

New Forest National Park Authority

Audit planning report

Year ending 31 March 2025

10 April 2025



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Private and Confidential
Members of the Resources, Audit and Performance
Committee
New Forest National Park Authority,
Lymington Town Hall,
Avenue Road,
Lymington,
SO41 9ZG

10 April 2025

Dear Resources, Audit and Performance Committee Members

Audit planning report

Attached is the audit planning report for the upcoming meeting of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee. This report aims to provide the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee of New Forest National Park Authority (the Authority) with a basis to review the proposed audit approach and scope for the 2024/25 audit. This is in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the National Audit Office's 2024 Code of Audit Practice, the Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) Ltd, auditing standards, and other professional requirements. This report summarises our evaluation of the key issues driving the development of an effective audit. We have aligned our audit approach and scope accordingly. The report also addresses the broader impact of Government proposals aimed at establishing a sustainable local audit system.

The Authority, as the Authority's body charged with governance, plays a crucial role in ensuring assurance over both the quality of the draft financial statements prepared by management and the Authority's wider arrangements to support a timely and efficient audit. Failure to achieve this will affect the level of resources required to fulfil our responsibilities. We will assess and report on the adequacy of the Authority's external financial reporting arrangements, as well as the effectiveness of the Authority in fulfilling its role within those arrangements as part of our Value for Money assessment. We will also consider invoking other statutory reporting powers to highlight any weaknesses in these arrangements if deemed necessary. We direct Resources, Audit and Performance Committee members and officers to the Public Sector Audit Appointment Limited's Statement of Responsibilities (paragraphs 26-28) for expectations on preparing financial statements (see Appendix A).

This report is intended solely for the information and use of the Authority, the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and management, and is not intended to be, and should not be used, by anyone other than these specified parties.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this report with you on 2nd June 2025 as well as understand whether there are other matters which you consider may influence our audit.

Yours faithfully

Simon Mathers

For and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP

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Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) issued the 'Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies'. It is available from the PSAA website (<https://www.psaa.co.uk/managing-audit-quality/statement-of-responsibilities-of-auditors-and-audited-bodies-from-2023-24-audits/>). The Statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between appointed auditors and audited bodies. It summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas. The 'Terms of Appointment and further guidance (updated July 2021)' issued by the PSAA (<https://www.psaa.co.uk/managing-audit-quality/terms-of-appointment/terms-of-appointment-and-further-guidance-1-july-2021/>) sets out additional requirements that auditors must comply with, over and above those set out in the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice 2024 (the NAO Code) and in legislation, and covers matters of practice and procedure which are of a recurring nature.

This report is made solely to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and management of New Forest National Park Authority. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and management of New Forest National Park Authority those matters we are required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and management of New Forest National Park Authority for this report or for the opinions we have formed.



01 2024/25 audit strategy overview

2024/25 audit strategy overview

Context

Timely, high-quality financial reporting and audit of local bodies play a crucial role in our democratic system. It aids in effective decision-making by local bodies and ensures transparency and accountability to local taxpayers. There is a consensus that the delay in publishing audited financial statements by local bodies has reached an unacceptable level, and it is acknowledged that cooperation among all stakeholders in the sector is necessary to address this issue. The reasons for the backlog are well-documented and include:

- Insufficient capacity within the local authority financial accounting profession.
- Increased complexity of reporting requirements within the sector.
- Insufficient capacity within audit firms with public sector experience.
- Heightened regulatory pressure on auditors, leading to an expanded scope and extent of audit procedures performed.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has collaborated with the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) and other system partners to develop and implement measures to address the backlog. SI 2024/907, along with the NAO Code and the Local Authority Reset and Recovery Implementation Guidance, have been created to ensure auditor compliance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)). In February 2025, responsibilities for leadership of the local audit system transferred from the FRC back to MHCLG. This change follows the December 2024 launch of the Government's strategy for reforming the local audit system in England, which includes plans to establish a Local Audit Office. The approach to addressing the backlog consists of three phases:

- Phase 1: Reset; clearing the backlog of historic audit opinions up to and including financial year 2022/23 by 13 December 2024. This is largely complete.
- Phase 2: Recovery from Phase 1; from 2023/24, use backstop dates to prevent a recurrence of the backlog and allow assurance to be rebuilt over multiple audit cycles. The backstop date for the audit of the 2024/25 financial statements is 27 February 2026. Auditors are waiting for guidance from the system leader to effectively, efficiently and consistently build back assurance over disclaimed audit periods.
- Phase 3: Reform; involving addressing systemic challenges in the system and embedding timely financial reporting and audit.

As detailed in our Audit Results Report presented to the Authority on 17/10/2024 and on 23/01/2025, we disclaimed our audit opinion on the Authority's 2023/24 financial statements.

We have obtained assurance over some of the closing balances in 2023/24. However, we do not have assurance over all brought-forward balances in 2024/25. Consequently, we lack assurance over all in-year movements and some closing balances for 2024/25. Although we will continue to work towards rebuilding assurance ahead of the 2024/25 backstop date (subject to guidance), we will not be able to obtain sufficient evidence to have reasonable assurance over all closing balances. We therefore expect to again issue a disclaimer of opinion in 2024/25.

2024/25 audit strategy overview (cont'd)

Rebuild of assurance – current position

The National Audit Office issued Local Audit Reset and Recovery Implementation Guidance (LARRIG) 05 on 10 September 2024, detailing the principle of returning to a state where auditors can issue audit opinions on local authority financial statements with sufficient audit evidence. This process will take several years to achieve.

Restoring assurance will need local authorities and auditors to work together. We are waiting for guidance from the National Audit Office and Financial Reporting Council to ensure a consistent approach for restoring assurance for disclaimed periods. Until then, we are unable to commence the rebuilding work programme.

We will audit the 2024/25 closing balance sheet and in-year transactions, similar to our approach for 2023/24, as well as performing additional risk assessment procedures to assess the likelihood of a material misstatement in the opening reserve position for 2024/25. Updates on rebuilding assurance for the historical position will be provided as guidance is issued and its implications for the Authority are evaluated taking into consideration the outcome of our risk assessment procedures. As the Authority's financial statements for 2022/23 and 2023/24 were subject to a disclaimer of opinion, it is highly probable that our risk assessment procedures to assess the likelihood of a material misstatement in the opening reserve position will conclude that an elevated risk of material misstatement is associated with the reserve balances, because of the way in which they accumulate over successive years.

Responsibilities of management and those charged with governance

The Authority's Section 151 Officer is responsible for preparing the financial statements in accordance with proper practices and confirming they give a true and fair view at the 31 March 2025. To complete the audit in a timely and efficient manner, it is essential that the financial statements are supported by high-quality working papers and audit evidence, and that Authority resources are available to support the audit process within agreed deadlines. The Resources, Audit and Performance Committee has an essential role in ensuring that it has assurance over both the quality of the financial statements and the Authority's wider arrangements to support the delivery of a timely and efficient audit. Where this conditions are not met, we will:

- Consider and report on the adequacy of the Authority's external financial reporting arrangements as part of our assessment of Value for Money arrangements.
- Consider the use of other statutory reporting powers to draw attention to weaknesses in Authority financial reporting arrangements, where deemed necessary.
- Assess the impact on available audit resource and where additional resources are deployed, seek a fee variation from PSAA. We have set out the factors that will lead to a fee variation at Appendix B, together with, at Appendix A, paragraphs 26-28 of PSAA's Statement of Responsibilities which clearly set out what is expected of audited bodies in preparing their financial statements.

2024/25 audit strategy overview (cont'd)

The following 'dashboard' summarises the significant accounting and auditing matters outlined in this report. It seeks to provide the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee with an overview of our initial risk identification for the upcoming audit and any changes in risks identified in the current year.

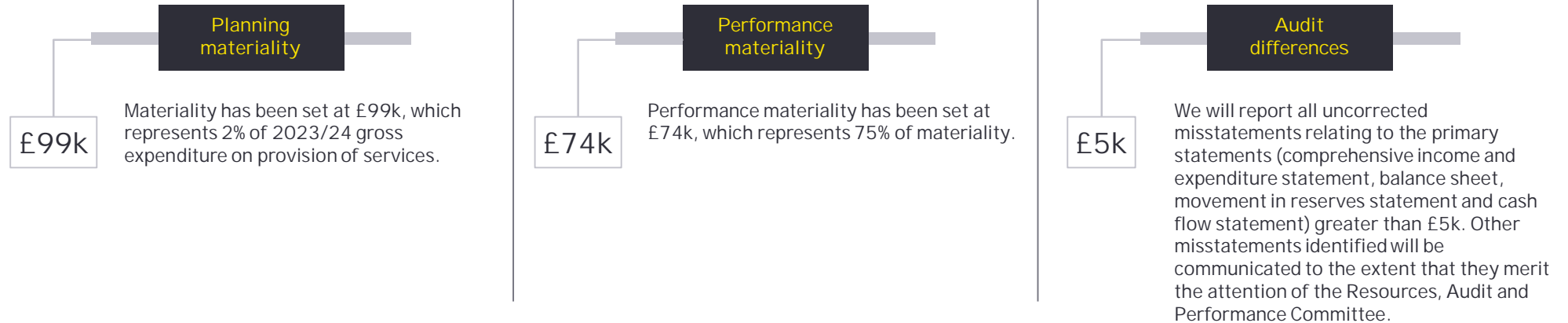
Audit risks and areas of focus

Risk/area of focus	Risk identified	Change from PY	Details
Misstatement due to fraud or error	Fraud risk	No change in risk or focus	There is a risk that the financial statements as a whole are not free from material misstatement whether caused by fraud or error. We perform mandatory procedures regardless of specifically identified fraud risks.
Risk of fraud in revenue and expenditure recognition, through inappropriate capitalisation of revenue expenditure	Fraud Risk	No change in risk or focus	<p>Under ISA 240 there is a presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to improper revenue recognition. In the public sector, this requirement is modified by Practice Note 10 issued by the Financial Reporting Council, which states that auditors should also consider the risk that material misstatements may occur by the manipulation of expenditure recognition.</p> <p>We have assessed the risk is most likely to occur through the inappropriate capitalisation of revenue expenditure.</p>
Pension Liability / Asset Valuation	Inherent risk	No change in risk or focus	<p>The Local Authority Accounting Code of Practice and IAS19 require the Authority to disclose its membership in the Local Government Pension Scheme in its financial statements.</p> <p>Due to the significant estimation and judgement involved, an actuary is engaged for calculations. ISAs (UK) 500 and 540 mandate procedures on using management experts and assumptions for fair value estimates.</p>
IFRS 16 Implementation	Inherent risk	New risk in 2024/25	<p>IFRS 16 Leases, is applicable in the public sector for periods beginning 1st April 2024. The 2024/25 CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting has adopted, interpreted and adapted this standard, setting out the financial reporting framework for the 2024/25 accounts.</p> <p>Where the Authority is the lessee, these will now be recognised on the Balance Sheet as a 'right of use' asset and lease liability reflecting the obligation to make lease payments.</p> <p>There is a risk that the transition will not be carried out correctly.</p>

We will continue to keep the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee updated on our assessment of any changes to audit risk.

2024/25 audit strategy overview (cont'd)

Materiality



We will keep the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee updated on any changes to materiality levels as the audit progresses.

2024/25 audit strategy overview (cont'd)

Audit scope

This audit planning report covers the work that we plan to perform to provide you with:

- our audit opinion on whether the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position as at 31 March 2025 and of the income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- our commentary on your arrangements to secure value for money in your use of resources for the relevant period. We include further details on the value for money arrangements in Section 3.

We also review and report to the National Audit Office (NAO), to the extent and in the form required by them, on the Authority's Whole of Government Accounts return.

Our audit will also include the required mandatory procedures in accordance with applicable laws and auditing standards.

When planning the audit we consider several key inputs:

- strategic, operational and financial risks relevant to the financial statements;
- developments in financial reporting and auditing standards;
- the quality of systems and processes;
- changes in the business and regulatory environment; and
- management's views on all the above.

By considering these inputs, our audit is focused on the areas that matter and our feedback is more likely to be relevant.

Considering the above, our professional duties require us to independently assess audit risks and take appropriate actions. The Terms of Appointment with the PSAA permit fee adjustments based on 'the auditor's assessment of risk and the work needed to meet their professional responsibilities'. Therefore, we outline these risks in this audit planning report and will discuss any impact on the proposed scale fee with management.

2024/25 audit strategy overview (cont'd)

Audit scope (cont'd)

Effects of climate-related matters on financial statements

Public interest in climate change is growing. We recognize that climate-related risks may span a long timeframe, and while these risks exist, their impact on the current financial statements may not be immediately significant. However, it remains essential to understand these risks to conduct a proper evaluation. Additionally, comprehending climate-related risks may be pertinent in the context of qualitative disclosures in the notes to the financial statements and in assessing value-for-money arrangements.

We inquire about climate-related risks during every audit as part of our understanding of the entity and its environment. As we continually re-evaluate our risk assessments throughout the audit, we consider the information obtained to help us assess the level of inherent risk.

Audit scope and approach

We plan to adopt a substantive audit approach.

2024/25 audit strategy overview (cont'd)

Value for Money

We are required to consider whether the Authority has made 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources.

The value for money planning and related risk assessment aims to collect enough evidence to document our evaluation of the Authority's arrangements, allowing us to prepare a commentary based on three reporting criteria. This process includes identifying and reporting any significant weaknesses in those arrangements and making suitable recommendations.

We will provide a commentary on the Authority's arrangements against three reporting criteria:

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

Commentary on value for money arrangements will be included in the 2024/25 Auditor's Annual Report. This will need to be issued by 30 November 2025 to comply with the revised requirements of the NAO Code.

Timeline


An audit timetable has been agreed with management. In Section 7 we include a provisional timeline for the audit. It is essential that all parties collaborate to ensure compliance with this timeline.



02 Audit risks

Our response to significant risks

We have set out the significant risks (including fraud risks denoted by*) identified for the current year audit along with the rationale and expected audit approach. The risks identified below may change to reflect any significant findings or subsequent issues we identify during the audit.



Presumptive risk
of management
override of
controls*

What is the risk?

The financial statements as a whole are not free of material misstatements whether caused by fraud or error.

As identified in ISA (UK) 240, management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of its ability to manipulate accounting records directly or indirectly and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.

We identify and respond to this fraud risk on every audit engagement.

What will we do?

- Identify fraud risks during the planning stages.
- Inquire of management about risks of fraud and the controls put in place to address those risks.
- Understand the oversight given by those charged with governance of management's processes over fraud.
- Discuss with those charged with governance the risks of fraud in the entity, including those risks that are specific to the entity's business sector (those that may arise from economic industry and operating conditions).
- Consider whether there are any fraud risk factors associated with related party relationships and transactions and if so, whether they give rise to a risk of material misstatement due to fraud.
- Consider the effectiveness of management's controls designed to address the risk of fraud.
- Determine an appropriate strategy to address those identified risks of fraud.
- Perform mandatory procedures regardless of specifically identified fraud risks, including testing of journal entries and other adjustments in the preparation of the financial statements.
- Undertake procedures to identify significant unusual transactions.
- Consider whether management bias was present in the key accounting estimates and judgments in the financial statements.

Having evaluated this risk we have considered whether we need to perform other audit procedures not referred to above. We concluded that those procedures included under 'Inappropriate capitalisation of revenue expenditure' are required.

Our response to significant risks (cont'd)

We have set out the significant risks (including fraud risks denoted by*) identified for the current year audit along with the rationale and expected audit approach. The risks identified below may change to reflect any significant findings or subsequent issues we identify during the audit.

Inappropriate capitalisation of revenue expenditure*

Financial statement impact

We have assessed that the risk of misreporting revenue outturn in the financial statements is most likely to be achieved through:

- Revenue expenditure being inappropriately recognised as capital expenditure at the point it is posted to the general ledger.
- Expenditure being classified as revenue expenditure financed as capital under statute (REFCUS) when it is inappropriate to do so.
- Expenditure being inappropriately transferred by journal from revenue to capital codes on the general ledger at the end of the year.

If this were to happen it would have the impact of understating revenue expenditure and overstating Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE) additions and/or REFCUS in the financial statements.

What is the risk?

Under ISA 240 there is a presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to improper revenue recognition. In the public sector, this requirement is modified by Practice Note 10 issued by the Financial Reporting Council, which states that auditors should also consider the risk that material misstatements may occur by the manipulation of expenditure recognition.

We have assessed the risk is most likely to occur through the inappropriate capitalisation of revenue expenditure.

What will we do?

- Test Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE) additions, if material, to ensure that the expenditure incurred and capitalised is clearly capital in nature.
- Assess whether the capitalised spend clearly enhances or extends the useful life of asset rather than simply repairing or maintaining the asset on which it is incurred.
- Consider whether any development or other related costs that have been capitalised are reasonable to capitalize, i.e., the costs incurred are directly attributable to bringing the asset into operational use.
- Test REFCUS, if material, to ensure that it is appropriate for the revenue expenditure incurred to be financed from ringfenced capital resources. Based on our work at the planning stage of the audit we expect there to be material REFCUS in the year.
- Seek to identify and understand the basis for any significant journals transferring expenditure from revenue to capital codes on the general ledger at the end of the year.

Other areas of audit focus

We have identified other areas of the audit, that have not been classified as significant risks, but are still important when considering the risks of material misstatement to the financial statements and disclosures and therefore may be key audit matters we will include in our audit report.

What is the risk/area of focus, and the key judgements and estimates?

Pension Liability Valuation

The Local Authority Accounting Code of Practice and IAS19 require the Authority to make extensive disclosures within its financial statements regarding its membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme administered by the Authority.

The Authority's pension fund balance is a material estimated balance and the Code requires that this balance be disclosed on the Authority's balance sheet. At 31 March 2024 this balance was nil due to the application of IFRIC 14 in relation to the asset ceiling.

The information disclosed is based on the IAS 19 report issued to the Authority by the actuary.

Accounting for this scheme involves significant estimation and judgement and therefore management engages an actuary to undertake the calculations on their behalf. ISAs (UK) 500 and 540 require us to undertake procedures on the use of management experts and the assumptions underlying fair value estimates.

Our response: Key areas of challenge and professional judgement

We will:

- Liaise with the auditors of Hampshire Pension Fund, to obtain assurances over the information supplied to the actuary in relation to the Authority
- Assess the work of the pension fund actuary including the assumptions they have used by relying on the work of PWC - Consulting Actuaries commissioned by the National Audit Office for all local government sector auditors, and considering any relevant reviews by the EY actuarial team
- Evaluate the reasonableness of the Pension Fund actuary's calculations by comparing them to the outputs of our own auditor's specialist's model; and
- Review and test the accounting entries and disclosures made within the Authority's financial statements in relation to IAS19.

What else will we do?

We will consider outturn information available at the time we undertake our work after production of the Authority's draft financial statements, for example the year-end actual valuation of pension fund assets. We will use this to inform our assessment of the accuracy of estimated information included in the financial statements and whether any adjustments are required.

Other areas of audit focus

We have identified other areas of the audit, that have not been classified as significant risks, but are still important when considering the risks of material misstatement to the financial statements and disclosures and therefore may be key audit matters we will include in our audit report.

What is the risk/area of focus, and the key judgements and estimates?

IFRS 16 Implementation

IFRS 16 Leases is applicable in local government for periods beginning 1 April 2024. It has been adopted, interpreted and adapted in the 2024/24 CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting which sets out the financial reporting framework for the Authority's 2024/25 accounts.

IFRS 16 eliminates the operating/finance lease distinction for leases and imposes a single model geared towards the recognition of all but low-value or short-term leases. Where the Authority is a lessee, these will now be recognised on the Balance Sheet as a 'right of use' asset and lease liability reflecting the obligation to make lease payments.

Successful transition will depend on the Authority having captured additional information about leases, both new and existing, especially regarding future minimum lease payments. The Authority will also have had to develop systems for capturing cost information that are fit for purpose, can respond to changes in lease terms and the presence of any variable (e.g., RPI-based) lease terms where forecasts will need to be updated annually based on prevailing indices.

The Authority performed an initial impact assessment in 2023/24 and expected to recognise a right of use asset of £279k which is material to our responsibilities. However, we noted in our 2023/24 Audit Results Report that this value did not include the required discounting to present value, and instead, was reflective of the contractual cash flows. We have therefore included the implementation of IFRS 16 as a new inherent risk.

Our response: Key areas of challenge and professional judgement

We will:

- Gain an understanding of the processes and controls developed by the Authority relevant to the implementation of IFRS 16. We will pay particular attention to the Authority's arrangements to ensure lease and lease-type arrangements considered are complete.
- Review the discount rate that is used to calculate the right of use asset and assess its reasonableness.
- Review management policies, including whether to use a portfolio approach, low value threshold, and asset classes where management is adopting as the practical expedient to non-lease components.
- Gain assurance over the right of use asset included in the 2024/25 financial statements.
- Sample test leases to ensure that transition arrangements have been correctly applied.
- Consider the accounting for leases provided at below market rate, including peppercorn and nil consideration, and the need to make adjustments to cost in the valuation of right of use assets at the balance sheet date.

What else will we do?

We do not anticipate to undertake any further planned procedures in relation to this risk. We will, however, provide an update to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee if any further procedures are undertaken.



03 Value for Money risks

Value for Money

Authority's responsibilities for value for money

The Authority is required to maintain an effective system of internal control that supports the achievement of its policies, aims and objectives while safeguarding and securing value for money from the public funds and other resources at its disposal.

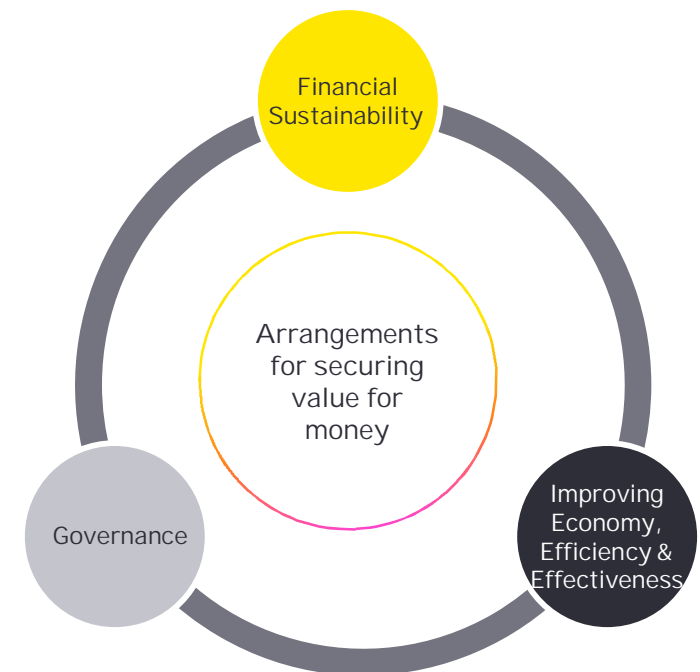
As part of the material published with the financial statements, the Authority is required to bring together commentary on the governance framework and how this has operated during the period in a governance statement. In preparing the governance statement, the Authority tailors the content to reflect its own individual circumstances, consistent with the requirements of the relevant accounting and reporting framework and having regard to any guidance issued in support of that framework. This includes a requirement to provide commentary on arrangements for securing value for money from the use of resources.

Auditor Responsibilities

Under the NAO Code we are required to consider whether the Authority has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources. The Code requires the auditor to design their work to provide them with sufficient assurance to enable them to report to the Authority a commentary against specified reporting criteria (see below) on the arrangements the Authority has in place to secure value for money through economic, efficient and effective use of its resources for the relevant period.

The specified reporting criteria are:

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



Value for Money (cont'd)

Planning and identifying risks of significant weakness in VFM arrangements

The NAO's guidance notes require us to conduct a risk assessment that collects sufficient evidence to document our evaluation of the Authority's arrangements, allowing us to draft a commentary under the three reporting criteria. This involves identifying and reporting on any significant weaknesses in those arrangements and making appropriate recommendations. In considering the Authority's arrangements, we consider:

- The governance statement;
- Evidence of arrangements during the reporting period;
- Evidence obtained from our audit of the financial statements;
- The work of inspectorates and other bodies; and
- Any other evidence that we deem as necessary to facilitate the performance of our statutory duties.

We then evaluate whether there is evidence indicating significant weaknesses in arrangements. According to the NAO's guidance, determining what constitutes a significant weakness and the extent of additional audit work required to address the risk is based on professional judgment. The NAO indicates that a weakness can be considered significant if it:

- Exposes, or could reasonably be expected to expose, the Authority to significant financial loss or risk;
- Leads to, or could reasonably be expected to lead to, significant impact on the quality or effectiveness of service or on the Authority's reputation or unlawful actions;
- Identifies a failure to take action to address a previously identified significant weakness, such as failure to implement or achieve planned progress on action/improvement plans.

Responding to identified risks of significant weakness

When planning work identifies a risk of significant weakness, the NAO's guidance requires us to consider the additional evidence needed to verify whether there is a significant weakness in arrangements. This involves conducting further procedures as necessary. We are required to report our planned procedures to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

Value for Money (cont'd)

Reporting on VFM

If we determine that the Authority has not made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources, the NAO Code mandates that we reference this by exception in the audit report on the financial statements.

Additionally, we are required to provide a commentary on the value for money arrangements in the Auditor's Annual Report. The NAO Code specifies that this commentary should be clear, readily understandable, and highlight any issues we wish to draw to the Authority's or the wider public's attention. This may include matters that are not considered significant weaknesses in arrangements but should still be brought to the Authority's awareness. It will also cover details of any recommendations from the audit and the follow-up of previously issued recommendations, along with our assessment of their satisfactory implementation. Our 2024/25 Auditor's Annual Report is required to be issued by 30 November 2025 to comply with the revised requirements of the NAO Code.

Status of our 2024/25 VFM planning

We have completed our initial value for money planning, where we have considered:

- Our entity level controls and understanding the business assessment
- The Authority's Risk Register
- The prior year Annual Governance Statement
- Authority meeting minutes
- Our planning meetings with management
- Key financial and budget information
- Key performance reports
- Internal audit reports
- Information from local, national and specialist media

We have not identified any risks of significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements to suggest that the Authority did not have proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources at that time.

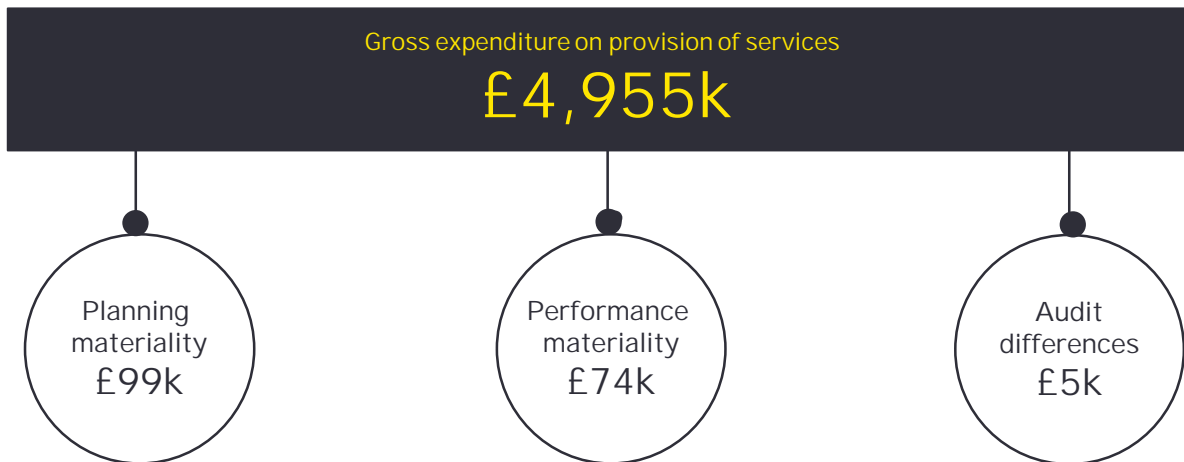


04 Audit materiality

Materiality

Authority materiality

For planning purposes, Authority materiality for 2024/25 has been set at £99k. This represents 2% of the Authority's 2023/24 gross expenditure on provision of services. It will be reassessed throughout the audit process. In our view, gross operating expenditure is the most appropriate basis for determining planning materiality for the Authority and we consider misstatements greater than 2% of gross operating expenditure to be material. Our evaluation requires professional judgement and so takes into account qualitative as well as quantitative considerations.



We will keep the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee updated on any changes to materiality levels as the audit progresses.

We request that the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee confirm its understanding of, and agreement to, these materiality and reporting levels.

Key definitions

Planning materiality – the amount over which we anticipate misstatements would influence the economic decisions of a user of the financial statements.

Performance materiality – the amount we use to determine the extent of our audit procedures. We have set performance materiality at £74k which represents 75% of planning materiality. The performance materiality has remained consistent at 75% in the current year due to the small number of misstatements identified in the 2023/24 audit.

Audit difference threshold – we propose that misstatements identified below this threshold are deemed clearly trivial. We will report to you all uncorrected misstatements over this amount relating to the income statement and balance sheet that have an effect on income or that relate to other comprehensive income.

Other uncorrected misstatements, such as reclassifications and misstatements in the cashflow statement or disclosures and corrected misstatements will be communicated to the extent that they merit the attention of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee, or are important from a qualitative perspective.



05 Scope of our audit

Audit process and strategy

Objective and Scope of our Audit scoping

In accordance with the NAO Code, our primary objectives are to conduct work that supports the delivery of our audit report to the Authority. Additionally, we aim to ensure that the Authority has established proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources, as mandated by relevant legislation and the requirements of the NAO Code.

We issue an audit report that covers:

1. Financial statement audit

Our opinion on the financial statements:

- Whether the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority and its expenditure and income for the period in question; and
- Whether the financial statements have been prepared properly in accordance with the relevant accounting and reporting framework as set out in legislation, applicable accounting standards or other direction.

Our opinion on other matters:

- whether other information published together with the audited financial statements is consistent with the financial statements.

Other procedures required by the Code:

- Examine and report on the consistency of the Whole of Government Accounts schedules or returns with the body's audited financial statements for the relevant reporting period in line with the instructions issued by the National Audit Office.

2. Arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness (value for money)

We are required to consider whether the Authority has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources and report a commentary on those arrangements.

Audit process and strategy (cont'd)

Audit Process Overview

Our audit involves:

- Identifying and understanding the key processes and internal controls; and
- Substantive tests of detail of transactions and amounts.
- Reliance on the work of experts in relation to areas, such as pensions valuations.

Our initial assessment of the key processes across the Authority has not identified any processes where we will seek to test key controls, either manual or IT. Our audit strategy will, as in previous years, follow a fully substantive approach. This will involve testing the figures within the financial statements rather than looking to place reliance on the controls within the financial systems. We assess this as the most efficient way of carrying out our work and obtaining the level of audit assurance required to conclude that the financial statements are not materially misstated.

Analytics

We will use a data driven approach to enable us to capture whole populations of your financial data, in particular journal entries. These tools:

- Help identify specific exceptions and anomalies which can then be subject to more traditional substantive audit tests; and
- Give greater likelihood of identifying errors than random sampling techniques.

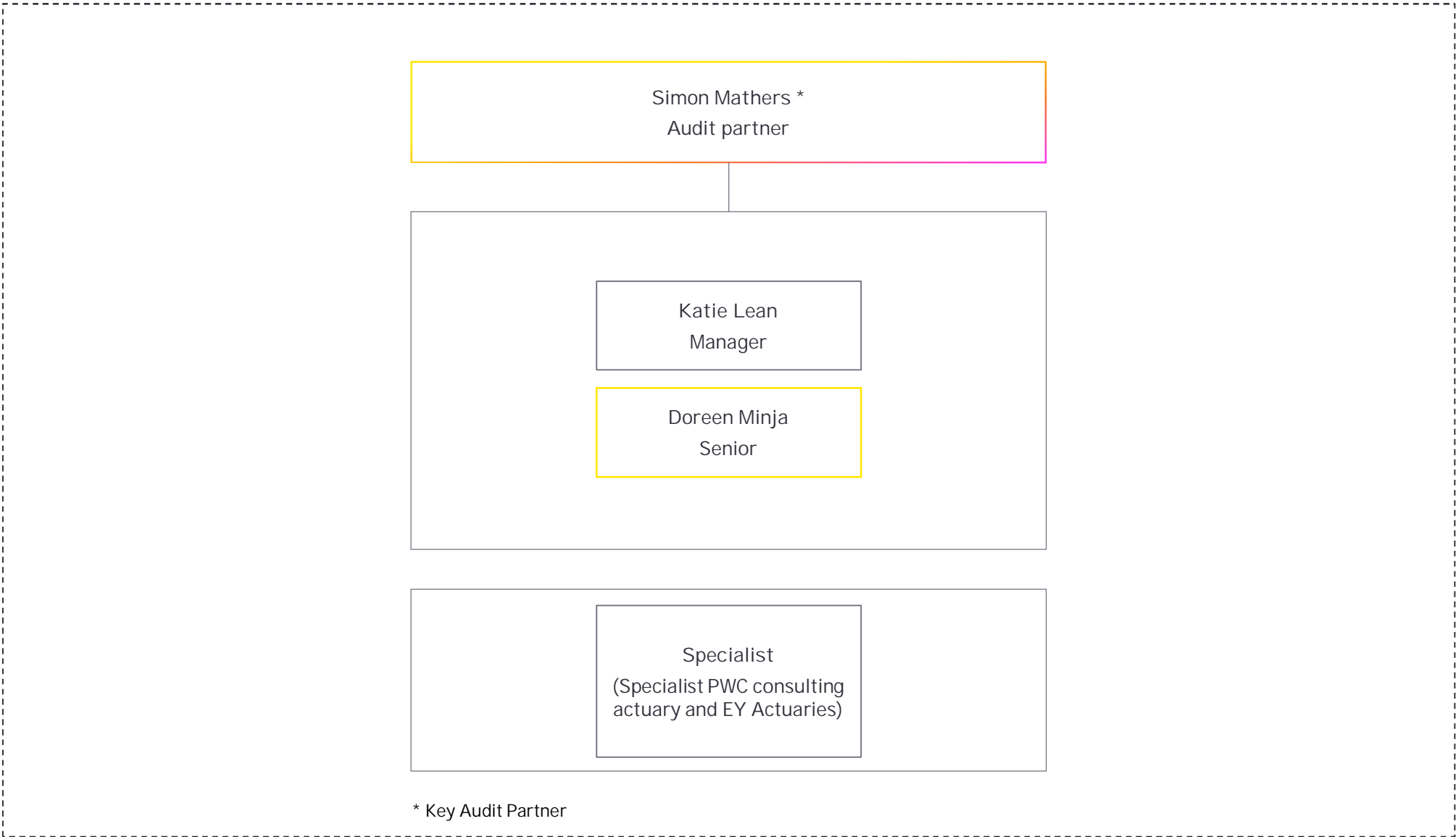
Internal audit

We will review internal audit plans and the results of their work. We will reflect the findings from these reports, together with reports from any other work completed in the year, in our detailed audit plan, where they raise issues that could have an impact on the financial statements.



06 Audit team

Audit team



Use of specialists

When auditing key judgements, we are often required to use the input and advice provided by specialists who have qualifications and expertise not possessed by the core audit team. The areas where EY specialists are expected to provide input for the current year audit are:

Area	Specialists
Pensions disclosure	EY Actuaries

In accordance with Auditing Standards, we will evaluate each specialist's professional competence and objectivity, considering their qualifications, experience and available resources, together with the independence of the individuals performing the work.

We also consider the work performed by the specialist in light of our knowledge of the Authority's business and processes and our assessment of audit risk in the particular area. For example, we would typically perform the following procedures:

- Analyse source data and make inquiries as to the procedures used by the specialist to establish whether the source data is relevant and reliable
- Assess the reasonableness of the assumptions and methods used
- Consider the appropriateness of the timing of when the specialist carried out the work
- Assess whether the substance of the specialist's findings are properly reflected in the financial statements

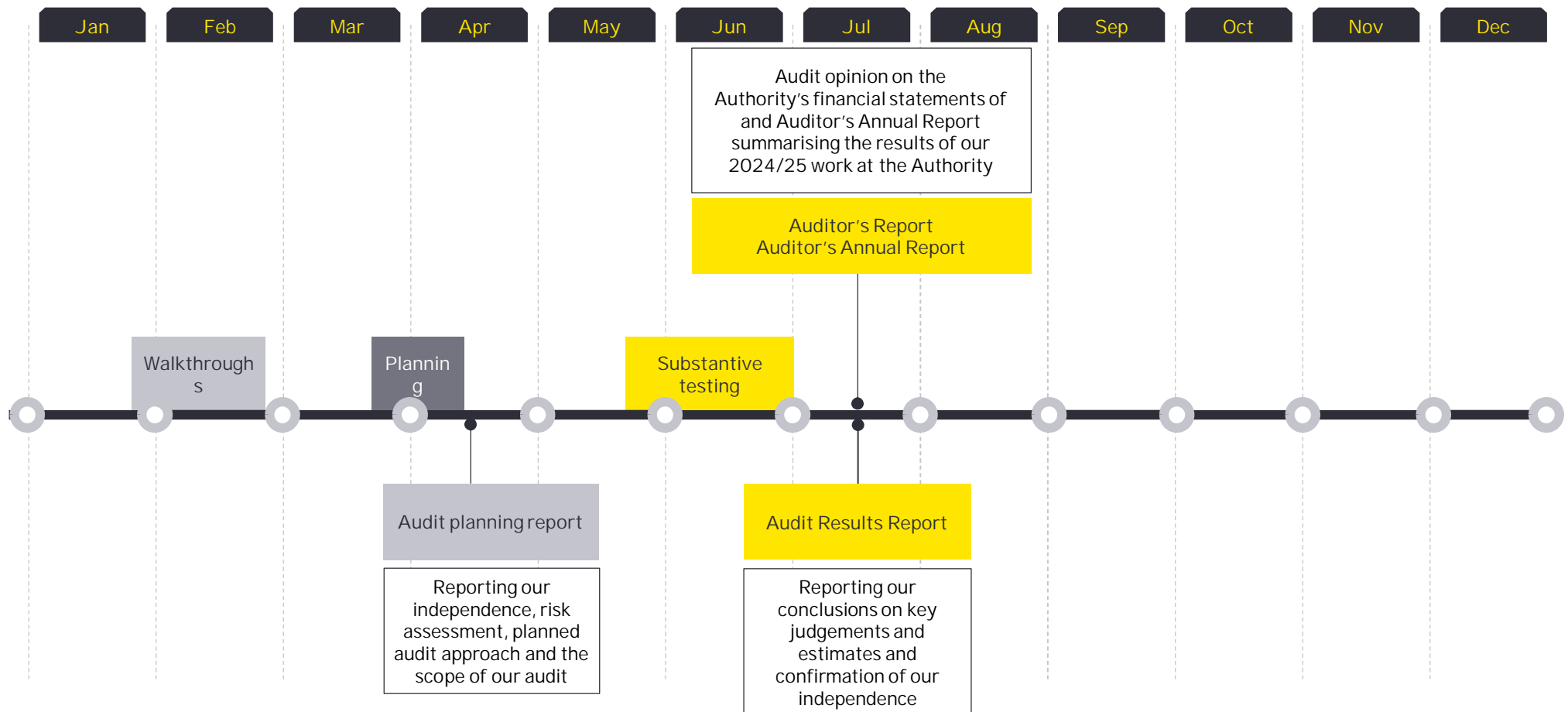


07 Audit timeline

Timetable of communication and deliverables

Timeline

Below is a timetable showing the key stages of the audit and the deliverables we have agreed to provide to you through the 2024/25 audit cycle. From time to time matters may arise that require immediate communication with the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and we will discuss them with the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee Chair as appropriate.





08 Independence

Introduction

The FRC Ethical Standard 2019 and ISA (UK) 260 'Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance', requires us to communicate with you on a timely basis on all significant facts and matters that bear upon our integrity, objectivity and independence. The Ethical Standard, as revised in December 2019, requires that we communicate formally both at the planning stage and at the conclusion of the audit, as well as during the course of the audit if appropriate. The aim of these communications is to ensure full and fair disclosure by us to those charged with your governance on matters in which you have an interest.

Required communications

Planning stage

- The principal threats, if any, to objectivity and independence identified by Ernst & Young (EY) including consideration of all relationships between you, your affiliates and directors and us;
- The safeguards adopted and the reasons why they are considered to be effective, including any Engagement Quality review;
- The overall assessment of threats and safeguards;
- Information about the general policies and process within EY to maintain objectivity and independence
- The IESBA Code requires EY to provide an independence assessment of any proposed non-audit service (NAS) to the PIE audit client and will need to obtain and document pre-concurrence from the audit committee/those charged with governance for the provision of all NAS prior to the commencement of the service (i.e., similar to obtaining a 'pre-approval' to provide the service).
- All proposed NAS for PIE audit clients will be subject to a determination of whether the service might create a self-review threat (SRT), with no allowance for services related to amounts that are immaterial to the audited financial statements.

Final stage

- In order for you to assess the integrity, objectivity and independence of the firm and each covered person, we are required to provide a written disclosure of relationships (including the provision of non-audit services) that may bear on our integrity, objectivity and independence. This is required to have regard to relationships with the entity, its directors and senior management, its affiliates, and its connected parties and the threats to integrity or objectivity, including those that could compromise independence that these create. We are also required to disclose any safeguards that we have put in place and why they address such threats, together with any other information necessary to enable our objectivity and independence to be assessed;
- Details of non-audit/additional services provided and the fees charged in relation thereto;
- Written confirmation that the firm and each covered person is independent and, if applicable, that any non-EY firms used in the group audit or external experts used have confirmed their independence to us;
- Details of any non-audit/additional services to a UK PIE audit client where there are differences of professional opinion concerning the engagement between the Ethics Partner and Engagement Partner and where the final conclusion differs from the professional opinion of the Ethics Partner
- Details of any inconsistencies between FRC Ethical Standard and your policy for the supply of non-audit services by EY and any apparent breach of that policy;
- Details of all breaches of the IESBA Code of Ethics, the FRC Ethical Standard and professional standards, and of any safeguards applied and actions taken by EY to address any threats to independence; and
- An opportunity to discuss auditor independence issues.

In addition, during the course of the audit, we are required to communicate with you whenever any significant judgements are made about threats to objectivity and independence and the appropriateness of safeguards put in place, for example, when accepting an engagement to provide non-audit services.

We ensure that the total amount of fees that EY and our network firms have charged to you and your affiliates for the provision of services during the reporting period, analysed in appropriate categories, are disclosed.

Relationships, services and related threats and safeguards

We highlight the following significant facts and matters that may be reasonably considered to bear upon our objectivity and independence, including the principal threats, if any. We have adopted the safeguards noted below to mitigate these threats along with the reasons why they are considered to be effective. However we will only perform non-audit services if the service has been pre-approved in accordance with your policy.

Overall Assessment

Overall, we consider that the safeguards that have been adopted appropriately mitigate the principal threats identified and we therefore confirm that EY is independent and the objectivity and independence of Simon Mathers, your audit engagement partner and the audit engagement team have not been compromised.

Self interest threats

A self interest threat arises when EY has financial or other interests in the Authority. Examples include where we receive significant fees in respect of non-audit services; where we need to recover long outstanding fees; or where we enter into a business relationship with you. At the time of writing, there are no long outstanding fees.

We believe that it is appropriate for us to undertake those permitted non-audit/additional services set out in Section 5.40 of the FRC Ethical Standard 2019 (FRC ES), and we will comply with the policies that you have approved.

No non-audit services have been provided and therefore, there are no services which are prohibited under the FRC's ES or require approval in accordance with your policy on pre-approval. In addition, when the ratio of non-audit fees to audit fees exceeds 1:1, we are required to discuss this with our Ethics Partner, as set out by the FRC ES, and if necessary agree additional safeguards or not accept the non-audit engagement. We will also discuss this with you.

At the time of writing, there are no non-audit services. No additional safeguards are required.

A self interest threat may also arise if members of our audit engagement team have objectives or are rewarded in relation to sales of non-audit services to you. We confirm that no member of our audit engagement team, including those from other service lines, has objectives or is rewarded in relation to sales to you, in compliance with Ethical Standard part 4. There are no other self interest threats at the date of this report.

Self review threats

Self review threats arise when the results of a non-audit service performed by EY or others within the EY network are reflected in the amounts included or disclosed in the financial statements.

There are no self review threats at the date of this report.

Management threats

Partners and employees of EY are prohibited from taking decisions on behalf of management of your company. Management threats may also arise during the provision of a non-audit service in relation to which management is required to make judgements or decision based on that work.

There are no management threats at the date of this report.

Other threats

Other threats, such as advocacy, familiarity or intimidation, may arise.

There are no other threats at the date of this report.

Other communications

EY Transparency Report 2024

EY has policies and procedures that instil professional values as part of firm culture and ensure that the highest standards of objectivity, independence and integrity are maintained.

Details of the key policies and processes in place within EY for maintaining objectivity and independence can be found in our annual Transparency Report which the firm is required to publish by law. The most recent version of this Report is for the period ended 30 June 2024 and can be found here: [EY UK 2024 Transparency Report](#).



09 Appendices

Appendix A – PSAA Statement of Responsibilities

As set out on the next page our fee is based on the assumption that the Authority complies with PSAA's Statement of Responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies. See <https://www.psaa.co.uk/managing-audit-quality/statement-of-responsibilities-of-auditors-and-audited-bodies/statement-of-responsibilities-of-auditors-and-audited-bodies-from-2023-24-audits/>. In particular the Authority should have regard to paragraphs 26-28 of the Statement of Responsibilities which clearly set out what is expected of audited bodies in preparing their financial statements. We set out these paragraphs in full below:

Preparation of the statement of accounts

26. Audited bodies are expected to follow Good Industry Practice and applicable recommendations and guidance from CIPFA and, as applicable, other relevant organisations as to proper accounting procedures and controls, including in the preparation and review of working papers and financial statements.

27. In preparing their statement of accounts, audited bodies are expected to:

- prepare realistic plans that include clear targets and achievable timetables for the production of the financial statements;
- ensure that finance staff have access to appropriate resources to enable compliance with the requirements of the applicable financial framework, including having access to the current copy of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code, applicable disclosure checklists, and any other relevant CIPFA Codes.
- assign responsibilities clearly to staff with the appropriate expertise and experience;
- provide necessary resources to enable delivery of the plan;
- maintain adequate documentation in support of the financial statements and, at the start of the audit, providing a complete set of working papers that provide an adequate explanation of the entries in those financial statements including the appropriateness of the accounting policies used and the judgements and estimates made by management;
- ensure that senior management monitors, supervises and reviews work to meet agreed standards and deadlines;
- ensure that a senior individual at top management level personally reviews and approves the financial statements before presentation to the auditor; and
- during the course of the audit provide responses to auditor queries on a timely basis.

28. If draft financial statements and supporting working papers of appropriate quality are not available at the agreed start date of the audit, the auditor may be unable to meet the planned audit timetable and the start date of the audit will be delayed.

Appendix B – Fees

The duty to prescribe fees is a statutory function delegated to Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

This is defined as the fee required by auditors to meet statutory responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice and supporting guidance published by the National Audit Office, the financial reporting requirements set out in the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting published by CIPFA/LASAAC, and the professional standards applicable to auditors' work.

A breakdown of our fees is shown in the table to the right.

The agreed fee presented is based on the following assumptions:

- officers meeting the agreed timetable of deliverables;
- our financial statement opinion and value for money conclusion being unqualified;
- appropriate quality of documentation is provided by the Authority;
- an effective control environment; and
- compliance with PSAA's Statement of Responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies. See <https://www.psaa.co.uk/managing-audit-quality/statement-of-responsibilities-of-auditors-and-audited-bodies/statement-of-responsibilities-of-auditors-and-audited-bodies-from-2023-24-audits/>. In particular the Authority should have regard to paragraphs 26–28 of the Statement of Responsibilities which clearly sets out what is expected of audited bodies in preparing their financial statements. These are set out in full on the previous page.

If any of the above assumptions prove to be unfounded, we will seek a variation to the agreed fee. This will be discussed with the Authority in advance.

	2024/25	2023/24
	£	£
Total Fee – Scale Fee	46,334	40,100
Scale Fee Adjustment	TBC Note 2	25,527 Note 1
Total audit fees	TBC	65,627

All fees exclude VAT

(1) As set out in the joint statement on update to proposals to clear the backlog and embed timely audit issued by DHLUC, PSAA will use its fee variation process to determine the final fee the Authority have to pay for the 2023/24 audit.

The 2023/24 work has been completed and we intend to submit a proposal to PSAA for a scale fee variation totalling £25,527. This final fee includes an adjustment for the following areas.

- Additional procedures to implement the revised ISA 315 (UK) auditing standard as originally set out in our Audit Planning Report, totalling £15,451.
- Additional procedures to consider the Authority's readiness for the implementation of IFRS 16 as originally set out in our in our Audit Planning Report, totalling £1,246.
- Work performed by EY Pensions to review the assumptions used in the Pensions Liability alongside additional work performed by the EY Audit Team to review the revised IAS 19 report requested from the Pension Fund Actuary, as a result of the misstatement detailed on page 11 of this report. In addition, we were required to engage with EY Pensions to review this revised IAS 19 report, due to the identification of a pension asset. This totals £8,829.

This is subject to change until the submission is made and all additional scale fee adjustments are subject to PSAA approval.

(2) The scale fee may be impacted by a range of other factors which will result in additional work, which include but are not limited to:

Consideration of correspondence from the public and formal objections.

- New accounting standards, for example full adoption or additional disclosures in respect of IFRS 16.
- Non-compliance with law and regulation with an impact on the financial statements.
- VFM risks of, or actual, significant weaknesses in arrangements and related reporting impacts.
- The need to exercise auditor statutory powers.
- Prior period adjustments.
- Modified financial statement opinions.

Appendix C – Required communications with Those Charged with Governance

We have detailed the communications that we must provide to Those Charged with Governance.

		Our Reporting to you
Required communications	What is reported?	When and where
Terms of engagement	Confirmation by the those charged with governance of acceptance of terms of engagement as written in the engagement letter signed by both parties.	The statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between the PSAA's appointed auditors and audited bodies.
Our responsibilities	Reminder of our responsibilities as set out in the engagement letter	The statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between the PSAA's appointed auditors and audited bodies.
Planning and audit approach	<p>Communication of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The planned scope and timing of the audit ▪ Any limitations on the planned work to be undertaken ▪ The planned use of internal audit ▪ The significant risks identified <p>When communicating key audit matters this includes the most significant risks of material misstatement (whether or not due to fraud) including those that have the greatest effect on the overall audit strategy, the allocation of resources in the audit and directing the efforts of the engagement team</p>	Audit planning report – 2 nd June 2025 Resources, Audit and Performance Committee
Significant findings from the audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Our view about the significant qualitative aspects of accounting practices including accounting policies, accounting estimates and financial statement disclosures ▪ Significant difficulties, if any, encountered during the audit ▪ Significant matters, if any, arising from the audit that were discussed with management ▪ Written representations that we are seeking ▪ Expected modifications to the audit report ▪ Other matters if any, significant to the oversight of the financial reporting process 	Audit results report

Appendix C – Required communications with Those Charged with Governance

		Our Reporting to you
Required communications	What is reported?	When and where
Going concern	<p>Events or conditions identified that may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether the events or conditions constitute a material uncertainty Whether the use of the going concern assumption is appropriate in the preparation and presentation of the financial statements The adequacy of related disclosures in the financial statements 	Audit results report
Misstatements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncorrected misstatements and their effect on our audit opinion, unless prohibited by law or regulation The effect of uncorrected misstatements related to prior periods A request that any uncorrected misstatement be corrected Material misstatements corrected by management 	Audit results report
Fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enquiries of the those charged with governance to determine whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud affecting the entity Any fraud that we have identified or information we have obtained that indicates that a fraud may exist Unless all of those charged with governance are involved in managing the entity, any identified or suspected fraud involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Management; b. Employees who have significant roles in internal control; or c. Others where the fraud results in a material misstatement in the financial statements The nature, timing and extent of audit procedures necessary to complete the audit when fraud involving management is suspected Matters, if any, to communicate regarding management's process for identifying and responding to the risks of fraud in the entity and our assessment of the risks of material misstatement due to fraud Any other matters related to fraud, relevant to those charged with governance responsibility 	Audit results report
Related parties	<p>Significant matters arising during the audit in connection with the entity's related parties including, when applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-disclosure by management Inappropriate authorisation and approval of transactions Disagreement over disclosures Non-compliance with laws and regulations Difficulty in identifying the party that ultimately controls the entity 	Audit results report

Appendix C – Required communications with Those Charged with Governance

		Our Reporting to you
Required communications	What is reported?	When and where
Independence	<p>Communication of all significant facts and matters that bear on EY's, and all individuals involved in the audit, integrity, objectivity and independence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication of key elements of the audit engagement partner's consideration of independence and objectivity such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The principal threats Safeguards adopted and their effectiveness An overall assessment of threats and safeguards Information about the general policies and process within the firm to maintain objectivity and independence <p>Communication whenever significant judgements are made about threats to integrity, objectivity and independence and the appropriateness of safeguards put in place.</p>	<p>Audit planning report – 2nd June 2025 Resources, Audit and Performance Committee</p> <p>Audit results report</p>
External confirmations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management's refusal for us to request confirmations Inability to obtain relevant and reliable audit evidence from other procedures 	Audit results report
Consideration of laws and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to compliance with applicable regulations, matters involving identified or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations, other than those which are clearly inconsequential and the implications thereof. Instances of suspected non-compliance may also include those that are brought to our attention that are expected to occur imminently or for which there is reason to believe that they may occur Enquiry of those charged with governance into possible instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations that may have a material effect on the financial statements and that those charged with governance may be aware of 	Audit results report
Internal controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant deficiencies in internal controls identified during the audit 	Audit results report
Representations	Written representations we are requesting from management and/or those charged with governance	Audit results report
System of quality management	How the system of quality management (SQM) supports the consistent performance of a quality audit	Audit results report
Material inconsistencies and misstatements	Material inconsistencies or misstatements of fact identified in other information which management has refused to revise	Audit results report
Auditors report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key audit matters that we will include in our auditor's report Any circumstances identified that affect the form and content of our auditor's report 	Audit results report

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