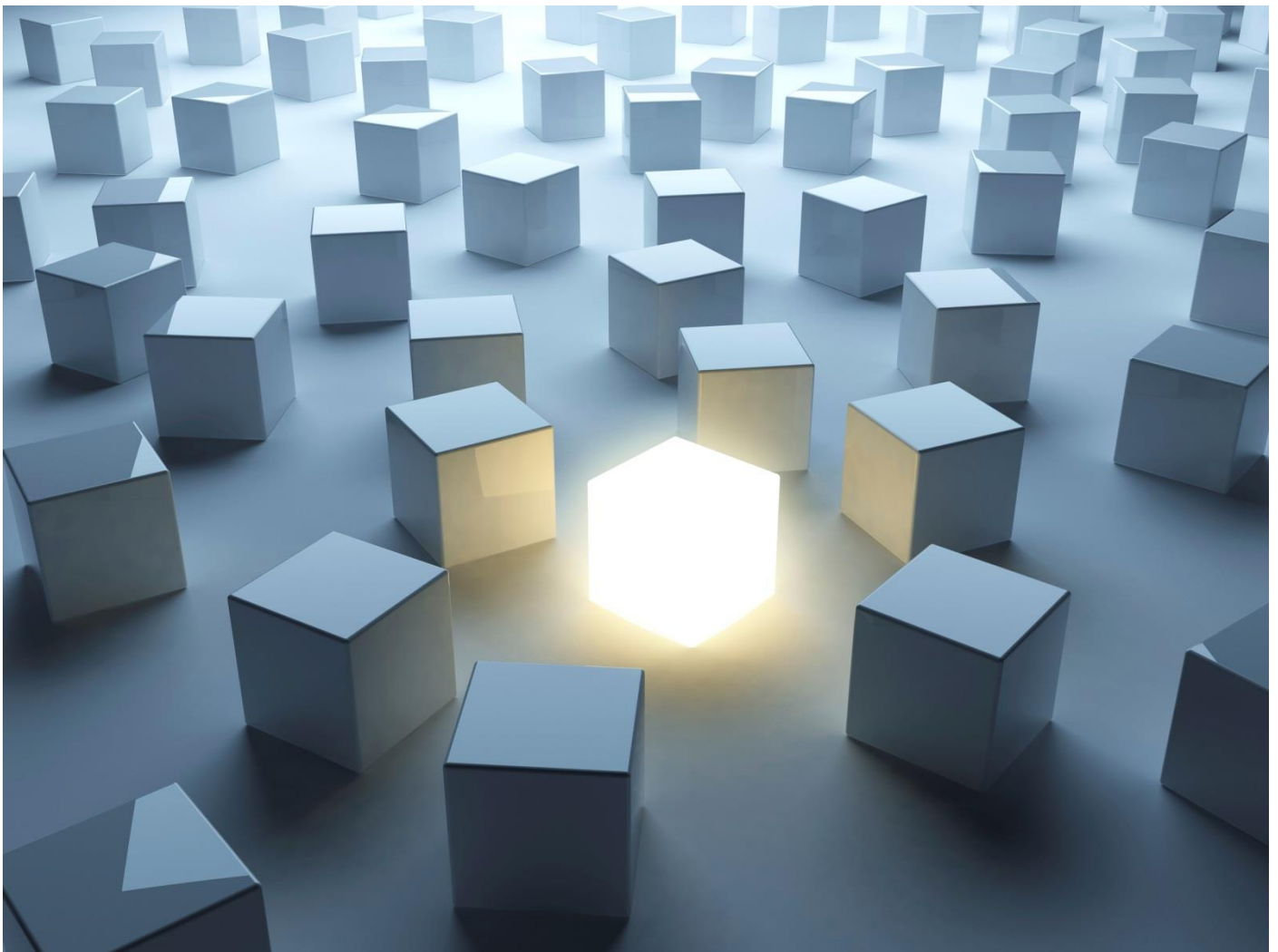


Audit Strategy Memorandum 2015/16

North Tyneside Council

March 2016



North Tyneside Council

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Members of the Audit Committee (on behalf of Those Charged with Governance)
North Tyneside Council
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16 March 2016

Dear Members

Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ending 31 March 2016

We are pleased to present our Audit Strategy Memorandum for North Tyneside Council for the year ending 31 March 2016.

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. It is a fundamental requirement that an auditor is, and is seen to be, independent of its clients, and Appendix A summarises our considerations and conclusions on our independence as auditors.

We value two-way communication with yourselves and we see this document, which has been prepared following our initial planning discussions with management, as being the basis for a discussion through which we can also understand your expectations.

This document will be presented at the Audit Committee meeting on 30 March 2016. If you would like to discuss any matters in more detail please do not hesitate to contact me on 07979 164467.

Yours faithfully

Gareth Davies
Partner
Mazars LLP

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Our reports are prepared in the context of the Public Sector Audit Appointment Limited’s ‘Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies’. Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to members or officers are prepared for the sole use of the Council and we take no responsibility to any member or officer in their individual capacity or to any third party.

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01 Purpose and background

Purpose of this document

This document sets out our audit plan in respect of the audit of the financial statements of North Tyneside Council (the Council) for the year ending 31 March 2016, and forms the basis for discussion at the Audit Committee meeting on 30 March 2016.

The plan sets out our proposed audit approach and is prepared to assist you in fulfilling your governance responsibilities. The responsibilities of those charged with governance are defined as to oversee the strategic direction of the entity and obligations related to the accountability of the entity, including overseeing the financial reporting process.

We see a clear and open communication between ourselves and you as 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 as part of the two-way communication process 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 Council which might affect the audit, including the likelihood of those risks materialising and how they are monitored and managed.

Appendix C outlines the form, timing and content of our communication with you during the course of the audit. Appendix D sets out forthcoming accounting and other issues that will be of interest.

Scope of engagement

We are appointed to perform the external audit of the Council for the year to 31 March 2016. The scope of our engagement is laid out in the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice.

Responsibilities

Audit opinion

We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements. Our audit does not relieve management or Members, of their responsibilities. We are also required to reach a conclusion on the arrangements the Council has put in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (our value for money conclusion).

Whole of Government Accounts

We report to the National Audit Office in respect of the consistency of the Council's Whole of Government Accounts submission with the financial statements.

Fraud

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 and Ireland) 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.

We are also required to give an elector, or any representative of the elector, an opportunity to question us about the accounting records of the Council and consider any objection made to the accounts by an elector.

02 Audit scope, approach and timeline

Audit scope

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

Our audit of the financial statements will be conducted in accordance with International Standards of Auditing (UK and Ireland) and in accordance with the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice. Our work is focused on those aspects of your business which we consider to have a higher risk of material misstatement such as those impacted 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

We apply a risk-based audit approach primarily driven by the matters 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. The work undertaken will include a combination of the following as appropriate:

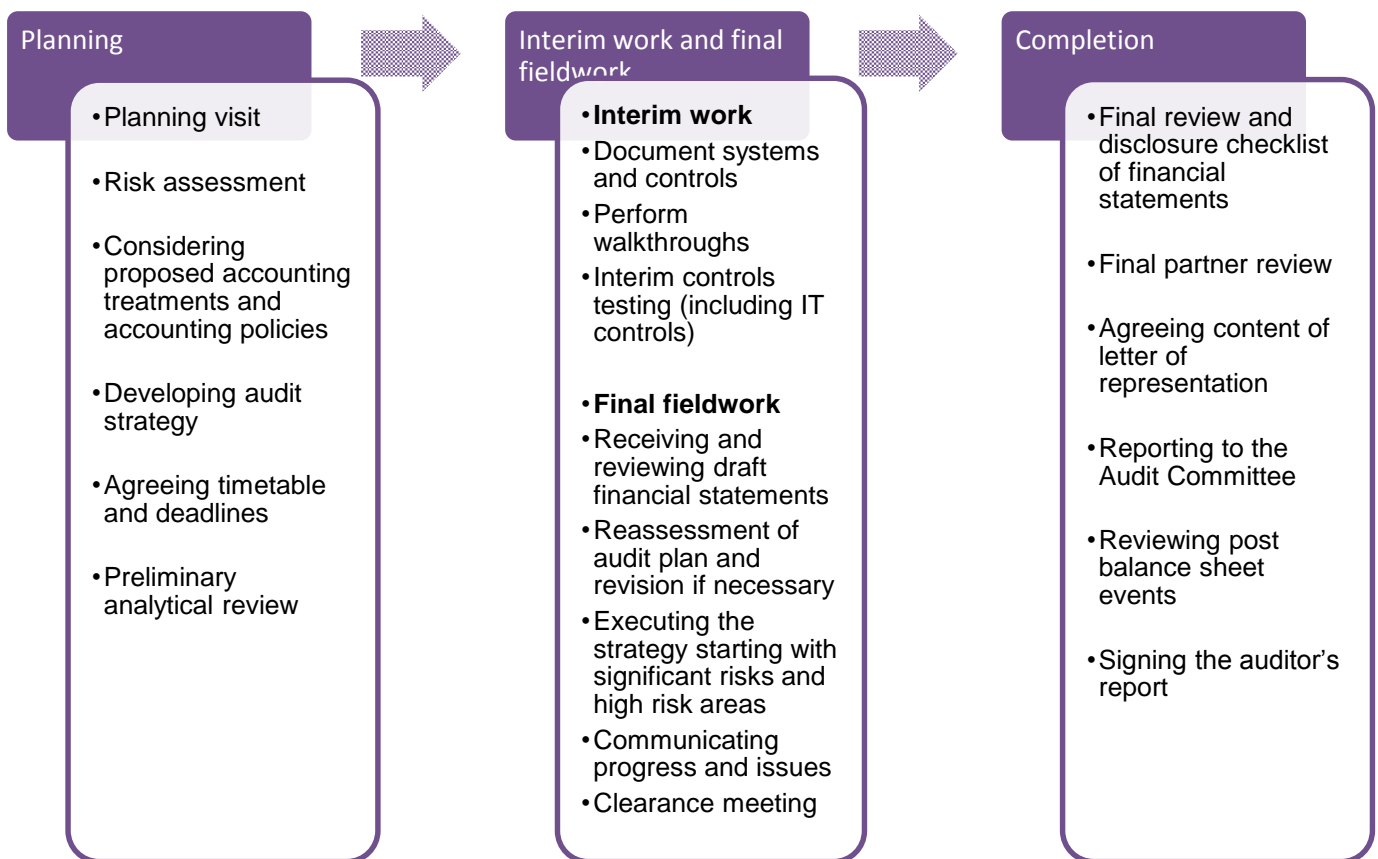
- testing of internal controls;
- substantive analytical procedures; and
- detailed substantive testing.

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.

Our audit approach for this year will also include an assessment of the IT environment and testing of IT general and application controls by a member of our specialist IT audit team.

Our audit will be planned and performed so as to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free of material misstatement and give a true and fair view. Materiality and misstatements are explained in more detail in Appendix B.

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



Reliance on other auditors

There are material entries in your financial statements relating to pensions where we will seek to place reliance on the work of other auditors.

Items of account	Other auditor	Nature of assurance to obtain from the auditor
Defined benefit liability and associated pension entries and disclosures.	Tyne and Wear Local Government Pension Fund Auditor (EY).	We have agreed a programme of work with the Pension Fund auditor that aims to provide assurance over the accuracy of source data used by the Actuary.

Service organisations

There are material entries in your financial statements where the Council is dependent on an external organisation. We call these entities service organisations. The table below outlines our approach to understanding the services the Council receives from each organisation and the effectiveness of controls in place to reduce the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements.

Nature of services provided and items of account	Name of service organisation	Audit approach to be adopted
All areas – processing of transactions and preparation of financial statements.	Engie (previously known as Cofely Gdf Suez).	We have full access to the systems and staff, therefore no additional procedures required.

The work of experts

The Council uses experts to inform aspects of the financial statements. Where appropriate we engage our own experts to inform our evaluation of the work of the Council's experts.

Item(s) of account	Management's expert	Our expert
Defined benefit liability and associated pension entries and disclosures.	Actuary (Aon Hewitt).	National Audit Office's consulting Actuary (PwC).
Property, plant and equipment valuations.	Capita.	National Audit Office's consulting valuer (Gerald Eve).
Financial instruments: fair value disclosures.	Capita.	Central assurance provided by the National Audit Office in respect of Capita's provision of fair value estimates.

Timeline

The diagram below sets out the timing of the key phases of our audit work. We will communicate with management throughout the audit process and will ensure significant issues identified are communicated to those charged with governance on a timely basis.



03 Significant risks

We have performed our planning procedures, including risk assessment, as detailed in section 2. In addition, we met with management as part of the audit planning process to discuss the risks that, in management's opinion, the Council faces and have considered the impact on our audit risk. The risks that we identify as significant for the purpose of our audit are the risks of material misstatement that in our judgement require special audit consideration.

We set out below the significant audit risks we have identified and which we will pay particular attention to during our audit. We design procedures to obtain sufficient assurance the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

Audit risks

Management override of controls

Description of the risk

In all entities, 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, we consider there to be a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk on all audits.

How we will address this risk

We will perform audit procedures on:

- accounting estimates included in the financial statements;
- identified significant transactions outside the normal course of business; and
- journals recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments made by officers in preparing the financial statements.

Revenue recognition

Description of the risk

There is an inherent risk of fraud in financial reporting relating to the recognition of revenue due to the potential to inappropriately record revenue in the wrong period. The Council relies on income as part of its medium-term financial strategy.

How we will address this risk

We will perform audit procedures on:

- journals recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments which recognise income, made in the preparation of the financial statements;
- a sample of income to confirm it has been accounted for in the correct accounting period; and
- the year-end reconciliation for receivables to the ledger.

Pension transactions and balances

Description of the risk

The financial statements contain material entries in a number of primary statements as well as material disclosure notes in relation to the Council's participation in the Local Government Pension Scheme. These entries arise from complex estimates used by the Council's Actuary as well as information provided to the Actuary by the Council.

How we will address this risk

We will:

- evaluate the Council's arrangements (including relevant controls) for making estimates in relation to pension entries within the financial statements; and
- consider the reasonableness of the Actuary's assumptions that underpin the relevant entries made by the Council in its financial statements, through the use of an expert commissioned by the National Audit Office.

Property, plant and equipment - valuation

Description of the risk

The financial statements contain material entries in respect of property, plant and equipment as well as material disclosure notes, with the previous audit identifying a material error in respect of council dwellings.

We have therefore assessed there is a risk of misstatement in relation to the valuation of property, plant and equipment, in addition to accounting changes relating to fair values this year (IFRS 13).

How we will address this risk

We will:

- challenge the assumptions used by the Valuer in his valuation report;
- compare the valuations used by the Council against local valuation trends, through the use of an expert commissioned by the National Audit Office; and
- substantively test the valuation of property, plant and equipment (taking into account the new standard, IFRS 13).

04 Value for money conclusion

Scope of work

For 2015/16, we are required to conclude whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We perform our work in this area in accordance with guidance set out by the National Audit Office in Auditor Guidance Note 3. This requires us to consider one overall criterion which is made up of three sub-criteria.

Overall criterion

The overall criterion set out by the National Audit Office is as follows:

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

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

As part of our work, we will also:

- review your annual governance statement;
- consider the work of other relevant regulatory bodies or inspectorates, such as Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission, to the extent the results of the work have an impact on our responsibilities; and
- carry out any risk-based work we determine appropriate.

Significant risks

We have considered the risks that are relevant to our value for money conclusion and have identified the following significant risk that we will address through our work.

Value for money significant risk – level of savings required

Description of the risk

The Council is facing continuing financial pressures from reduced funding, increased demand and changing responsibilities. The Council is responding to these challenges via a programme of efficiencies, service reviews and developing new ways to manage demand and deliver services, encapsulated in its 'Target Operating Model' and 'Creating a Brighter Future' programme.

The latest medium-term financial strategy forecasts the need to make savings of £14.158 million in 2015/16, as well as a further £15.737 million in 2016/17. In addition, the Council needs to make further savings of £23.598 million in 2017/18 and £16.533 million in 2018/19 in order to deliver a balanced budget.

The level of savings the Council needs to achieve over the period of its medium-term financial strategy, on top of savings already achieved in recent years, represents a significant risk to the value for money conclusion.

How we will address this risk

We will carry out audit procedures reviewing the robustness of:

- the medium-term financial strategy;
- budget monitoring reports and other finance updates; and
- a sample of the savings plans and underlying assumptions to their delivery.

05 Your audit team

Your audit team and their contact details are set out below.

Partner and Engagement
Lead

- Gareth Davies
- gareth.davies@mazars.co.uk
- 07979 164 467

Engagement Senior
Manager

- Diane Harold
- diane.harold@mazars.co.uk
- 07971 513 174

Engagement Assistant
Manager

- Elaine Hall
- elaine.hall@mazars.co.uk
- 07881 283 350

A partner has also been appointed to this audit to act as the Engagement Quality Control Reviewer.

06 Fees for audit and other services

Public Sector Audit Appointments set scale fees for the work we do under the Code of Audit Practice and the certification of your housing subsidy claim. Our proposed fees are consistent with these scale fees.

Audit fee work

Area of work	2015/16 scale fee	2014/15 actual fee	2014/15 scale fee
Code audit work	£135,765	£181,020	£181,020
Certification work	£16,970	£16,100	£16,100
Total	£152,735	£197,120	£197,120

Non-audit fee work

Area of work	2015/16	2014/15
Skills for Funding Agency subcontracting controls assurance	£1,500	n/a
Pooled Capital Receipts return	TBC	£1,800
Teachers' Pensions return	TBC	£3,750
Total	£1,500	£5,550

See also Appendix A – Independence which also considers non-audit fee work.

Appendix A – Independence

We are required by the Financial Reporting Council to confirm to you at least annually in writing that we comply with the Auditing Practices Board’s Ethical Standards. 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 ethical training;
- rotation policies covering audit engagement partners and other key members of the audit team who are required to rotate off a client after a set number of years; and
- 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 Lead.

We wish to confirm that in our professional judgement, as at the date of this document, we are independent and comply with UK regulatory and professional requirements. However, if at any time you have concerns or questions about our integrity, objectivity or independence please discuss these with the Engagement Lead, Gareth Davies. Prior to the provision of any non-audit services, Gareth Davies will undertake appropriate procedures to consider and fully assess the impact that providing the service may have on our auditor independence.

The following principal threats to our independence and associated safeguards have been identified.

Issue	Perceived threat	Safeguards and procedures
Pooled Capital Receipts return 2015/16 Teachers’ Pensions return 2015/16	We may be engaged again to provide assurance services in respect of the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pooled Capital Receipts; and • Teachers’ Pensions return. The perceived threat is that of ‘self-interest’ i.e. provision of additional services.	The value of services provided for these returns last year was not material at £1,800 and £3,750 respectively and our assessment is that there is no impact on our audit. No additional safeguards are required.
Skills for Funding Agency subcontracting controls assurance 2015/16	The perceived threat is that of ‘self-interest’ i.e. provision of additional services, noting this work has already been carried out.	The value of services provided for this return was not material at £1,500 and our assessment was that there was no impact on our audit. No additional safeguards were required.

Appendix B – 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.

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.

We discuss with management any significant misstatements or anomalies that we identify during the course of the audit and we report in our Audit Completion Report all unadjusted misstatements we have identified other than those which are clearly trivial, and obtain written representation that explains why these remain unadjusted.

Appendix C – Key communication points

ISA 260 'Communication with Those Charged with Governance' and ISA 265 'Communicating Deficiencies in Internal Control to Those Charged with Governance and Management' require us to communicate a number of points with you.

Relevant points that need to be communicated with you at each stage of the audit are outlined below.

Form, timing and content of our communications

We will present the following reports to the Audit Committee:

- Audit Strategy Memorandum (i.e. this audit plan);
- Audit Completion Report (report at the end of the audit of the financial statements); and
- Annual Audit Letter.

These documents will be discussed with management prior to being presented to the Audit Committee and their comments will be incorporated as appropriate.

Key communication points at the planning stage as included in this Audit Strategy Memorandum

- Our responsibilities in relation to the audit of the financial statements
- The planned scope and timing of the audit
- Significant audit risks and areas of management judgement
- Our independence
- Responsibilities for preventing and detecting errors
- Materiality
- Fees for audit and other services

Key communication points at the completion stage to be included in our Audit Completion Report

- 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
- Unadjusted misstatements
- Management representation letter
- Our proposed draft audit report
- Independence

Appendix D – Forthcoming accounting and other issues

The 2015/16 CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting (the Code) has made several changes to financial reporting requirements relevant to the Council, of which you should be aware. We provide workshops explaining these changes to which we invite officers from the Council responsible for preparing the financial statements. The workshops provide full details of the changes in the 2015/16 Code as well as a forward look to potential future accounting changes that may be of relevance to the Council.

As well as the accounting issues outlined below, we would like to draw the Audit Committee’s attention to changes in the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 that require the Council to notify us of the date on which the period for the exercise of public rights commences. If you require detailed information on any of these changes or any other emerging issues, please contact any member of the engagement team.

Forthcoming accounting issues

Early deadlines	How this may affect the Council
The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 outline earlier deadlines for local authorities to produce their statements of account from the 2017/18 financial year.	The impacts of this change on local authorities and their auditors are significant and we have begun to discuss how we will meet the challenges the new dates place on us all with Council officers.
Fair Value accounting	How this may affect the Council
The Code adopts the principles of IFRS 13 in respect of measuring fair value for the first time in 2015/16.	Some assets and liabilities held by the Council may need to be revalued on the basis of their fair value for the first time in 2015/16.
Highways Network Assets	How this may affect the Council
The measurement basis for the Council’s Highways Network Assets will change from depreciated historic cost to depreciated replacement cost in 2016/17, but with no prior period restatement required.	It is likely that the impact of this change will be significant and that the value of relevant assets on the Council’s balance sheet will increase.