standards Committee aware of the External Audit Plan.

8. Other significant issues

- 8.1 In preparing this report, the author has considered issues related to Human Rights, Legal Matters, Human Resources, Equalities, Public Health Inequalities, and Climate Local and there are no areas of concern.

9. Appendix

- 9.1 Appendix A – External Audit Plan, Year Ended 31st March 2024

10. Background paper(s)

None.

11. Report author's contact details

Nick Brown	Finance Group Manager
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Blaby District Council

External audit plan

Year ended 31 March 2024

February 2024

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Your key team members

Chris Brown

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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 Blaby District Council ('the Council') for the year ended 31 March 2024 for those charged with governance.

The core elements of our work include:

- An audit of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts for the Council; and
- An assessment of the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (Value for Money work).

Auditor responsibilities

We are responsible for performing an audit in accordance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office and International Standards on Auditing UK (ISAs). Our primary responsibility is to form and express an independent opinion on the Council'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 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 in arrangements for securing value for money, with 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)

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 an advisory notice; or
- Making an application for judicial review.

The Act also requires us to give electors, or any representatives of electors, the opportunity to question us about the accounting records of the Council and consider any objections made to the accounts.

On completion of our audit work, we will issue an Audit Findings 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 the 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 plan 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, 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 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.

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 and 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 in Appendix I.

Any identified errors greater than £36,000 will be reported to you and, if not adjusted, confirmed as immaterial as part of your letter of representation to us.

Accounting systems and internal controls

To maximise audit efficiency, 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 so 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.

We will consider whether we require to engage with any additional auditor's expert throughout the audit.

Our audit team will consult internally with our Technology Risk team in assessing the information technology general controls (ITGC).

Audit scope and general approach

Significant changes in the financial reporting framework

There have been no significant changes in the financial reporting framework this year, including the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the 'CIPFA Code'). As permitted by the CIPFA Code, the council has chosen to defer the implementation of IFRS 16 'Leases' until 2024/25.

Significant changes in the Council's functions or activities

There have been no significant changes to the functions and activities of the Council.

Going concern

Management responsibility

Management is required to make and document an assessment of whether the Council 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'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.

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Additional procedures for the NAO

The National Audit Office (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 Whole of Government Accounts (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 2023/24.

As at the date of this report, the draft instructions have not yet been issued and the NAO have not yet confirmed which entities will be sampled components.

Auditor reporting delays for previous periods and the impact on our audit

As at the date of this audit plan, the audits for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 have not yet been completed. Although we are planning to complete the 2023/24 audit in line with the timetable set out on page 16, please note that we will not be able to fully complete the audit, issue our auditor's report and certify the closure of the audit until your predecessor auditor has completed their audit for the year ended 31 March 2023. Once the 2022/23 audit has been completed we will need to review the predecessor auditor's audit file to gain assurance over your opening balances as at 1 April 2023, and/ or consider the impact on our audit of any modifications to their auditor's report.

Further, once the 2021, 2022 and 2023 audits have been completed, we will revisit our planning procedures and audit plan to assess whether any additional procedures are required over and above those we have identified in this audit plan. Should additional procedures or changes to the plan be required, we will report these to you. The cost of additional work to revisit planning upon completion of the prior year audits will also be reported to you.

Significant risks of material misstatement

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

- Are 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</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 include manual journals, management estimates and judgements and one-off transactions outside the ordinary course of 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

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

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Fraud in revenue recognition and expenditure (rebutted) Material misstatement due to fraudulent financial reporting relating to revenue recognition is a rebuttable presumed risk under ISA (UK) 240.</p> <p>Page 16 Having considered the nature of the revenue streams at the Council, we consider that the risk of fraud in revenue recognition can be rebutted due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little incentive by management to manipulate revenue recognition; and • Limited opportunity to manipulate revenue recognition. <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 manipulating revenue. We are satisfied that this is not a significant risk for the reasons set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little incentive by management to manipulate expenditure recognition; and • Limited opportunity to manipulate expenditure recognition. <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue and expenditure recognition: Low 	<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 design of the controls in the key accounting systems, where a risk of material misstatement was identified, by performing a walkthrough of the systems; • Evaluating the Council's accounting policies for recognition of income and expenditure and compliance with the CIPFA Code; and • Substantively testing material income and expenditure streams using analytical procedures and sample testing of transactions.

Significant risks of material misstatement

Identified risk	Planned audit procedures
<p>Valuation of land and buildings and investment property (key accounting estimate) Revaluation of land and buildings and investment property should be performed with sufficient regularity so that carrying amounts are not materially misstated.</p> <p>Land and buildings are held at fair value and revalued as part of the five-year rolling programme. The council also holds one investment property which is valued annually at fair value, in line with the CIPFA Code.</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 at 31 March. 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>This represents a key accounting estimate made by management 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 land and buildings and investment property as a significant risk. 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 fall outside our expectations.</p> <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and buildings and investment property (valuation): High 	<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 benefit pension fund liability (key accounting estimate) An actuarial estimate of the net defined benefit pension liability 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 and the calculation of any asset ceiling when determining the value of a pension asset (where relevant). 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 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 as a significant risk.</p> <p>Inherent risk of material misstatement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined pension fund net liability (valuation): High 	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating management's 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 significant, will require specific consideration during the audit.

We have not identified any such risks at the planning stage of the audit.

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 highlighted in this report.

Value for Money arrangements

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”).

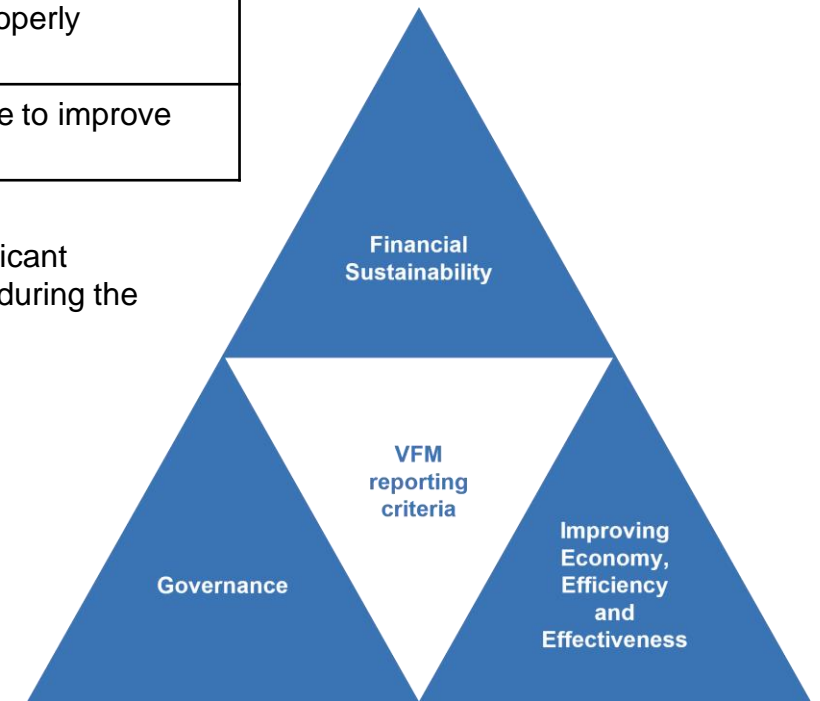
NAO Auditor Guidance Note 03 ‘Auditors’ Work on Value for Money Arrangements’ (“AGN 03”) was updated and issued on 18 January 2023 and requires us to provide an annual commentary on arrangements, which will be published as part of the Auditor’s Annual Report. Such commentary will highlight any significant weaknesses in arrangements, along with recommendations for improvement. The Code requires us to structure our commentary under three specified reporting criteria:

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

As part of the audit planning process, we are required to perform procedures to identify potential risks of significant weakness in the Council’s arrangements to secure VFM. 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.

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 Council; and
- The action the Council needs to take to address the weakness.



Value for Money arrangements

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.

Our risk assessment is set out below.

Criteria	Potential risk of significant weakness	Our risk based procedures and evaluation approach includes (but is not limited to)
Financial sustainability	We have not at this stage identified any risks of significant weakness that require specific audit procedures. We will reassess once the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 value for money work has been completed by the predecessor auditor.	
Governance	We have not at this stage identified any risks of significant weakness that require specific audit procedures. We will reassess once the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 value for money work has been completed by the predecessor auditor.	
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	We have not at this stage identified any risks of significant weakness that require specific audit procedures. We will reassess once the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 value for money work has been completed by the predecessor auditor.	

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	Chris Brown	Chris.Brown@azets.co.uk
Director	Bethany Hincks	Bethany.Hincks@azets.co.uk

Timetable

Event	Date
Audit planning meeting	26 September 2023
Reporting of plan to Audit Committee	12 February 2024
Interim audit	w/c 8 April 2024
Year end audit	27 August 2024 – 27 September 2024
Reporting of Audit Findings (ISA260)	November 2024
Auditor's Annual Report (AAR)	November 2024
Target date of approval of accounts	November 2024
Accounts publication deadline (as specified in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015)	TBC (likely 30 November 2024)

Our expectations and requirements

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.

In order 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.

Please note that we will be unable to complete our 2023/24 audit until your audits for all previous financial years have been completed by your predecessor auditors and auditor's reports covering both the financial statements audit and value for money work have been issued. The National Audit Office continues to explore ways to escalate the timely completion of all outstanding local government audits.

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 also comply 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 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 that may be provided to the Council, the threats to our independence these would present and the safeguards we will put in place to mitigate these threats.

Service	Provided to	Fee	Threats identified	Safeguards to mitigate threats to independence
Audit related: Certification of Housing Benefit Assurance Process (HBAP) claim (2023/24) This service is still subject to agreement of terms with management.	Council	£28,000 (plus £2,000 for each additional workbook)	Self-interest Self-review Management	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 the Council. The fee is fixed and not contingent in nature. 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 management. 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.

Fees

PSAA set a fee scale 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.

The estimated audit fee (excluding VAT) is as follows:

Audit fee	2023/24 £
Base fee for the audit of the Council financial statements (as set out in the fee scales issued by PSAA)	139,897
ISA 315*	20,985
IFRS 16 (IAS 8 disclosure)	TBC
Potential impact of delayed prior year audit opinions	TBC
Total audit fee for Blaby District Council	160,882

*The work relating to this standard is not included within the scale fee set out above and the total amount is subject to determination by PSAA.

This fee is estimated based on our understanding at this point in time and may be subject to change.

The approximate total fees to be charged to the Council for the provision of services in 2023/24 are as follows:

Audit fee	2023/24 £
Audit of the Council (as above)	160,882
Potential audit related services – HBAP **	28,000
Total fees	194,309

** Subject to change based on agreement with management and complexity of HBAP grant certification.

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 such as during the audit planning, the interim visit, the final audit and once the financial statements have been signed.

Appendix I: 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 we identify. 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. 'Clearly trivial' matters are those 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 2024 is as follows:

	Council £'000	Explanation
Overall materiality for the financial statements	731	1.75% of gross revenue expenditure based on the prior year (2022/23) unaudited draft accounts. This will be reassessed upon receipt of the draft accounts for 2023/24. The financial statements are considered to be materially misstated where total errors exceed this value.
Performance materiality	438	60% of materiality. Audit work will be performed to capture individual errors at this level
Trivial threshold	36	5% of overall materiality for the Council. 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. We have determined that no specific materiality levels need to be set for this audit.



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