



Audit Strategy Memorandum

County Durham and Darlington Fire
and Rescue Authority

Year ending 31 March 2019





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This document is to be regarded as confidential to County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority. It has been prepared for the sole use of the Audit and Risk Committee as the appropriate sub-committee charged with governance . No responsibility is accepted to any other person in respect of the whole or part of its contents. Our written consent must first be obtained before this document, or any part of it, is disclosed to a third party.

Mazars LLP
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Durham
DH1 5TS

Members of the Audit and Risk Committee
County Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority
Service Headquarters
Belmont Business Centre
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DH1 1TW

15 February 2019

Dear Sirs / Madams

Audit Strategy Memorandum – Year ending 31 March 2019

We are pleased to present our Audit Strategy Memorandum for the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) for the year ending 31 March 2019.

The purpose of this document is to summarise our audit approach, highlight significant audit risks and areas of key judgements and provide you with the details of our audit team. As it is a fundamental requirement that an auditor is, and is seen to be, independent of its clients, Section 7 of this document also summarises our considerations and conclusions on our independence as auditors.

We consider two-way communication with you to be key to a successful audit and important in:

- reaching a mutual understanding of the scope of the audit and the responsibilities of each of us;
- sharing information to assist each of us to fulfil our respective responsibilities;
- providing you with constructive observations arising from the audit process; and
- ensuring that we, as external auditors, gain an understanding of your attitude and views in respect of the internal and external operational, financial, compliance and other risks facing the Authority which may affect the audit, including the likelihood of those risks materialising and how they are monitored and managed.

This document, which has been prepared following our initial planning discussions with management, is the basis for discussion of our audit approach, and any questions or input you may have on our approach or role as auditor.

This document also contains specific appendices that outline our key communications with you during the course of the audit, and forthcoming accounting issues and other issues that may be of interest.

Client service is extremely important to us and we strive to continuously provide technical excellence with the highest level of service quality, together with continuous improvement to exceed your expectations so, if you have any concerns or comments about this document or audit approach, please contact me on 0191 383 6300.

Yours faithfully

Gavin Barker
Gavin Barker (Feb 15, 2019)

Gavin Barker
Mazars LLP

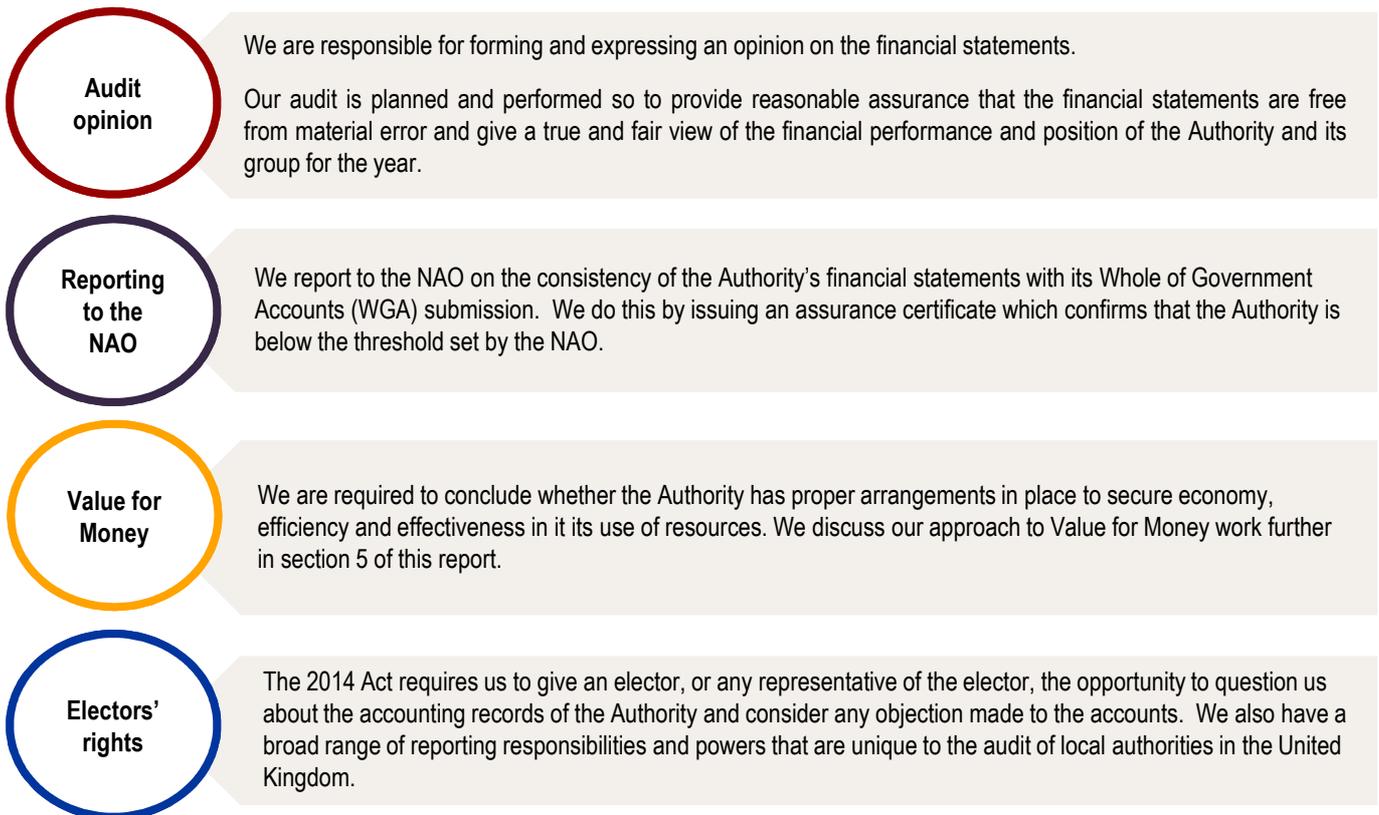
1. ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITIES SUMMARY

Overview of engagement

We are appointed to perform the external audit of the Authority and its group for the year to 31 March 2019. The scope of our engagement is set out in the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies, issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) available from the PSAA website: <https://www.psa.co.uk/audit-quality/statement-of-responsibilities/>

Our responsibilities

Our responsibilities are principally derived from the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the 2014 Act) and the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office (NAO), as outlined below:



Our audit does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities. The responsibility for safeguarding assets and for the prevention and detection of fraud, error and non-compliance with law or regulations rests with both those charged with governance and management. In accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK), we plan and perform our audit so as to obtain reasonable assurance that the financial statements taken as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. However our audit should not be relied upon to identify all such misstatements.

As part of our audit procedures in relation to fraud we are required to enquire of those charged with governance as to their knowledge of instances of fraud, the risk of fraud and their views on management controls that mitigate the fraud risks.

The Authority is required to prepare its financial statements on a going concern basis by the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting. As auditors, we are required to consider the appropriateness of the use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements and the adequacy of disclosures made.

For the purpose of our audit, we have identified the Audit and Risk Committee as those charged with governance.



2. YOUR AUDIT ENGAGEMENT TEAM



- Gavin Barker, Director
- Gavin.Barker@mazars.co.uk
- 0191 383 6300



- Campbell Dearden, Manager
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- 07881 283 348



- Joanne Greener, Assistant Manager
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- 07881 252 444

3. AUDIT SCOPE, APPROACH AND TIMELINE

Audit scope

Our audit approach is designed to provide an audit that complies with all professional requirements.

Our audit of the financial statements will be conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK), relevant ethical and professional standards, our own audit approach and in accordance with the terms of our engagement. Our work is focused on those aspects of your business which we consider to have a higher risk of material misstatement, such as those affected by management judgement and estimation, application of new accounting standards, changes of accounting policy, changes to operations or areas which have been found to contain material errors in the past.

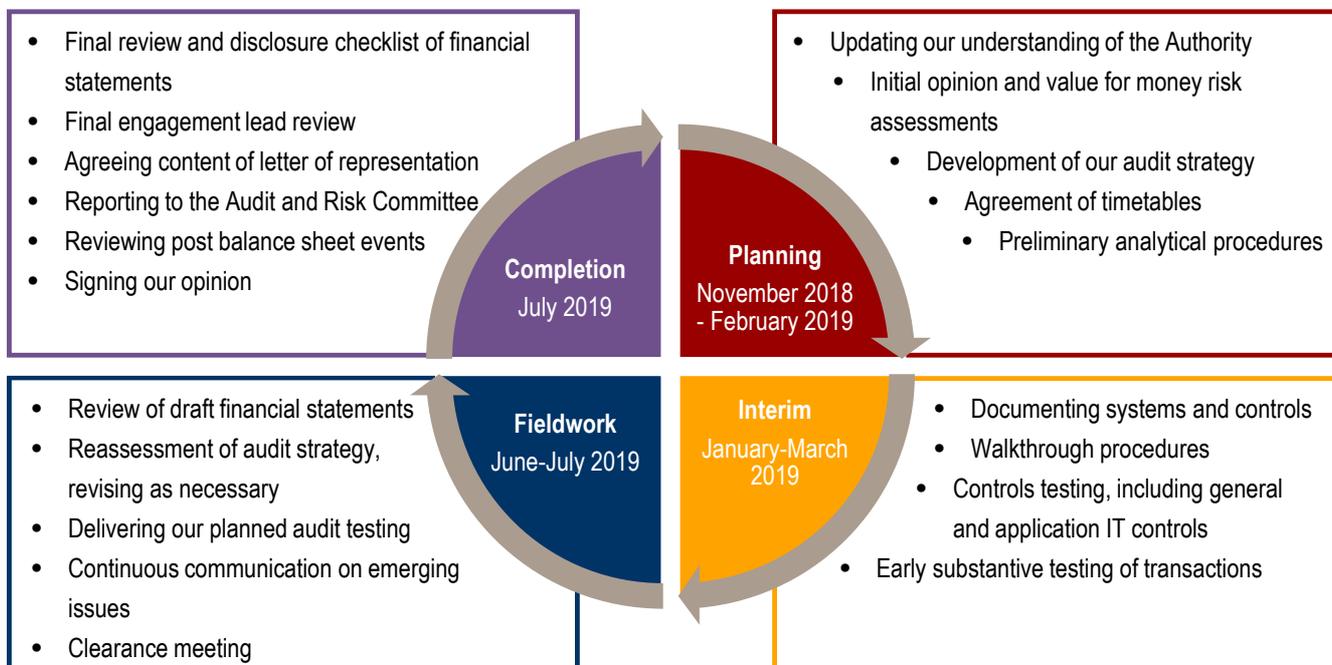
Audit approach

Our audit approach is a risk-based approach primarily driven by the risks we consider to result in a higher risk of material misstatement of the financial statements. Once we have completed our risk assessment, we develop our audit strategy and design audit procedures in response to this assessment.

If we conclude that appropriately-designed controls are in place then we may plan to test and rely upon these controls. If we decide controls are not appropriately designed, or we decide it would be more efficient to do so, we may take a wholly substantive approach to our audit testing. Substantive procedures are audit procedures designed to detect material misstatements at the assertion level and comprise tests of details (of classes of transactions, account balances, and disclosures) and substantive analytical procedures. Irrespective of the assessed risks of material misstatement, which take into account our evaluation of the operating effectiveness of controls, we are required to design and perform substantive procedures for each material class of transactions, account balance, and disclosure.

Our audit will be planned and performed so as to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement and give a true and fair view. The concept of materiality and how we define a misstatement is explained in more detail in section 8.

The diagram below outlines the procedures we perform at the different stages of the audit.



3. AUDIT SCOPE, APPROACH AND TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

Reliance on internal audit

Where possible we will seek to utilise the work performed by internal audit to modify the nature, extent and timing of our audit procedures. We will meet with internal audit to discuss the progress and findings of their work prior to the commencement of our controls evaluation procedures.

Where we intend to rely on the work of internal audit, we will evaluate the work performed by your internal audit team and perform our own audit procedures to determine its adequacy for our audit.

Management's and our experts

Management makes use of experts in specific areas when preparing the Authority's financial statements. We also use experts to assist us to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence on specific items of account.

Items of account	Management's expert	Our expert
Defined benefit liability	Government Actuary's department (GAD) for Firefighters; and Aon Hewitt Limited for all other employees	National Audit Office, prepared by PwC
Property, plant and equipment valuation	Durham County Council Valuer	National Audit Office, prepared by Gerald Eve

Service organisations

International Auditing Standards (UK) define service organisations as third party organisations that provide services to the Authority that are part of its information systems relevant to financial reporting. We are required to obtain an understanding of the services provided by service organisations as well as evaluating the design and implementation of controls over those services. The table below summarises the service organisations used by the Authority and our planned audit approach.

Items of account	Service organisation	Audit approach
Provision and maintenance of the general ledger system (including Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable) which affects all items of account.	Durham County Council	We have full access to systems, therefore no additional procedures are required.



3. AUDIT SCOPE, APPROACH AND TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

Group audit approach

We understand that the Authority intends to produce group financial statements for the first time for the 2018/19 financial year.

We are responsible for the audit of the group financial statements, which consolidate the Authority's single entity accounts with the components of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service Community Interest Company and Vital Fire Solutions Limited. In 2018/19, these two additional components are estimated to be less than 1% of the group total based on gross operating expenditure, and are consequently not significant components.

Our group audit approach for 2018/19 will include:

- reviewing the draft financial statements of the two additional component entities highlighted above;
- analytical procedures at group audit level supplemented by tests of detail if appropriate;
- undertaking reasonableness checks on the information to be included in the statements in relation to the entities. We will also assess the controls that management have put in place over the information to be included in the group accounts and assess the potential impact on our audit work;
- reviewing how the Authority prepares its group statements and manages the consolidation process; and
- the audit of the group financial statements, ensuring appropriate consolidation adjustments and disclosures of the information provided by the other entities.

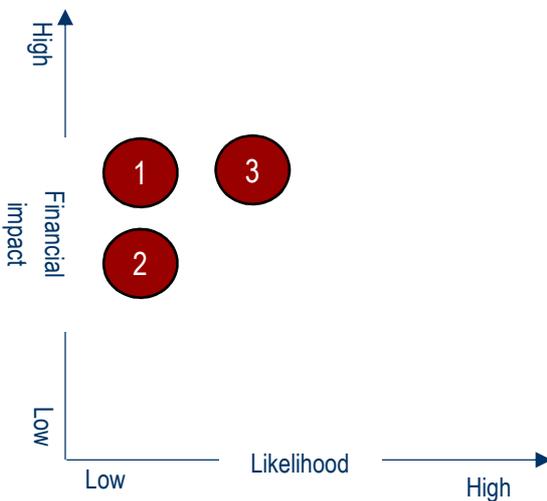


4. SIGNIFICANT RISKS AND KEY JUDGEMENT AREAS

Following the risk assessment approach discussed in section 3 of this document, we have identified relevant risks to the audit of financial statements. The risks that we identify are categorised as significant, enhanced or standard, as defined below:

- Significant risk** A significant risk is an identified and assessed risk of material misstatement that, in the auditor's judgment, requires special audit consideration. For any significant risk, the auditor shall obtain an understanding of the entity's controls, including control activities relevant to that risk.
- Enhanced risk** An enhanced risk is an area of higher assessed risk of material misstatement at audit assertion level other than a significant risk. Enhanced risks incorporate but may not be limited to:
- key areas of management judgement, including accounting estimates which are material but are not considered to give rise to a significant risk of material misstatement; and
 - other audit assertion risks arising from significant events or transactions that occurred during the period.
- Standard risk** This is related to relatively routine, non-complex transactions that tend to be subject to systematic processing and require little management judgement. Although it is considered that there is a risk of material misstatement, there are no elevated or special factors related to the nature, the likely magnitude of the potential misstatements or the likelihood of the risk occurring.

The summary risk assessment, illustrated in the table below, highlights those risks which we deem to be significant. We have summarised our audit response to these risks on the next page.



Risk	
1	Significant - Management override of control
2	Significant - Property, plant and equipment valuation
3	Significant - Defined benefit liability valuation



4. SIGNIFICANT RISKS AND KEY JUDGEMENT AREAS (CONTINUED)

We provide more detail on the identified risks and our testing approach with respect to significant risks in the table below. An audit is a dynamic process, should we change our view of risk or approach to address the identified risks during the course of our audit, we will report this to the Audit and Risk Committee.

Significant risks

	Description of risk	Planned response
1	<p>Management override of controls</p> <p>Management at various levels within an organisation are in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of their ability to manipulate accounting records and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur there is a risk of material misstatement due to fraud on all audits.</p>	<p>We plan to address the management override of controls risk through performing audit work over accounting estimates, journal entries and significant transactions outside the normal course of business or otherwise unusual.</p>
2	<p>Property, plant and equipment valuation</p> <p>The financial statements contain material entries on the Balance Sheet as well as material disclosure notes in relation to the Authority's holding of buildings.</p> <p>Although the Authority employs an internal valuation expert to provide information on valuations, there remains a high degree of estimation uncertainty associated with the revaluation of PPE due to the significant judgements and number of variables involved in providing revaluations.</p>	<p>We will consider the Authority's arrangements for ensuring that PPE values are reasonable and, if required, will engage our own expert to provide data to enable us to assess the reasonableness of the valuations provided by the Authority's valuer. We will also assess the competence, skills and experience of the valuer.</p> <p>Where necessary we will also perform further audit procedures on individual assets to ensure that the basis and level of valuation is appropriate.</p>
3	<p>Defined benefit liability valuation</p> <p>The financial statements contain material pension entries in respect of retirement benefits. The calculation of these pension figures, both assets and liabilities, can be subject to significant volatility and includes estimates based upon a complex interaction of actuarial assumptions. This results in an increased risk of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will discuss with key contacts any significant changes to the pensions estimates prior to the preparation of the final accounts. In addition to our standard programme of work in this area, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the management controls you have in place to assess the reasonableness of the figures provided by the actuaries; and • consider the reasonableness of the actuaries outputs, referring to an expert's report on all actuaries nationally which is commissioned annually by the National Audit Office.



5. VALUE FOR MONEY

Our approach to Value for Money

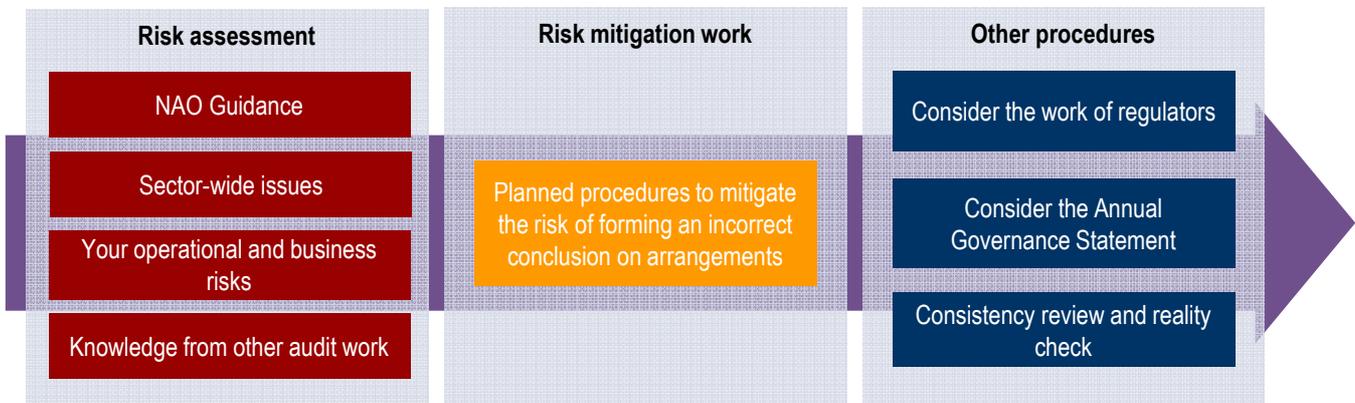
We are required to form a conclusion as to whether the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The NAO issues guidance to auditors that underpins the work we are required to carry out, and sets out the overall criterion and sub-criteria that we are required to consider.

The overall criterion is that, 'in all significant respects, the Authority had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.'

To assist auditors in reaching a conclusion on this overall criterion, the following sub-criteria are set out by the NAO:

- informed decision making;
- sustainable resource deployment; and
- working with partners and other third parties.

A summary of the work we undertake to reach our conclusion is provided below:



Significant Value for Money risks

The NAO's guidance requires us to carry out work at the planning stage to identify whether or not a Value for Money (VFM) exists. Risk, in the context of our VFM work, is the risk that we come to an incorrect conclusion rather than the risk of the arrangements in place at the Authority being inadequate. As outlined above, we draw on our deep understanding of the Authority and its partners, the local and national economy and wider knowledge of the public sector.

For the 2018/19 financial year, we have not identified any significant risks to our VFM work.



6. FEES FOR AUDIT AND OTHER SERVICES

Fees for work as the Authority's appointed auditor

We communicated our proposed fee of £22,235 in our fee letter dated 19 April 2018, which was in line with the scale fee set by PSAA. The Authority has since indicated that it will prepare group financial statements in 2018/19 alongside the Authority's financial statements, as referenced in section 3 of this Memorandum, and as such we are proposing to vary the 2018/19 audit fee, subject to agreement from PSAA.

Service	2017/18 fee	2018/19 fee
Code audit work	£28,877	£22,235
Plus: additional fees in respect of audit of group consolidation	£0	£1,475*
Total fees for Code audit work	£28,877	£23,710*

* Subject to agreement by PSAA and confirmation from PSAA of 2018/19 scale rates for additional work.

Fees for non-PSAA work

Mazars LLP completed the audit and corporation tax returns of Vital Fire Solutions Limited and the Community Interest Company in 2017/18 and the fees were as follows.

- Vital Fire Solutions Limited: audit fee of £2,900 plus VAT and corporation tax at £850 plus VAT; and
- Community Interest Company (CIC): audit fee of £2,900 plus VAT and corporation tax at £850 plus VAT.

We understand that the intention is that these two companies will claim an exemption from audit in 2018/19 under section 479C of the Companies Act 2006.

Before agreeing to undertake any additional work, we consider whether there are any actual, potential or perceived threats to our independence. Further information about our responsibilities in relation to independence is provided in section 7.



7. OUR COMMITMENT TO INDEPENDENCE

We are committed to independence and are required by the Financial Reporting Council to confirm to you at least annually, in writing, that we comply with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard. In addition, we communicate any matters or relationship which we believe may have a bearing on our independence or the objectivity of the audit team.

Based on the information provided by you and our own internal procedures to safeguard our independence as auditors, we confirm that in our professional judgement there are no relationships between us and any of our related or subsidiary entities, and you and your related entities creating any unacceptable threats to our independence within the regulatory or professional requirements governing us as your auditors.

We have policies and procedures in place which are designed to ensure that we carry out our work with integrity, objectivity and independence. These policies include:

- all partners and staff are required to complete an annual independence declaration;
- all new partners and staff are required to complete an independence confirmation and also complete computer-based ethics training;
- rotation policies covering audit engagement partners and other key members of the audit team;
- use by managers and partners of our client and engagement acceptance system which requires all non-audit services to be approved in advance by the audit engagement partner.

We confirm, as at the date of this document, that the engagement team and others in the firm as appropriate, and Mazars LLP are independent and comply with relevant ethical requirements. However, if at any time you have concerns or questions about our integrity, objectivity or independence please discuss these with Gavin Barker in the first instance.

Prior to the provision of any non-audit services, Gavin Barker will undertake appropriate procedures to consider and fully assess the impact that providing the service may have on our auditor independence.

No threats to our independence have been identified.

Any emerging independence threats and associated identified safeguards will be communicated in our Audit Completion Report.



8. MATERIALITY AND MISSTATEMENTS

Summary of initial materiality thresholds

Threshold	Initial threshold - Authority (£'000s)	Initial threshold - Group (£'000s)
Overall materiality	892	900
Performance materiality	714	720
Specific materiality:		
• Members allowances	1	1
• Officers remuneration	100	100
• Exit packages	100	100
Trivial threshold for errors to be reported to the Audit Committee	27	27

Materiality

Materiality is an expression of the relative significance or importance of a particular matter in the context of financial statements as a whole. Misstatements in financial statements are considered to be material if they, individually or in aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

Judgements on materiality are made in light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by the size and nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both. Judgements about materiality are based on consideration of the common financial information needs of users as a group and not on specific individual users.

The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our perception of the financial information needs of the users of the financial statements. In making our assessment we assume that users:

- have a reasonable knowledge of business, economic activities and accounts;
- have a willingness to study the information in the financial statements with reasonable diligence;
- understand that financial statements are prepared, presented and audited to levels of materiality;
- recognise the uncertainties inherent in the measurement of amounts based on the use of estimates, judgement and the consideration of future events; and
- will make reasonable economic decisions on the basis of the information in the financial statements.

We consider materiality whilst planning and performing our audit based on quantitative and qualitative factors.

Whilst planning, we make judgements about the size of misstatements which we consider to be material and which provides a basis for determining the nature, timing and extent of risk assessment procedures, identifying and assessing the risk of material misstatement and determining the nature, timing and extent of further audit procedures.

The materiality determined at the planning stage does not necessarily establish an amount below which uncorrected misstatements, either individually or in aggregate, will be considered as immaterial.

We revise materiality for the financial statements as our audit progresses should we become aware of information that would have caused us to determine a different amount had we been aware of that information at the planning stage.



8. MATERIALITY AND MISSTATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Our provisional materiality is set based on a benchmark of gross expenditure at the surplus/deficit on provision of services level. We will identify a figure for materiality but identify separate levels for procedures designed to detect individual errors, and also a level above which all identified errors will be reported to the Audit Committee.

We consider that gross expenditure at the surplus/deficit on provision of services level remains the key focus of users of the financial statements and, as such, we base our materiality levels around this benchmark.

We expect to set a materiality threshold at 2% of gross revenue expenditure.

Based on last year's audited financial statements, we anticipate the overall materiality for the year ending 31 March 2019 to be in the region of £892,000 for the Authority (£670,000 in the prior year) and £900,000 for the Group (not applicable in the prior year).

After setting initial materiality, we continue to monitor materiality throughout the audit to ensure that it is set at an appropriate level.

Performance Materiality

Performance materiality is the amount or amounts set by the auditor at less than materiality for the financial statements as a whole to reduce, to an appropriately low level, the probability that the aggregate of uncorrected and undetected misstatements exceeds materiality for the financial statements as a whole.

Our initial assessment of performance materiality is based on low inherent risk, meaning that we have calculated performance materiality as being 80% of overall materiality. As with overall materiality, we will remain aware of the need to change this performance materiality level through the audit to ensure it remains to be set at an appropriate level.

Misstatements

We aggregate misstatements identified during the audit that are other than clearly trivial. We set a level of triviality for individual errors identified (a reporting threshold) for reporting to the Audit Committee that is consistent with the level of triviality that we consider would not need to be accumulated because we expect that the accumulation of such amounts would not have a material effect on the financial statements. Based on our preliminary assessment of overall materiality, our proposed triviality threshold is £27,000 based on 3% of overall materiality. If you have any queries about this please do not hesitate to raise these with Gavin Barker.

Reporting to the Audit Committee

To comply with International Standards on Auditing (UK), the following three types of audit differences will be presented to the Audit Committee:

- summary of adjusted audit differences;
- summary of unadjusted audit differences; and
- summary of disclosure differences (adjusted and unadjusted).



APPENDIX A – KEY COMMUNICATION POINTS

ISA (UK) 260 'Communication with Those Charged with Governance', ISA (UK) 265 'Communicating Deficiencies In Internal Control To Those Charged With Governance And Management' and other ISAs (UK) specifically require us to communicate the following:

Required communication	Audit Strategy Memorandum	Audit Completion Report
Our responsibilities in relation to the audit of the financial statements and our wider responsibilities	✓	
Planned scope and timing of the audit	✓	
Significant audit risks and areas of management judgement	✓	
Our commitment to independence	✓	✓
Responsibilities for preventing and detecting errors	✓	
Materiality and misstatements	✓	✓
Fees for audit and other services	✓	
Significant deficiencies in internal control		✓
Significant findings from the audit		✓
Significant matters discussed with management		✓
Our conclusions on the significant audit risks and areas of management judgement		✓
Summary of misstatements		✓
Management representation letter		✓
Our proposed draft audit report		✓



APPENDIX B – FORTHCOMING ACCOUNTING AND OTHER ISSUES

Changes relevant to 2018/19

IFRS 9 Financial Instruments - the standard replaces IAS 39 and introduces significant changes to the recognition and measurement of the Authority's financial instruments, particularly its financial assets.

Although the accounting changes may be complex and may require the reclassification of some instruments, it is likely that the Authority will continue to measure the majority of its financial assets at amortised costs.

For Authorities that hold instruments that will be required to be measured at fair value under the new standard, there may be instances where changes in these fair values are recognised immediately and impact on the general fund. At this stage it is unclear whether statutory provisions, over and above those already in place, will be put in place to mitigate the impact of these fair value movements on the Authority's general fund balance.

IFRS 15 Revenue from Contracts with Customers - the 2018/19 Code also applies the requirements of IFRS 15, but it is unlikely that this will have significant implications for most local authorities.

There are no other significant changes to the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting (the Code) for 2018/19.

Changes in future years

Accounting standard	Year of application	Implications
IFRS 16 – Leases	2020/21	<p>IFRS 16 will replace the existing leasing standard, IAS 17, and will introduce significant changes, particularly for lessees. The requirements for lessors will be largely unchanged from the position in IAS 17.</p> <p>Lessees will need to recognise assets and liabilities for all leases (except short-life or low-value leases) as the distinction between operating leases and finance leases is removed.</p> <p>The introduction of this standard is likely to lead to significant work being required in order to identify all leases to which the Authority are party to.</p> <p>CIPFA/LASAAC have confirmed that the effective date of implementation in the Code has been deferred for one year only to 1 April 2020, for alignment with the wider public sector.</p>

