

Audit opinion plan

Northampton Borough Council

Audit 2010/11

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

Contents

Introduction	2
Responsibilities	3
Fee for the audit	4
Specific actions the Council could take to minimise its audit fees	4
Auditors report on the financial statements.....	5
Materiality	5
Identifying opinion audit risks.....	5
Identification of specific risks.....	6
Value for money (VFM) risks	7
Testing strategy	8
Value for money conclusion	9
Key milestones and deadlines.....	10
The audit team.....	11
Independence and objectivity	11
Meetings	11
Quality of service	11
Planned outputs.....	12
Appendix 1 Basis for fee	13
Appendix 2 Independence and objectivity	14
Appendix 3 Working together	16
Appendix 4 Glossary	17

Introduction

This plan sets out the audit work that we propose to undertake for the audit of your financial statements and the value for money conclusion 2010/11.

1 The plan is based on the Audit Commission's risk-based approach to audit planning. It reflects:

- audit work specified by the Audit Commission for 2010/11;
- current national risks relevant to your local circumstances; and
- your local risks.

Responsibilities

The Audit Commission's Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies sets out the respective responsibilities of the auditor and the audited body. The Audit Commission has issued a copy of the Statement to every audited body.

2 The Statement summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body begin and end and we undertake our audit work to meet these responsibilities.

3 We comply with the statutory requirements governing our audit work, in particular:

- the Audit Commission Act 1998; and
- the Code of Audit Practice.

Fee for the audit

The fee for the audit is £204,500, as indicated in our letter of 28 April 2010.

4 The Audit Commission scale fee for Northampton Borough Council is £194,750. The fee proposed for 2010/11 is 5 per cent above the scale fee and is within the normal level of variation specified by the Commission. The letter also indicated the Audit Commission had given a 'one off' subsidy of £9,455 against the 2010/11 fees.

5 In setting the fee, we assumed that:

- the level of risk in relation to the audit of accounts is consistent with that for 2009/10 and no significant difficulties would arise in the course of our work;
- good quality, accurate working papers are available at the start of the financial statements audit;
- the Council will supply good quality working papers to support the restatement of 2009/10 balances to comply with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS); and
- Internal Audit undertakes appropriate work on all material systems and this is available for our review from February 2011.

6 Where these assumptions are not met, we may be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee. Where this is the case, we will discuss this first with the Head of Finance and issue supplements to the plan to record any revisions to the risk and the impact on the fee.

7 Further information on the basis for the fee is set out in appendix 1.

Specific actions the Council could take to minimise its audit fees

8 The Audit Commission requires its auditors to inform audited bodies of specific actions it could take to minimise its audit fees. As in previous years, we will work with staff to identify any specific actions that the Council could take and to provide ongoing audit support.

9 We have provided free training for finance staff focusing on key accounting and audit issues for the 2010/11 financial statements. We are also proposing to work in collaboration with the Council to minimise audit testing of the Housing & Council Tax Benefit (HCTB) claim and have arranged a local training workshop to ensure officers are aware of the necessary testing and evidence requirements.

Auditors report on the financial statements

We will carry out the audit of the financial statements in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Auditing Practices Board (APB).

10 We are required to issue an audit report giving an opinion on whether the accounts give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2011.

Materiality

11 We will apply the concept of materiality in both planning and performing the audit, in evaluating the effect of any identified misstatements, and in forming an opinion.

Identifying opinion audit risks

12 We need to maintain a full understanding of the Council to identify any risk of material misstatement (whether due to fraud or error) in the financial statements. We do this by:

- identifying the business risks facing the Council including assessing your own risk management arrangements;
- considering the financial performance of the Council;
- assessing internal control - including reviewing the control environment, the IT control environment and Internal Audit; and
- assessing the risk of material misstatement arising from the activities and controls within the Council information systems.

Identification of specific risks

We have considered the additional risks that are appropriate to the current opinion audit and have set these out below.

Table 1: **Specific risks**

Specific opinion risks identified

Risk area	Audit response
Re-statement of the 2008/09 and 2009/10 audited accounts into IFRS format.	We are undertaking early work to review the Council's overall arrangements for re-statement of previous year's balances into IFRS format. This includes reviewing and testing the conversion process and adoption of appropriate accounting policies. Our work has focused on key risks and areas of major change such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ leases;■ employee benefits; and■ government grants.
Preparation of the 2010/11 accounts in IFRS format.	We will review and test the format and content of the primary statements, including accounting policies and disclosure notes, using the latest available technical guidance. We plan to rely on a mixture of controls testing (key financial systems) and detailed testing of the material balances in the financial statements.
Implementation of Single Status pay and grading structure and settlement of equal pay claims.	We will review the council's accounting treatment particularly in respect of any back-pay or pending equal pay claims.

Risk area	Audit response
<p>We reported a number of issues arising from our 2009/10 audit, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ scope to provide additional details in the Annual Governance Statement in respect of weaknesses in internal controls and management actions; ■ a need to review the basis for calculation of the bad provision in respect of housing rents; ■ scope to improve the explanatory foreword; ■ large amounts of unallocated cash at the year-end; ■ ensuring depreciation calculations take account of the residual value of assets; ■ non-retention of working papers to support the creditors control account reconciliation; and ■ material errors in the statement of movements on GF balance, cash-flow statement, and classification of assets. 	<p>We will review and test the Council's response to these and other issues arising from our 2009/10 audit.</p>

Value for money (VFM) risks

13 Our risk assessment for the VFM conclusion is in progress. Any emerging risks will be reported later in the year.

Testing strategy

On the basis of the risks identified above we will produce a testing strategy that will consist of testing key controls and substantive tests of transaction streams and material account balances at year end.

14 We can carry out the testing both before and after the draft financial statements have been produced (pre and post-statement testing).

15 Wherever possible, we will complete some substantive testing earlier in the year before the financial statements are available for audit. We have identified the following areas where substantive testing could be carried out early.

- Review of accounting policies.
- IFRS restatement of opening balances.

16 Where we identify other possible early testing, we will discuss it with officers.

17 Wherever possible, we will seek to rely on the work of Internal Audit to help meet our responsibilities. For 2010/11, we expect to be able to use the results of Internal Audit's work on all key financial systems that produce material figures in the financial statements.

18 We will also seek to rely on the work of other auditors and experts, as appropriate, to meet our responsibilities. For 2010/11 we plan to rely on the work of KPMG as auditors of the Northamptonshire pension fund. We will also seek to place reliance on the Council's actuary and valuer. The Audit Commission has engaged Gerald Eve and PwC to provide its auditors with information to help assess the reasonableness of property valuations and actuarial assumptions.

Value for money conclusion

We are required to give a statutory VFM conclusion on the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

19 This is based on two criteria, specified by the Commission, related to your arrangements for:

- securing financial resilience – focusing on whether the Council is managing its financial risks to secure a stable financial position for the foreseeable future; and
- challenging how the Council secures economy, efficiency and effectiveness – focusing on whether the Council is prioritising its resources within tighter budgets and improving productivity and efficiency.

20 Where appropriate we will plan a programme of VFM audit work based on our risk assessment.

Key milestones and deadlines

The Council is required to prepare the financial statements by 30 June 2011. We are required to complete the audit and issue the opinion and value for money conclusion by 30 September 2011.

21 The key stages in producing and auditing the financial statements are in table 2.

22 We have already agreed with officers a schedule of working papers required to support the entries in the financial statements. The agreed fee is dependent on the timely receipt of accurate working papers.

23 The audit team will meet with the key contact regularly during the audit to review overall progress, matters arising and status of any outstanding queries.

Table 2: **Proposed timetable**

Activity	Date
Testing of controls and early substantive testing	February to April 2011
Receipt of accounts	June 2011
Sending audit working papers to the auditor	June 2011
Start of detailed testing	18 July 2011
Progress meetings	Weekly
Present report to those charged with governance at the audit committee	September 2011
Issue opinion and value for money conclusion	By 30 September 2011

The audit team

Table 3 shows the key members of the audit team for the 2010/11 audit.

Table 3: **Audit team**

Name	Contact details	Responsibilities
Neil Bellamy District Auditor	n-bellamy@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 4057	Responsible for the overall delivery of the audit including the quality of outputs, signing the opinion and conclusion, and liaison with the Chief Executive.
Trevor Croote Audit Manager	t-croote@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 4064	Manages and coordinates the different elements of the audit work. Key point of contact for the Corporate Director Resources.

Independence and objectivity

24 We are aware of one potential conflict of interest for a member of the audit team, as reported to you and discussed with officers in previous years. Safeguards have been put in place to ensure that this does not result in a significant threat to the independence and objectivity of our audit.

25 We comply with the ethical standards issued by the APB and with the Commission's requirements in respect of independence and objectivity as summarised in appendix 2.

Meetings

26 The audit team will ensure we have knowledge of your issues to inform our risk-based audit through regular liaison with key officers. Our proposals are set out in appendix 3.

Quality of service

27 We aim to provide you with a fully satisfactory audit service. If, however, you are unable to deal with any difficulty through the local team please contact Chris Westwood, Director of Professional Practice, Audit Practice, Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ (c-westwood@audit-commission.gov.uk) who will look into any complaint promptly and to do what he can to resolve the position.

28 If you are still not satisfied you may of course take up the matter with the Audit Commission's Complaints Investigation Officer (The Audit Commission, Westward House, Lime Kiln Close, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS34 8SR).

Planned outputs

29 We will discuss and agree reports with the right officers before issuing them to the Audit Committee.

Table 4: **Planned outputs**

Planned output	Indicative date
Annual governance report	September 2011
Auditor's report giving an opinion on the financial statements	September 2011
Final accounts memorandum (if required)	November 2011
Annual audit letter	November 2011

Appendix 1 Basis for fee

The Audit Commission is committed to targeting its work where it will have the greatest effect, based upon assessments of risk and performance. This means planning work to address areas of risk relevant to our audit responsibilities and reflecting this in the audit fees.

The risk assessment process starts with the identification of the significant financial and operational risks applying to the Council with reference to the following.

- Our cumulative knowledge of the Council:
 - planning guidance issued by the Audit Commission; and
 - the specific results of previous and ongoing audit work.
- Interviews with Council officers.
- Liaison with Internal Audit.

Assumptions

In setting the fee, we have assumed the following.

- The Council will have fully implemented the recommendations contained in our annual governance report of 2009/10.
- You will inform us of significant developments impacting on the audit.
- Internal audit meets the appropriate professional standards.
- Internal audit undertakes appropriate work on all systems that provide material figures in the financial statements sufficient that we can place reliance for the purposes of our audit.
- You provide:
 - good quality working papers and records to support the financial statements by 30 June 2011;
 - information asked for within agreed timescales (as set out in the joint working protocol); and
 - prompt responses to draft reports.
- There is no allowance for extra work needed to address questions or objections raised by local government electors.

Where these assumptions are not met, we will be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee.

Appendix 2 Independence and objectivity

Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are required to comply with the Commission's Code of Audit Practice and Standing Guidance for Auditors, which defines the terms of the appointment. When auditing the financial statements, auditors are also required to comply with auditing standards and ethical standards issued by the Auditing Practices Board (APB).

The main requirements of the Code of Audit Practice, Standing Guidance for Auditors and the standards are summarised below.

International Standard on Auditing (UK and Ireland) 260 (Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance) requires that the appointed auditor:

- discloses in writing all relationships that may bear on the auditor's objectivity and independence, the related safeguards put in place to protect against these threats and the total amount of fee that the auditor has charged the client; and
- confirms in writing that the APB's ethical standards are complied with and that, in the auditor's professional judgement, they are independent and their objectivity is not compromised.

The standard defines 'those charged with governance' as 'those persons entrusted with the supervision, control and direction of an entity'. In your case, the appropriate addressee of communications from the auditor to those charged with governance is the Audit Committee. The auditor reserves the right, however, to communicate directly with the Council on matters which are considered to be of sufficient importance.

The Commission's Code of Audit Practice has an overriding general requirement that appointed auditors carry out their work independently and objectively, and ensure that they do not act in any way that might give rise to, or could reasonably be perceived to give rise to, a conflict of interest. In particular, appointed auditors and their staff should avoid entering into any official, professional or personal relationships which may, or could reasonably be perceived to, cause them inappropriately or unjustifiably to limit the scope, extent or rigour of their work or impair the objectivity of their judgement.

The Standing Guidance for Auditors includes a number of specific rules. The key rules relevant to this audit appointment are as follows.

- Appointed auditors should not perform additional work for an audited body (ie work over and above the minimum required to meet their statutory responsibilities) if it would compromise their independence or might give rise to a reasonable perception that their independence could be compromised. Where the audited body invites the auditor to carry out risk-based work in a particular area that cannot otherwise be

justified as necessary to support the auditor's opinion and conclusions, it should be clearly differentiated within the Audit and Inspection Plan as being 'additional work' and charged for separately from the normal audit fee.

- Auditors should not accept engagements that involve commenting on the performance of other auditors appointed by the Commission on Commission work without first consulting the Commission.
- The District Auditor responsible for the audit should, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, be changed at least once every seven years, with additional safeguards in the last two years.
- The District Auditor and senior members of the audit team are prevented from taking part in political activity on behalf of a political party, or special interest group, whose activities relate directly to the functions of local government or NHS bodies in general, or to a particular local government or NHS body.

The District Auditor and members of the audit team must abide by the Commission's policy on gifts, hospitality and entertainment.

Appendix 3 Working together

Meetings

The audit team will ensure we have knowledge of your issues to inform our risk-based audit through regular liaison with key officers.

Our proposal for the meetings is as follows.

Table 5: **Proposed meetings with officers**

Council officers	Audit Commission staff	Timing	Purpose
Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Support	District Auditor (DA) and Audit Manager (AM)	As required.	General update plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ April - audit plan; and■ December - annual audit letter.
Head of Finance	AM and/or Team Leader (TL)	Quarterly for routine liaison meetings and weekly during the final accounts audit.	Update on audit issues and progress.
Internal Audit Manager	AM and/or TL	Quarterly.	Update on progress and discussion of annual plans January/February.
Audit Committee	DA and/or AM	As determined by the Committee	Presentation of audit reports such as the annual audit plan, annual governance report and annual audit letter.

Sustainability

The Audit Commission is committed to promoting sustainability in our working practices and we will actively consider opportunities to reduce our impact on the environment. This will include:

- reducing paper flow by encouraging you to submit documentation and working papers electronically;
- use of video and telephone conferencing for meetings as appropriate; and
- reducing travel.

Appendix 4 Glossary

Annual audit letter

Report issued by the auditor to an audited body that summarises the audit work carried out in the period, auditors' opinions or conclusions (where appropriate) and significant issues arising from auditors' work.

Audit of the accounts

The audit of the accounts of an audited body comprises all work carried out by auditors in accordance with the Code to meet their statutory responsibilities under the Audit Commission Act 1998.

Audited body

A body to which the Audit Commission is responsible for appointing the external auditor, comprising both the members of the body and its management (the senior officers of the body). Those charged with governance are the members of the audited body. (See also 'Members' and 'Those charged with governance'.)

Auditing Practices Board (APB)

The body responsible in the UK for issuing auditing standards, ethical standards and other guidance to auditors. Its objectives are to establish high standards of auditing that meet the developing needs of users of financial information and to ensure public confidence in the auditing process.

Auditing standards

Pronouncements of the APB, which contain basic principles and essential procedures with which auditors are required to comply, except where otherwise stated in the auditing standard concerned.

Auditor(s)

Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission.

Code (the)

The Code of Audit Practice.

Commission (the)

The Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England.

Directors

Members of the board who are collectively and individually responsible for the overall direction and control of the audited body. In NHS bodies there is a unitary board, consisting of executive members and part-time non-executive members, chaired by a non-executive member. The chief executive is responsible to the board for the day-to-day management of the organisation but, as accountable officer, is also responsible to the Department of Health for the proper stewardship of public money and assets. (See also 'Those charged with governance' and 'Audited body').

Ethical Standards

Pronouncements of the APB that contain basic principles that apply to the conduct of audits and with which auditors are required to comply, except where otherwise stated in the standard concerned.

Financial statements

The annual statement of accounts or accounting statements that audited bodies are required to prepare, which summarise the accounts of the audited body, in accordance with regulations and proper practices in relation to accounts.

Internal control

The whole system of controls, financial and otherwise, that is established in order to provide reasonable assurance of effective and efficient operations, internal financial control and compliance with laws and regulations.

Materiality (and significance)

The APB defines this concept as 'an expression of the relative significance or importance of a particular matter in the context of the financial statements as a whole. A matter is material if its omission would reasonably influence the decisions of an addressee of the auditor's report; likewise a misstatement is material if it would have a similar influence. Materiality may also be considered in the context of any individual primary statement within the financial statements or of individual items included in them. Materiality is not capable of general mathematical definition, as it has both qualitative and quantitative aspects'.

The term 'materiality' applies only in relation to the financial statements. Auditors appointed by the Commission have responsibilities and duties under statute, in addition to their responsibility to give an opinion on the financial statements, which do not necessarily affect their opinion on the financial statements.

The concept of 'significance' applies to these wider responsibilities and auditors adopt a level of significance that may differ from the materiality level applied to their audit in relation to the financial statements. Significance has both qualitative and quantitative aspects.

Members

The elected, or appointed, members of local government bodies who are responsible for the overall direction and control of the audited body. (See also 'Those charged with governance' and 'Audited body'.)

Regularity (of expenditure and income)

Whether, subject to the concept of materiality, the expenditure and income of the audited body have been applied for the purposes intended by parliament, and whether they conform with the authorities that govern them.

Annual Governance Statement

Local government bodies are required to publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) with their financial statements. The disclosures in the AGS are supported and evidenced by the body's assurance framework. The Annual Governance Statement is prepared in accordance with guidance issued by CIPFA.

Those charged with governance

Those charged with governance are defined in auditing standards as 'those persons entrusted with the supervision, control and direction of an entity'. In local government bodies, those charged with governance, for the purpose of complying with auditing standards, are the full council, audit committee (where established) or any other committee with delegated responsibility for approval of the financial statements;

Audit committees are not mandatory for local government bodies, other than police authorities and local probation trusts. Other bodies are expected to put in place proper arrangements to allow those charged with governance to discuss audit matters with both internal and external auditors. Auditors should satisfy themselves that these matters, and auditors' reports, are considered at the level within the audited body that they consider most appropriate.

Whole of Government Accounts

The Whole of Government Accounts initiative is to produce a set of consolidated financial accounts for the entire UK public sector on commercial accounting principles. Local government bodies, other than probation boards and trusts, are required to submit a consolidation pack to the department for Communities and Local Government which is based on, but separate from, their statutory accounts.

If you require a copy of this document in an alternative format or in a language other than English, please call:
0844 798 7070

© Audit Commission 2011.

Design and production by the Audit Commission Publishing Team.

Image copyright © Audit Commission.

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors, members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
- any third party.



Audit Commission

1st Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4HQ

Telephone: 0844 798 3131

Fax: 0844 798 2945

Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946