

# External Audit Plan

**Year ending 31 March 2022**

Somerset County Council  
June 2022



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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit planning process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect the Council or all weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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# Key matters

## Factors

### Infrastructure Assets

The CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting prescribes the accounting treatment and disclosure requirements for infrastructure assets and requires these to be reported in the Balance Sheet at depreciated historical cost (i.e., historic cost less accumulated depreciation and impairment). Nationally, this has become an area of regulator interest, with CIPFA and the NAO also reviewing this issue, as there is a risk that where authorities have incurred expenditure on the replacement or enhancement of existing infrastructure assets, they may not readily be able to identify the original assets being replaced or enhanced. This could result in an overstatement of both gross book values and accumulated depreciation, and potentially also net book values where assets lives have not been assessed regularly and on an appropriate basis.

### Climate Change

Somerset County Council, along with the four district councils in Somerset, declared a climate change emergency in 2019. Working together, the council have developed a strategy to address the challenge of climate change 'Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset – Somerset's Climate Emergency'. This sets out four key goals:

- To decarbonise local authorities, the wider public sector estates and reduce our carbon footprint
- To work towards making Somerset a Carbon Neutral County by 2030
- To have a Somerset which is prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of Climate Change

These are ambitious goals which are likely to have financial as well as operational impact upon the Council.

### Audit Quality

On 29 October 2022, the FRC published its annual report setting out the findings of its review of the work of local auditors. The report summarises the results of the FRC's inspections of twenty audit files for the last financial year.

Grant Thornton are one of seven firms which currently delivers local audit work. Of our 330 local government and NHS audits, 87 are currently defined as 'major audits' which fall within the scope of the AQR. This year, the FRC looked at nine of our audits.

### Value for Money

Under the 2020 Audit Code of Practice, we are required to undertake sufficient work to satisfy ourselves that the Council "has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources."

Our initial risk assessment has built on our understanding of your arrangements, taking into account any findings from previous work on value for money. We will report our findings against the following reporting criteria:

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

## Our response

- We will review the Council arrangements in respect of accounting for infrastructure assets in line with the current guidance and in response to the current consultation and will report on any issues identified.
- We will review the Council plans for addressing the climate change emergency including its financial assumptions and commitments
- We will assess whether the Council has appropriate arrangements in place for identifying the potential future costs to its operations as a result of climate change
- We will monitor the Councils arrangements for implementing the actions within its joint strategy
- The results of the recent FRC review are outlined on page 5 and 6 of this Audit Plan
- As a firm, we are absolutely committed to audit quality and financial reporting in the local government sector. Our proposed work and fee, as set further in our Audit Plan, will be agreed with the Director of Finance and Governance.
- We will consider your arrangements for managing and reporting your financial resources as part of our audit in completing our Value for Money work.
- Where recommendations have been identified through previous audit work, these will be followed up this year.
- We will keep our risk assessment under continuous review. Where appropriate, we will update our risk assessment to reflect emerging risks or findings and report this to the Council.

# Introduction and headlines

## Purpose

This document provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Somerset County Council ('the Council') and the Group for those charged with governance.

## Respective responsibilities

The National Audit Office ('the NAO') has issued a document entitled Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'). This summarises where the responsibilities of auditors begin and end and what is expected from the audited body. Our respective responsibilities are also set out in the agreed in the Terms of Appointment and Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA). We draw your attention to both of these documents.

## Scope of our audit

The scope of our audit is set in accordance with the Code and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the Council [and group]'s financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Audit committee); and we consider whether there are sufficient arrangements in place at the Council and group for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources. Value for money relates to ensuring that resources are used efficiently to maximise the outcomes that can be achieved.

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or the Audit Committee of your responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the Council to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the conduct of its business, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. We have considered how the Council is fulfilling these responsibilities.

Our audit approach is based on a thorough understanding of the Council's business and is risk based.

## Significant risks

Those risks requiring special audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood of a material financial statement error have been identified as:

- Revenue transactions include fraudulent transactions – specifically for Fees, Charges and Other Service Income (the remaining sources of income are rebutted)
- Management override of controls
- Valuation of Land and Buildings
- Valuation of Pension Fund Net Liability

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings (ISA 260) Report.

## Materiality

We have determined planning materiality to be £13.5m (PY £12.3m) for the Council, which equates to 1.5% of your prior year gross expenditure for the year. We are required to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. Clearly trivial has been set at £0.675m (PY £0.615m).

## Value for Money arrangements

We have identified two risks of significant weakness from our initial planning work, in relation to:

- Arrangements for transition to the new Unitary Authority
- Risk to the delivery of the financial plan

We will continue our review of your arrangements, including reviewing your Annual Governance Statement, before we issue our auditor's annual report.

## Audit logistics

Our interim visit took place in March 2022 and our final visit will take place from July 2022. Our audit work will be delivered through a combination of on-site work as well as working remotely, to ensure the most efficient, effective and timely audit. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan, our Audit Findings Report and Auditor's Annual Report.

Our fee for the audit for 2021-22 is detailed on page 19. In the prior year it was £126,752 for the Council. The fee will be subject to the Council delivering a good set of financial statements and working papers.

We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard (revised 2019) and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

# Significant improvements from the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) quality inspection

On 29 October 2021, the FRC published its annual report setting out the findings of its review of the work of local auditors. The report summarises the results of the FRC's inspections of twenty audit files for the last financial year. A link to the report is here: [FRC AQR Major Local Audits October 2021](#)

Grant Thornton are one of seven firms which currently delivers local audit work. Of our 330 local government and NHS audits, 87 are currently defined as 'major audits' which fall within the scope of the AQR. This year, the FRC looked at nine of our audits.

## Our file review results

The FRC reviewed nine of our audits last year. It graded six files (67%) as 'Good' and requiring no more than limited improvements. No files were graded as requiring significant improvement, representing an impressive year-on-year improvement. The FRC described the improvement in our audit quality as an 'encouraging response by the firm to the quality findings reported in the prior year.' Our Value for Money work continues to be delivered to a high standard, with all of the files reviewed requiring no more than limited improvement. We welcome the FRC findings and conclusions which demonstrate the impressive improvement we have made in audit quality over the past year.

The FRC also identified a number of good practices including effective challenge of management's valuer, use of an auditor's expert to assist with the audit of a highly specialised property valuation, and the extent and timing of involvement by the audit partner on the VFM conclusion.

## Our continued commitment to Audit quality and continuous improvement

Our work over the past year has been undertaken during the backdrop of COVID, when the public sector has faced the huge challenge of providing essential services and helping safeguard the public during the pandemic. As auditors we have had to reflect on the significant challenges faced by our colleagues working at the front line in delivering vital public services whilst staying focused on the principles of good governance and financial management, things which are more important than ever. We are very proud of the way we have worked effectively with audited bodies, demonstrating empathy in our work whilst still upholding the highest audit quality.

Our results over the past three years are shown in the table below:

Grade	Number 2018/19	Number 2019/20	Number 2020/21
Good with limited improvements (Grade 1 or 2)	1	1	6
Improvements required (Grade 3)	2	5	3
Significant improvements required (Grade 4)	1	0	0
Total	4	6	9

Over the coming year we will make further investments in audit quality including strengthening our quality and technical support functions, and increasing the level of training, support and guidance for our audit teams. We will address the specific improvement recommendations raised by the FRC, including:

- enhanced training for local auditors on key assumptions within property valuations, and how to demonstrate an increased level of challenge
- formalising our arrangements for the consideration of complex technical issues by Partner Panels.

As part of our enhanced Value for Money programme, we will focus on identifying the scope for better use of public money, as well as highlighting weaknesses in governance or financial stewardship where we see them.

## Conclusion

Local audit plays a critical role in the way public sector audits an society interact, and it depends on the trust and confidence of all those who rely on it. As a firm we're proud to be doing our part to promote good governance, effective stewardship and appropriate use of public funds.



# Significant risks identified

Significant risks are defined by ISAs (UK) as risks that, in the judgement of the auditor, require special audit consideration. In identifying risks, audit teams consider the nature of the risk, the potential magnitude of misstatement, and its likelihood. Significant risks are those risks that have a higher risk of material misstatement.

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<b>Income from Fees, Charges and Other Service Income</b>	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.</p> <p>For Somerset County Council, we have concluded that the greatest risk of material misstatement relates to 'Fees, Charges, and Other Service Income'. We have therefore identified the occurrence of 'Fees, Charges, and Other Service Income' as a significant risk, which is one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p> <p>We have rebutted this presumed risk for the other revenue streams of the Authority because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other income streams are primarily derived from grants or formula based income from Central Government and tax payers; and/or</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited.</li> </ul>	<p>For 'Fees, Charges and Other Service Income' we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate the group's accounting policy for recognition of income from fees, charges, and other service income for appropriateness;</li> <li>• gain an understanding of the authority's system for accounting for income from fees, charges, and other service income and evaluate the design of the associated controls;</li> <li>• agree, on a sample basis, amounts recognised as income from fees, charges and other service income in the financial statements to supporting documents.</li> </ul> <p>For all other revenue streams, having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited</li> <li>• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Somerset County Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.</li> </ul>
<b>Management over-ride of controls</b>	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities. The Authority faces external scrutiny of its spending and this could potentially place management under undue pressure in terms of how they report performance.</p> <p>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular: journals, management estimates, and transactions outside the course of business; as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate the design effectiveness of management controls over journals</li> <li>• analyse the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals</li> <li>• test unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration</li> <li>• gain an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence</li> <li>• evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.</li> </ul>

# Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<b>Valuation of Land and Buildings (Rolling Revaluation)</b>	<p>The council revalue its land and buildings on a rolling five-yearly basis. This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions. Additionally, management will need to ensure the carrying value in the Authority's financial statements is not materially different from the current value or the fair value (for surplus assets) at the financial statements date, where a rolling programme is used.</p> <p>We therefore identified the appropriateness of the specific inputs and assumptions that drive the valuation of land and buildings as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work</li> <li>• evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert</li> <li>• write to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out</li> <li>• challenge the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding</li> <li>• engage our own valuer to assess the instruction to the authority's valuer, the authority's valuer's report and the assumptions that underpin the valuation</li> <li>• test revaluations made during the year to see if they had been input correctly into the group's asset register</li> <li>• evaluating the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management has satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value at year end.</li> </ul>
<b>Valuation of Pension Fund Net Liability</b>	<p>The Authority's pension fund net liability, as reflected in its balance sheet as the net defined benefit liability, represents a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p> <p>The pension fund net liability is considered a significant estimate due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of the Authority's pension fund net liability as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• update our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the authority's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluate the design of the associated controls;</li> <li>• evaluate the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work;</li> <li>• assess the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the authority's pension fund valuation;</li> <li>• assess the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the authority to the actuary to estimate the liability;</li> <li>• test the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary;</li> <li>• undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; and</li> <li>• agree the advance payment made to the pension fund during the year to the expected accounting treatment and relevant financial disclosures.</li> <li>• obtain assurances from the auditor of the pension fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements.</li> </ul>

# Other risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
<b>Valuations of Infrastructure assets</b>	<p>The Council owns infrastructure assets with a net book value of £490m (as at 31 March 2021).</p> <p>The CIPFA Code of Practice on local authority accounting (the Code) states that infrastructure assets shall be measured at depreciated historical cost. Historical cost is deemed to be the carrying amount of an asset as at 1 April 2007 (i.e. brought forward from 31 March 2007) or at the date of acquisition, whichever date is the later, and adjusted for subsequent depreciation or impairment.</p> <p>There is a risk that the carrying value of infrastructure assets is not appropriate given the nature of how the assets are held on the balance sheet and monitored through the asset register.</p> <p>The Council should consider whether the carrying value remains appropriate, or whether there are any indications of significant impairments and also the replacement of assets that have not been fully depreciated and the subsequent derecognition of the replaced assets, such as highways and street lighting.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• review and challenge the arrangements that the council has in place around impairment of infrastructure assets</li><li>• evaluate management’s processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate</li><li>• evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of any management expert relied upon</li><li>• challenge the information and assumptions used to inform the estimate</li><li>• consider whether there has been any replacement of assets that have not been fully depreciated and evaluate the subsequent derecognition of the replaced assets.</li></ul>

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings Report.



# Accounting estimates and related disclosures

The Financial Reporting Council issued an updated ISA (UK) 540 (revised): *Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures* which includes significant enhancements in respect of the audit risk assessment process for accounting estimates.

## Introduction

Under ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) auditors are required to understand and assess an entity's internal controls over accounting estimates, including:

- The nature and extent of oversight and governance over management's financial reporting process relevant to accounting estimates;
- How management identifies the need for and applies specialised skills or knowledge related to accounting estimates;
- How the entity's risk management process identifies and addresses risks relating to accounting estimates;
- The entity's information system as it relates to accounting estimates;
- The entity's control activities in relation to accounting estimates; and
- How management reviews the outcomes of previous accounting estimates.

As part of this process auditors also need to obtain an understanding of the role of those charged with governance, which is particularly important where the estimates have high estimation uncertainty, or require significant judgement.

Specifically do Audit Committee members:

- Understand the characteristics of the methods and models used to make the accounting estimates and the risks related to them;
- Oversee management's process for making accounting estimates, including the use of models, and the monitoring activities undertaken by management; and
- Evaluate how management made the accounting estimates?



# Accounting estimates and related disclosures

## Additional information that will be required

To ensure our compliance with this revised auditing standard, we will be requesting further information from management and those charged with governance during our audit for the year ended 31 March 2022.

Based on our knowledge of the Council we have identified the following material accounting estimates for which this is likely to apply:

- Valuations of land and buildings
- Depreciation
- Impairment of Infrastructure Assets and replacement of assets that have not been fully depreciated
- Year end provisions and accruals, specifically for demand led services such as Adult's and Children's services
- Credit loss and impairment allowances
- Valuation of defined benefit net pension fund liabilities
- Fair value estimates
- Valuation of level 2 and level 3 investments
- PFI Liabilities

## The Council's Information systems

In respect of the Council's information systems we are required to consider how management identifies the methods, assumptions and source data used for each material accounting estimate and the need for any changes to these. This includes how management selects, or designs, the methods, assumptions and data to be used and applies the methods used in the valuations.

When the models used include increased complexity or subjectivity, as is the case for many valuation models, auditors need to understand and assess the controls in place over the models and the data included therein. Where adequate controls are not in place we may need to report this as a significant control deficiency and this could affect the amount of detailed substantive testing required during the audit.

If management has changed the method for making an accounting estimate we will need to fully understand management's rationale for this change. Any unexpected changes are likely to raise the audit risk profile of this accounting estimate and may result in the need for additional audit procedures.

We are aware that the Council uses management experts in deriving some of its more complex estimates, e.g. asset valuations and pensions liabilities. However, it is important to note that the use of management experts does not diminish the responsibilities of management and those charged with governance to ensure that:

- All accounting estimates and related disclosures included in the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the financial reporting framework, and are materially accurate;
- There are adequate controls in place at the Council (and where applicable its service provider or management expert) over the models, assumptions and source data used in the preparation of accounting estimates.



### Estimation uncertainty

Under ISA (UK) 540 we are required to consider the following:

- How management understands the degree of estimation uncertainty related to each accounting estimate; and
- How management address this estimation uncertainty when selecting their point estimate.

For example, how management identified and considered alternative, methods, assumptions or source data that would be equally valid under the financial reporting framework, and why these alternatives were rejected in favour of the point estimate used.

The revised standard includes increased emphasis on the importance of the financial statement disclosures. Under ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018), auditors are required to assess whether both the accounting estimates themselves and the related disclosures are reasonable.

Where there is a material uncertainty, that is where there is a significant risk of a material change to the estimated carrying value of an asset or liability within the next year, there needs to be additional disclosures. Note that not all material estimates will have a material uncertainty and it is also possible that an estimate that is not material could have a risk of material uncertainty.

Where there is material estimation uncertainty, we would expect the financial statement disclosures to detail:

- **What the assumptions and uncertainties are;**
- **How sensitive the assets and liabilities are to those assumptions, and why;**
- **The expected resolution of the uncertainty and the range of reasonably possible outcomes for the next financial year; and**
- **An explanation of any changes made to past assumptions if the uncertainty is unresolved.**

### Planning enquiries

As part of our planning risk assessment procedures we have made inquiries of management.

### Further information

Further details on the requirements of ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) can be found in the auditing standard on the Financial Reporting Council's website:

[https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/0fa69c03-49ec-49ae-a8c9-cc7a2b65382a/ISA-\(UK\)-540\\_Revised-December-2018\\_final.pdf](https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/0fa69c03-49ec-49ae-a8c9-cc7a2b65382a/ISA-(UK)-540_Revised-December-2018_final.pdf)

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# Other matters

## Other work

In addition to our responsibilities under the Code of Practice, we have a number of other audit responsibilities, as follows:

- We read your Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement to check that they are consistent with the financial statements on which we give an opinion and our knowledge of the Council.
- We carry out work to satisfy ourselves that disclosures made in your Annual Governance Statement are in line with requirements set by CIPFA.
- We carry out work on your consolidation schedules for the Whole of Government Accounts process in accordance with NAO group audit instructions.
- We consider our other duties under legislation and the Code, as and when required, including:
  - giving electors the opportunity to raise questions about your 2021/22 financial statements, consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the 2021/22 financial statements;
  - issuing a report in the public interest or written recommendations to the Council under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act).
  - application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under section 28 or a judicial review under section 31 of the Act
  - issuing an advisory notice under section 29 of the Act
- We certify completion of our audit.

## Other material balances and transactions

Under International Standards on Auditing, "irrespective of the assessed risks of material misstatement, the auditor shall design and perform substantive procedures for each material class of transactions, account balance and disclosure". All other material balances and transaction streams will therefore be audited. However, the procedures will not be as extensive as the procedures adopted for the risks identified in this report.

# Materiality

## The concept of materiality

Materiality is fundamental to the preparation of the financial statements and the audit process and applies not only to the monetary misstatements but also to disclosure requirements and adherence to acceptable accounting practice and applicable law. Misstatements, including omissions, are considered to be material if they, individually or in the aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

## Materiality for planning purposes

We have determined financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the gross expenditure of the Council for the financial year. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. Materiality at the planning stage of our audit is £13.500m (PY £12.300m) for the Council, which equates to 1.5% of your prior year gross expenditure for the year. We design our procedures to detect errors in specific accounts at a lower level of precision which we have determined to be £20,000 for Senior officer remuneration.

We reconsider planning materiality if, during the course of our audit engagement, we become aware of facts and circumstances that would have caused us to make a different determination of planning materiality.

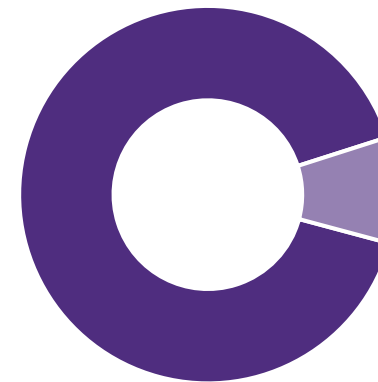
## Matters we will report to the Audit Committee

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our opinion on the financial statements as a whole, we nevertheless report to the Audit Committee any unadjusted misstatements of lesser amounts to the extent that these are identified by our audit work. Under ISA 260 (UK) 'Communication with those charged with governance', we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA 260 (UK) defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. In the context of the Council, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £0.675m (PY £0.615m).

If management have corrected material misstatements identified during the course of the audit, we will consider whether those corrections should be communicated to the Audit Committee to assist it in fulfilling its governance responsibilities.

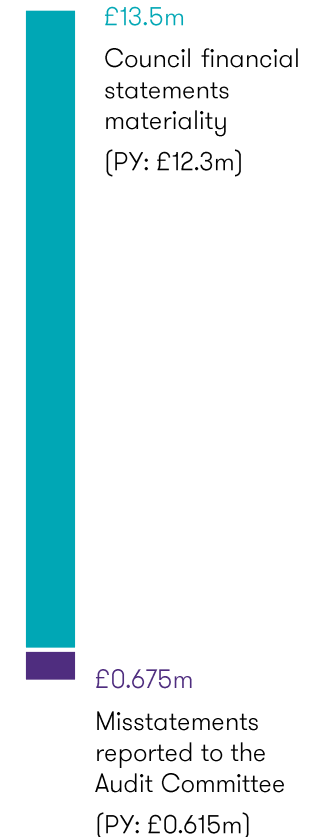
## Prior year gross operating costs

£900m Council  
(PY: £820m)



- Prior year gross operating costs
- Materiality

## Materiality



# IT audit strategy

In accordance with ISA (UK) 315, we are required to obtain an understanding of the information systems relevant to financial reporting to identify and assess the risks of material misstatement. As part of this we obtain an understanding of the controls operating over relevant Information Technology (IT) systems i.e., IT general controls (ITGCs). Our audit will include completing an assessment of the design of ITGCs related to security management; technology acquisition, development and maintenance; and technology infrastructure. Based on the level of assurance required for each IT system the assessment may focus on evaluating key risk areas ('streamlined assessment') or be more in depth ('detailed assessment').

The following IT systems have been judged to be in scope for our audit and based on the planned financial statement audit approach we will perform the indicated level of assessment:

IT system	Audit area	Planned level IT audit assessment
SAP	Financial reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Streamlined ITGC design assessment [Limited Scope Roll-forward procedures]</li></ul>



# Value for Money arrangements

Approach to Value for Money work for 2021/22

The National Audit Office (NAO) issued updated guidance for auditors in April 2020. The Code requires auditors to consider whether the body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria. These are as set out below:

We have not identified any risks of significant weaknesses from our initial planning work. We will continue our review of your arrangements, including reviewing your Annual Governance Statement, before we issue our auditor's annual report.



## Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Arrangements for improving the way the body delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users.



## Financial Sustainability

Arrangements for ensuring the body can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (3-5 years)



## Governance

Arrangements for ensuring that the body makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and management, risk management, and ensuring the body makes decisions based on appropriate information

## Potential types of recommendations

A range of different recommendations could be made following the completion of work on risks of significant weakness, as follows:



### Statutory recommendation

Written recommendations to the body under Section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. A recommendation under schedule 7 requires the body to discuss and respond publicly to the report.



### Key recommendation

The Code of Audit Practice requires that where auditors identify significant weaknesses in arrangements to secure value for money they should make recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the body. We have defined these recommendations as 'key recommendations'.



### Improvement recommendation

These recommendations, if implemented should improve the arrangements in place at the body, but are not made as a result of identifying significant weaknesses in the body's arrangements

# Risks of significant VFM weaknesses

As part of our planning work, we considered whether there were any risks of significant weakness in the body's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources that we needed to perform further procedures on. The risks we have identified are detailed in the first table below, along with the further procedures we will perform. We may need to make recommendations following the completion of our work. The potential different types of recommendations we could make are set out in the second table.

## Risks of significant weakness

Those risks requiring audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood that proper arrangements are not in place at the body to deliver value for money.



### Arrangements for transition to the new Unitary Authority

Local Government reorganisation in Somerset will result in an end to the current two-tier system from 1 April 2023, with a single Unitary Authority taking responsibility for service delivery across the county. There is a risk that arrangements are not in place to support a successful transition.

In order to address this potential risk of significant weakness we will:

- consider the arrangements that have been put in place to support a successful transition across key financial and governance workstreams;
- assess how the Council is working with its partners to support the change.

We anticipate being able to achieve this by reviewing meeting papers and minutes and interviewing those officers responsible for transition workstreams.



### Financial Sustainability - Risk to the delivery of the Financial Plan

Whilst the Council has built up a healthier level of reserves and has strengthened its delivering of financial targets and savings in recent years, financial challenge and uncertainty continues to increase. In setting the 2021/22 budget and Medium Financial Strategy, the Council has identified the need to make a further savings.

In order to address this potential risk of significant weakness we will:

- further review progress towards delivering savings and additional income and assess the reasonableness of the assumptions that underpin the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- We will review the delivery of the 2021/22 budget as well as how the Council has developed its financial plan.
- Further, we will consider potential funding gaps in financial planning that could substantially threaten the delivery of the plan.

# Audit logistics and team

Planning and risk assessment

Interim audit  
February – March  
2022

April 2022

Audit Plan

Year end audit  
July – September 2022

Audit committee  
November 2022

Audit Findings Report

Audit committee  
November 2022

Auditor's Annual Report



**Barrie Morris, Engagement Lead**

Barrie leads our relationship with you and takes overall responsibility for the delivery of a high quality audit, meeting the highest professional standards and adding value to the Council.



**Grace Hawkins, Audit Manager**

Grace plans, manages and leads the delivery of the audit, is your key point of contact for your finance team and is your first point of contact for discussing any issues.



**Oscar Edwards, Audit In-charge**

Oscar's role is to assist in planning, managing and delivering the audit fieldwork, ensuring the audit is delivered effectively and efficiently. Oscar supervises and coordinates the on-site audit team.

## Audited body responsibilities

Where audited bodies do not deliver to the timetable agreed, we need to ensure that this does not impact on audit quality or absorb a disproportionate amount of time, thereby disadvantaging other audits. Where the elapsed time to complete an audit exceeds that agreed due to a client not meeting its obligations we will not be able to maintain a team on site. Similarly, where additional resources are needed to complete the audit due to a client not meeting their obligations we are not able to guarantee the delivery of the audit to the agreed timescales. In addition, delayed audits will incur additional audit fees.

## Our requirements

To minimise the risk of a delayed audit, you need to ensure that you:

- produce draft financial statements of good quality by the agreed timetable you have agreed with us, including all notes, the Narrative Report and the Annual Governance Statement
- ensure that good quality working papers are available at the start of the audit, in accordance with the working paper requirements schedule that we have shared with you
- ensure that the agreed data reports are available to us at the start of the audit and are reconciled to the values in the accounts, in order to facilitate our selection of samples for testing
- ensure that all appropriate staff are available on site throughout (or as otherwise agreed) the planned period of the audit
- respond promptly and adequately to audit queries.

# Audit fees

In 2012, PSAA awarded a contract of audit for Somerset County Council beginning with effect from 2018/19. The fee agreed in the contract was £76,902. Since that time, there have been a number of developments, particularly in relation to the revised Code and ISA's which are relevant for the 2021/22 audit.

Additionally, across all sectors and firms, the FRC has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge and to undertake additional and more robust testing, as detailed on page 10 in relation to the updated ISA (UK) 540 (revised): Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures.

As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and public sector financial reporting. As in previous years, we are discussing the extent of fee variations for the audit of the current years' financial statements. These discussions are still ongoing and therefore, at this time, we are not able to provide a proposed fee. We will communicate this to you in a future progress report, once it has been agreed with the Director of Finance and Governance.

	Actual Fee 2019/20	Actual Fee 2020/21	Proposed fee 2021/22
Scale Fee	£76,902	£76,902	£82,902
Additional Fee	£65,270	£49,850	£60,713
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	£142,172	£126,752	£143,615

## Assumptions

In setting the fees, we assume that the Council will:

- prepare a good quality set of financial statements, supported by comprehensive and well presented working papers which are ready at the start of the audit
- provide appropriate analysis, support and evidence to support all critical judgements and significant judgements made during the course of preparing the financial statements
- provide early notice of proposed complex or unusual transactions which could have a material impact on the financial statements.

## Relevant professional standards

In preparing our fee estimate, we will have regard to all relevant professional standards, including paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the FRC's [Ethical Standard \(revised 2019\)](#) which stipulate that the Engagement Lead (Key Audit Partner) must set a fee sufficient to enable the resourcing of the audit with partners and staff with appropriate time and skill to deliver an audit to the required professional and Ethical standards.

# Audit fees – detailed analysis - Council

Scale fee published by PSAA	£82,902
<b><i>Ongoing increases to scale fee first identified in 2019/20</i></b>	
Increased challenge, complexity and lower materiality	£5,625
Enhanced audit procedures for Property, Plant and Equipment including our own audit expert	£4,938
Enhanced audit procedures for Pensions	£750
<b>Recurring Audit fee 2019/20</b>	<b>£94,215</b>
<b><i>Ongoing increases to scale fee first identified in 2020/21</i></b>	
Additional work on Value for Money (VfM) under new NAO Code	£19,000
Increased audit requirements of revised ISAs	£13,900
<b>Recurring Audit fee 2020/21</b>	<b>£127,115</b>
Additional Review for Major Local Authorities	£1,500
Infrastructure	£5,000
Remote Working*	£10,000
<b>Total audit fees (excluding VAT)</b>	<b>£143,615</b>

\*The pandemic has led to considerable changes to how we all work and how we have carried out our audits over the last two years. Many local authorities are exploring new ways of working to support its officers, through use of remote and hybrid working environments. We see the positive benefits this can bring to the Council, and its workforce, both in providing more flexibility and reducing its environmental impact. Whilst there are many efficiencies to remote working, having the ability to work together with officers face to face in conducting our audit work provides many advantages to the timely progression of the audit; both in minimising inefficiencies in gathering audit evidence, and in discussing key issues with officers and resolving and concluding outstanding queries.

As part of our planning for 2021/22, we have been engaging with the Council to explore completing some elements of our work on-site over the summer. With Covid restrictions now lifted, this is the appropriate thing to do. We have been discussing this with PSAA and propose that where councils continue to have a preference to undertake audits remotely, either fully or in part, that audit fees would be uplifted to reflect the inefficiencies that this would cause. For Somerset County Council, we estimate this uplift to be in the region of £10,000.

# Independence and non-audit services

## Auditor independence

Ethical Standards and ISA (UK) 260 require us to give you timely disclosure of all significant facts and matters that may bear upon the integrity, objectivity and independence of the firm or covered persons, relating to our independence. We encourage you to contact us to discuss these or any other independence issues with us. We will also discuss with you if we make additional significant judgements surrounding independence matters.

We confirm that there are no significant facts or matters that impact on our independence as auditors that we are required or wish to draw to your attention. We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard (Revised 2019) and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements. Further, we have complied with the requirements of the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 01 issued in May 2020 which sets out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Ethical Standard. For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams and component audit firms providing services to the Council.

## Other services

The following other services provided by Grant Thornton were identified.

The amounts detailed are fees agreed to-date for audit related and non-audit services to be undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP in the current financial year. These services are consistent with the Council's policy on the allotment of non-audit work to your auditors. Any changes and full details of all fees charged for audit related and non-audit related services by Grant Thornton UK LLP and by Grant Thornton International Limited network member Firms will be included in our Audit Findings report at the conclusion of the audit.

None of the services provided are subject to contingent fees.

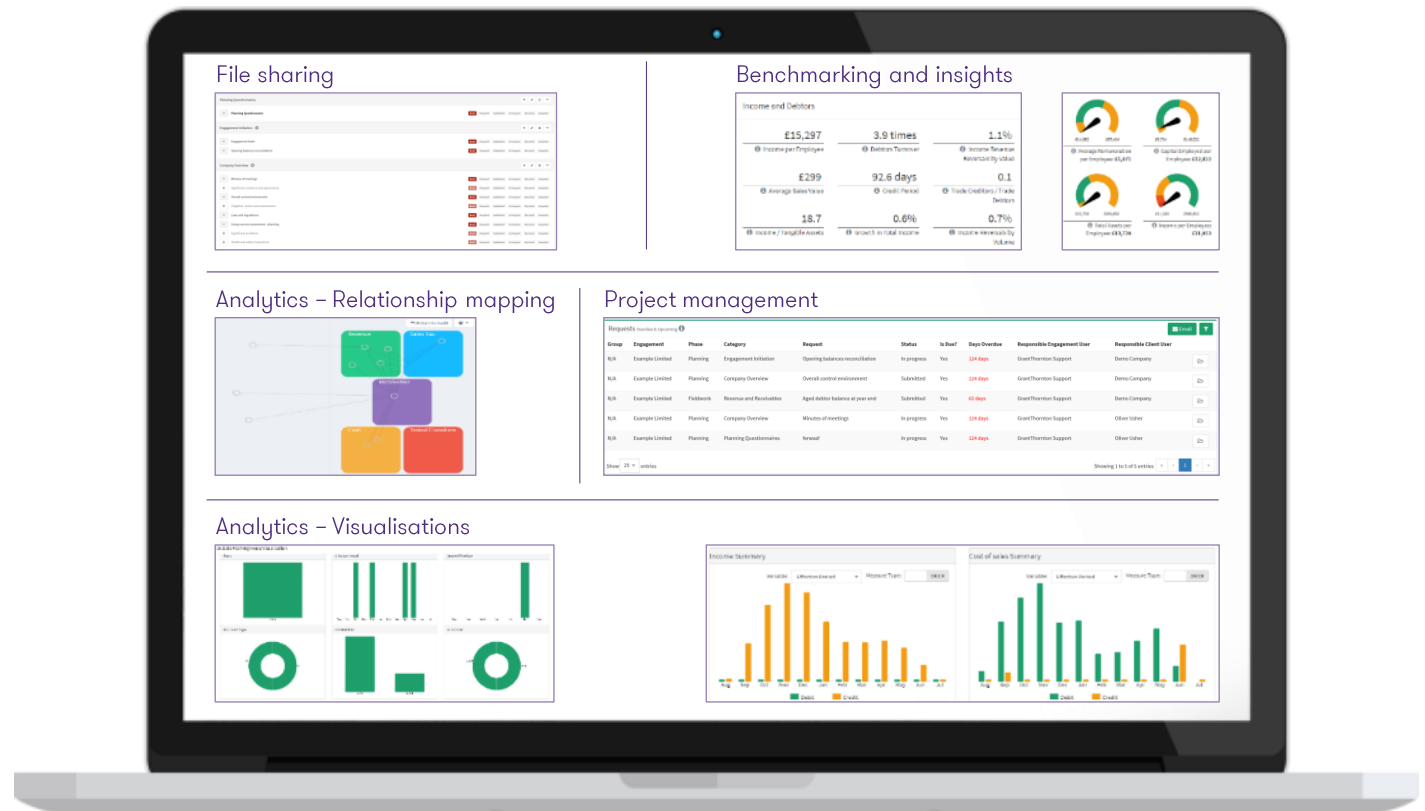
Service	Fees £	Threats	Safeguards
Audit related			
Certification of Teachers' Pension	7,500	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is £7,500 in comparison to the total fee for the audit and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors all mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.



# Our digital audit experience

A key component of our overall audit experience is our comprehensive data analytics tool, which is supported by Inflo Software technology. This tool has a number of key functions within our audit process:

Function	Benefits for you
Data extraction	Providing us with your financial information is made easier
File sharing	An easy-to-use, ISO 27001 certified, purpose-built file sharing tool
Project management	Effective management and oversight of requests and responsibilities
Data analytics	Enhanced assurance from access to complete data populations



Grant Thornton's Analytics solution is supported by Inflo Software technology

# Our digital audit experience

A key component of our overall audit experience is our comprehensive data analytics tool, which is supported by Inflo Software technology. This tool has a number of key functions within our audit process:



## Data extraction

- Real-time access to data
- Easy step-by-step guides to support you upload your data



## File sharing

- Task-based ISO 27001 certified file sharing space, ensuring requests for each task are easy to follow
- Ability to communicate in the tool, ensuring all team members have visibility on discussions about your audit, reducing duplication of work



## Project management

- Facilitates oversight of requests
- Access to a live request list at all times



## Data analytics

- Relationship mapping, allowing understanding of whole cycles to be obtained quickly
- Visualisation of transactions, allowing easy identification of trends and anomalies

## How will analytics add value to your audit?

Analytics will add value to your audit in a number of ways. We see the key benefits of extensive use of data analytics within the audit process to be the following:

### Improved fraud procedures using powerful anomaly detection

Being able to analyse every accounting transaction across your business enhances our fraud procedures. We can immediately identify high risk transactions, focusing our work on these to provide greater assurance to you, and other stakeholders.

Examples of anomaly detection include analysis of user activity, which may highlight inappropriate access permissions, and reviewing seldom used accounts, which could identify efficiencies through reducing unnecessary codes and therefore unnecessary internal maintenance.

Another product of this is identification of issues that are not specific to individual postings, such as training requirements being identified for members of staff with high error rates, or who are relying on use of suspense accounts.

### More time for you to perform the day job

Providing all this additional value does not require additional input from you or your team. In fact, less of your time is required to prepare information for the audit and to provide supporting information to us.

Complete extracts from your general ledger will be obtained from the data provided to us and requests will therefore be reduced.

We provide transparent project management, allowing us to seamlessly collaborate with each other to complete the audit on time and around other commitments.

We will both have access to a dashboard which provides a real-time overview of audit progress, down to individual information items we need from each other. Tasks can easily be allocated across your team to ensure roles and responsibilities are well defined.

Using filters, you and your team will quickly be able to identify actions required, meaning any delays can be flagged earlier in the process. Accessible through any browser, the audit status is always available on any device providing you with the information to work flexibly around your other commitments.



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