



The Annual Audit Letter for Leicester City Council

Year ended 31 March 2019

9 September 2019



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Executive Summary

Purpose

Our Annual Audit Letter (Letter) summarises the key findings arising from the work that we have carried out at of Leicester City Council ('the Council') for the year ended 31 March 2019.

This Letter is intended to provide a commentary on the results of our work to the Council and external stakeholders, and to highlight issues that we wish to draw to the attention of the public. In preparing this Letter, we have followed the National Audit Office (NAO)'s Code of Audit Practice and Auditor Guidance Note (AGN) 07 – 'Auditor Reporting'. We reported the detailed findings from our audit work to the Council's Audit Committee as those charged with governance in our Audit Findings Report on 24/07/2019.

Our work

Materiality	We determined materiality for the audit of the Council's financial statements to be £17.2m, which is 1.5% of the Council's gross operating expenses.
Financial Statements opinion	We gave an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements on 30 July 2019.
Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)	We completed our work on the Council's consolidation return following guidance issued by the NAO. We issued an assurance statement which did not identify any issues for the NAO, as the group auditor, to consider on 9 September 2019.
Use of statutory powers	We did not identify any matters which required us to exercise our additional statutory powers.
Value for Money arrangements	We were satisfied that the Council put in place proper arrangements to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We reflected this in our audit report to the Council on 30 July 2019.
Certification of Grants	<p>We completed work on the Council's 2017-18 Council's 2017-18 Pooling of Housing Capital Receipts return as an audit related non-audit service. There were no matters we were required to report (page 8).</p> <p>We have not yet started work on the 2018-19 pooled capital receipts return which has a 31 January 2020 deadline. We also carry out work to certify the Council's 2018-19 Housing Benefit subsidy claim on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions and the 2018-19 Teachers' Pension return. Our work on these claims is not yet complete and will be finalised by 30 November 2019. We will report the results of this work to the Audit and Risk Committee separately.</p>
Certificate	Following completion of our work on the Council's WGA return we certified that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of Leicester City Council in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice on 9 September 2019.

Respective responsibilities

We have carried out our audit in accordance with the NAO's Code of Audit Practice, which reflects the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act). Our key responsibilities are to:

- give an opinion on the Council's financial statements (section two)
- assess the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (the value for money conclusion) (section three).

In our audit of the Council's financial statements, we comply with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs) and other guidance issued by the NAO.

Executive Summary

Working with the Council

During the year we have delivered a number of successful outcomes with you:

- An efficient audit – we delivered an efficient audit with you in July, delivering the financial statements by the deadline, releasing your finance team for other work.
- Understanding your operational health – through the value for money conclusion we provided you with assurance on your operational effectiveness.
- Sharing our insight – we provided regular audit committee updates covering best practice.
- Providing training – we provided your teams with training on financial statements and annual reporting
- Supporting development – we provided training for the Audit and Risk Committee in respect of the work of external audit. We also provided an aide memoire document to assist members in their review of the Council's financial statements

We would like to record our appreciation for the assistance and co-operation provided to us during our audit by the Council's staff.

Grant Thornton UK LLP
August 2019

Audit of the Financial Statements

Our audit approach

Materiality

In our audit of the Council's financial statements, we use the concept of materiality to determine the nature, timing and extent of our work, and in evaluating the results of our work. We define materiality as the size of the misstatement in the financial statements that would lead a reasonably knowledgeable person to change or influence their economic decisions.

We determined materiality for the audit of the Council's financial statements to be £17.2m, which is 1.5% of the group's gross operating expenses. We used this benchmark as, in our view, users of Council's financial statements are most interested in where the Council has spent its revenue in the year.

We set a lower threshold of £860,000, above which we reported errors to the Audit and Risk Committee in our Audit Findings Report.

We also set a lower level of specific materiality for specific transactions, balances or disclosures. We set a lower threshold of £25,000 to disclosures of senior manager's remuneration to be sensitive as we believe these disclosures are of specific interest to the reader of the accounts.

The scope of our audit

Our audit involves obtaining sufficient evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements to give reasonable assurance that they are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. This includes assessing whether:

- the accounting policies are appropriate, have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed;
- the significant accounting estimates made by management are reasonable; and
- the overall presentation of the financial statements gives a true and fair view.

We also read the remainder of the financial statements, and the Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement, to check it is consistent with our understanding of the Council and with the financial statements included in the Annual Accounts 2018/19 on which we gave our opinion.

We carry out our audit in accordance with ISAs (UK) and the NAO Code of Audit Practice. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

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

We identified key risks and set out overleaf the work we performed in response to these risks and the results of this work.

Audit of the Financial Statements

Significant Audit Risks

These are the significant risks which had the greatest impact on our overall strategy and where we focused more of our work.

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions
<p>1. The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions (rebutted)</p> <p>Under ISA (UK) 240 – <i>the Auditor’s Responsibility to Consider Fraud in an Audit of Financial Statements</i> - there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.</p> <p>This presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue recognition.</p>	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Council, we have determined as part of our planning procedures that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition • opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited • the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Leicester City Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable 	<p>We have not altered our assessment as reported in the audit plan and, whilst not a significant risk, as part of our audit work we did undertake work on material revenue items. Our work did not identify any matters that would indicate our rebuttal was incorrect. We therefore have no issues to report in this regard.</p>
<p>2. Management override of controls</p> <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. .</p> <p>The Council 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 one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement for the Council.</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gained an understanding of the accounting estimates, judgements applied and decisions made by management and consider their reasonableness • obtained a full listing of journal entries, identify and tested unusual journal entries for appropriateness • evaluated the rationale for any changes in accounting policies or significant unusual transactions. 	<p>Our audit work at the Council has not identified any issues in respect of management override of controls.</p>

Audit of the Financial Statements

Significant Audit Risks - continued

These are the risks which had the greatest impact on our overall strategy and where we focused more of our work.

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions
<p>3. Valuation of land and buildings</p> <p>The Council's accounting policy is to revalue all assets on a rolling basis in order to ensure that all assets are revalued at least every five years, thereby meeting the Code requirements.</p> <p>In previous years valuations have been as at 1 April. To ensure that the carrying value is not materially different from the current value at the financial statements date the Council has therefore had to demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> for the year revalued there were no material movements between the 1 April and 31 March; and, for the four years not subject to revaluation demonstrate that the carrying value of those assets is not materially different from their current value. <p>This valuation of property, plant and equipment (PPE) represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved (£2,466m) and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>We therefore identified 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 have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> documented and evaluated management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to the valuation experts and the scope of their work evaluated the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert written to the valuer, with follow up discussions as necessary, to confirm the basis on which the valuations were carried out challenged the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding tested, on a sample basis, revaluations made during the year to ensure they are consistent with the valuer's report and have been input correctly into the Authority's asset register evaluated and challenged the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management have satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value. 	<p>The Council owns 20,759 dwellings and is required to revalue these properties in accordance with MHCLG's Stock Valuation for Resource Accounting guidance. The guidance requires the use of beacon methodology, in which a detailed valuation of representative property types is then applied to similar properties. The Council engaged an external valuer to complete the valuation of these properties. The year end valuation of Council Housing was £950m, a net increase of £40m from 2017/18 (£910m).</p> <p>Other land and buildings (OLB) comprises specialised assets such as schools and libraries, which are required to be valued at depreciated replacement cost (DRC) at year end, reflecting the cost of a modern equivalent asset necessary to deliver the same service provision. The remainder of other land and buildings are not specialised in nature and are required to be valued at existing use in value (EUV) at year end.</p> <p>The Council has engaged its own internal valuer to complete the valuation of properties as at 31 March 2019 on a five yearly cyclical basis. 72% of total assets were revalued during 2018/19. The year end valuation of OLB was £1,189m, a net increase of £171m from 2017/18 (£1,018m).</p> <p>We identified from our review of the Council's draft financial statements that £13.2m of surplus assets (year end total £76m) were valued at historic cost, when the Code requires them to be valued at fair value, i.e. the price that would be received to sell an asset or paid to transfer a liability in an orderly transaction between market participants. All except £275k of this value relates to land at Waterside. The fair value for this land has subsequently been determined to be £11.1m. The Council amended for this adjustment by decreasing the value of the asset by £1.9m, with an equal and opposite amount to the revaluation reserve.</p> <p>The remaining assets of £251m (PY £253m) are either valued at historic cost or use historic cost as a proxy for current value (vehicles and plant).</p> <p>From the procedures carried out we are satisfied that the valuation of land and building in the financial statements is not materially misstated. We have no other points to report in relation to the valuation of Property, Plant and Equipment.</p>

Audit of the Financial Statements

Significant Audit Risks - continued

These are the risks which had the greatest impact on our overall strategy and where we focused more of our work.

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions
<p>4. Valuation of the pension fund net liability</p> <p>The Council'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 and group accounts.</p> <p>The pension fund net liability is considered a significant estimate due to the size of the numbers involved (£811m as at 31 March 2019, PY £634 million) and the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of the pension fund net liability as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updated our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Council's net pension fund liability is not materially misstated and evaluate the design of the associated controls; • evaluated the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work; • assessed the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Council's pension fund valuation; • assessed the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Council to the actuary to estimate the liability; • tested 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; • undertaken 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 • sought assurances from the auditor of the Leicestershire 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. 	<p>Our audit identified one issue in relation to accounting for the impact of the McCloud Court of Appeal judgement. The Court of Appeal has ruled that there was age discrimination in the judges and firefighters pension schemes where transitional protections were given to scheme members. The legal ruling has implications not just for pension funds, but also for other pension schemes where they have implemented transitional arrangements on changing benefits, such as the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). Our Grant Thornton view was that the McCloud judgement gave rise to a past service cost and liability which should be recognised as the ruling created a new obligation.</p> <p>As a result of the ruling we have worked with the Council to consider the implications of the judgement. As a result, during the course of the audit the Council sought a revised report from the actuary in order to account for the impact of the recent "McCloud" judgement.</p> <p>This was provided in July and the accounts updated accordingly. It has led to an increase in the defined gross pension liability by £17.635m. The fair value of plan assets has also been updated to reflect the actual rather than estimated position at 31 March, a decrease of £28.11m. The net pension liability on the balance sheet has therefore moved from £766m in the draft accounts to £811m.</p> <p>We are satisfied that these adjustments have been reflected in the revised financial statements and confirmed that the pension liability is not materially misstated in the financial statements after these adjustments</p>

Audit of the Financial Statements

Audit opinion

We gave an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements on 30 July 2019.

Preparation of the financial statements

The Council presented us with draft financial statements in accordance with the national deadline, and provided a good set of working papers to support them. The finance team responded promptly and efficiently to our queries during the course of the audit.

Issues arising from the audit of the financial statements

We reported the key issues from our audit to the Council's Audit Committee on 24 July 2019.

Opening balances

ISA 510 (UK) requires that in conducting an initial audit engagement we should obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence about whether opening balances contain misstatements that materially affect the current period's financial statements; and appropriate accounting policies reflected in the opening balances have been consistently applied in the current period's financial statements. We reviewed the work of the predecessor auditor and concluded that we can place reliance upon it except for the following areas where we undertook additional audit procedures:

- Confirm opening balances of long-term market loans, Leicester Fire Service borrowing, the bond issue and transferred debt liability to council records.
- When we review the Council's PFI models we will agree opening balances as well as closing balances and confirm the rationale for the accounting treatment.
- Undertake substantive testing on the opening debtors and creditors balances.

Through our testing, the Council identified that two prior period adjustments were required:

1. Grants were treated incorrectly in the prior year financial statements. They had been held on the balance sheet as creditors/receipts in advance, which for these particular grants was incorrect, as they must be recognised immediately as income, unless any conditions have not been met.
2. In supplying evidence for the sample testing of the grants, the corporate finance team identified that were elements of schools grants income that had been erroneously double counted; once by the Council, and again by the school.

These adjustments have both been made. There were no unadjusted misstatements.

Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report

We are required to review the Council's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report. It published them on its website in the Statement of Accounts in line with the national deadlines.

Both documents were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant supporting guidance. We confirmed that both documents were consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Council and with our knowledge of the Council.

Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)

We are required to carry out work on the Council's Data Collection Tool in line with instructions provided by the NAO. We issued an assurance statement which did not identify any issues for the group auditor to consider on 9 September 2019.

Other statutory powers

We also have additional powers and duties under the Act, including powers to issue a public interest report, make written recommendations, apply to the Court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law, and to give electors the opportunity to raise questions about the Council's accounts and to raise objections received in relation to the accounts.

Certification of Grants

This is our first Annual Audit Letter to the Council. We have certified the Council's prior year (2017-18) Pooling of housing Capital receipts return. There were no exceptions we were required to report to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in our agreed upon procedures report dated 31 January 2019.

We also carry our work to certify the Council's 2018-19 Housing Benefit Subsidy claim on behalf of the Department for Work and pensions (DWP), the 2018-19 Pooling of housing Capital receipts return for MHCLG and 2018-19 Teachers' Pension return for Teachers' Pensions. Our work on these claims is either not yet started or complete. We will report the results of this work to the Audit and Risk Committee.

Certificate of closure of the audit

We certified that we have completed the audit of the financial statements of Leicester City Council in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Audit Practice on 9 September 2019.

Value for Money conclusion

Background

We carried out our review in accordance with the NAO Code of Audit Practice, following the guidance issued by the NAO in November 2017 which specified the criterion for auditors to evaluate:

In all significant respects, the audited body takes properly informed decisions and deploys resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people.

Key findings

Our first step in carrying out our work was to perform a risk assessment and identify the risks where we concentrated our work.

The risks we identified and the work we performed are set out overleaf.

Overall Value for Money conclusion

We are satisfied that in all significant respects the Council put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2019.

Value for Money conclusion

Value for Money Risks

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions (see Audit Findings Report for detailed findings)
<p>Financial resilience</p> <p>The Authority has historically managed its finances well, achieving financial targets: however, the scale and pace of change for local government will affect future projections and it is important the Authority is on track to identify and produce savings required to deliver balanced budgets in the future.</p>	<p>As part of our work we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaken a review of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and financial monitoring reports and assess the assumptions used and savings being achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The way the Council applies its savings requirements is to take the required savings out of each directorate in the budget. Therefore monitoring of savings is through monitoring how it is performing against budget. The positive General Fund outturn position achieved during 2018-2019, and the resulting adjustments to reserves, will therefore help to support the Council's short term financial position. However, it does not address the challenging financial position that the Council finds itself in over the medium term; namely identifying an additional £27.3 million of budget reduction and income generation proposals over the period to 2020-2021. The Council are looking at developing savings schemes to fill gaps in future years. In the <i>General Fund Revenue Budget 2019/20 to 2021/22</i> the section 151 officer noted down her risk assessment and adequacy of estimates in the 2019-20 budget, highlighting the need to achieve budgeted revenues. We therefore reviewed income collection rates achieved in 2018-19 to assess the Council's success in this area.. For business rates, the Council's collection rate is approximately 97% which is not uncommon. Annual collection rate for council tax is 95%, but collection continues after the year in question and eventually a collection rate of 98% is achieved. Again, this is within the normal parameters seen in the sector. Therefore we concluded, that while the s151 officer has highlighted it as a risk, the Council are starting from a positive position of reasonable collection rates. The budgeted position has been met with use of £10.2m of reserves. This was anticipated and is as a result of the Council's managed reserves strategy whereby reserves have been built up over a number of years in order to provide a buffer when needed. We note that the general fund is at £15m even after use of reserves, and the total level of earmarked reserves as at 31 March 2019 stands at £222m. We have conducted a review of reserves, which demonstrates that even without the identification of further savings the Council has sufficiency of reserves for it to continue for the foreseeable future, though the use of General Fund and earmarked reserves. However, this would necessitate a potential reconsideration of the Council's strategic objectives and therefore confirms the need for savings to be identified and delivered. <p>We concluded that the risk was sufficiently mitigated and the Council has proper arrangements in place to ensure it plans finances effectively to support the sustainable delivery of strategic priorities and using appropriate cost and performance information to support informed decision making.</p>

Value for Money conclusion

Value for Money Risks

Risks identified in our audit plan	How we responded to the risk	Findings and conclusions (see Audit Findings Report for detailed findings)
<p>OFSTED There was a joint local review by the Care Quality Commission and OFSTED of the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group’s Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services. This review led to a letter being issued in June 2018 noting that a written statement of action was required because of significant weaknesses identified in the local area’s practice.</p>	<p>As part of our work we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained the statement of action submitted to OFSTED and reviewed how the Council is ensuring that these actions are undertaken and progress against the plan monitored. • Additionally, the Authority has been the subject of a ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services) Focussed Visit of their children’s services. We have reviewed this report and considered it as part of our VFM arrangements conclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsequent to our initial risk assessment being undertaken we have obtained the statement of action submitted to OFSTED and reviewed how the Council is ensuring that these actions are undertaken and progress against the plan monitored. In the response from OFSTED upon receipt of the written statement of action, it was noted that the actions were required to address the following significant weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the lack of strategic planning to improve the outcomes for children and young people who have SEN and/or disabilities • the poor quality of the education, health and care (EHC) plans • the assessment of children and young people’s social care needs • the lack of joint commissioning of services to support young people’s health needs post-19 • the disjointed approach to preparation for adulthood. • The action plan that was discussed at the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) board in October 2018 showed that actions were either completed or not yet due but that work was being done in all areas. • In respect of the focussed visit to Leicester City Council’s Children Services, (which involved inspectors looking at the local authority’s arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan, including children receiving help and support from the disabled children’s service), there was no overall “rating” assigned. However, while it identified there was still work to do, it also included positive messages in relation to the improvement of the quality of social work practice. <p>From our discussion with key officers and review of the relevant documentation, we can see that the Council are making progress and are monitoring their actions. In addition to the above, the department produce quarterly assurance reports, which are considered by members, and which demonstrate that the Council knows itself well and is continuing to audit itself to identify where further improvements need to be made.</p>

A. Reports issued and fees

We confirm below our final reports issued and fees charged for the audit.

Reports issued

Report	Date issued
Audit Plan	6 March 2019
Audit Findings Report	24 July 2019
Annual Audit Letter	August 2019

Fees

	Planned £	Actual fees £	2017/18 fees £
Statutory audit	112,884	121,884	146,603
Total fees	112,884	121,884	146,603

Fees for non-audit services

Service	Fees £
Audit related services	
• Housing capital receipts	5,000
• Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim	53,000
• Teachers Pension Return	5,500
Non-Audit related services	
- None	Nil

Non-audit services

- For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Council. The table above summarises all non-audit services which were identified.
- We have considered whether non-audit services might be perceived as a threat to our independence as the Council's auditor and have ensured that appropriate safeguards are put in place.

The above non-audit services are consistent with the Council's policy on the allotment of non-audit work to your auditor.

Audit fee variation

As outlined in our audit plan, the 2018-19 scale fee published by PSAA of £112,884 assumes that the scope of the audit does not significantly change. There are a number of areas where the scope of the audit has changed, which has led to additional work. These are set out in the following table.

Area	Reason	Fee proposed
Assessing the impact of the McCloud ruling	The Government's transitional arrangements for pensions were ruled discriminatory by the Court of Appeal last December. The Supreme Court refused the Government's application for permission to appeal this ruling. As part of our audit we have reviewed the revised actuarial assessment of the impact on the financial statements along with any audit reporting requirements.	£3,000
Pensions – IAS 19	The Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that the quality of work by audit firms in respect of IAS 19 needs to improve across local government audits. Accordingly, we have increased the level of scope and coverage in respect of IAS 19 this year to reflect this.	£3,000
PPE Valuation – work of experts	As above, the Financial Reporting Council has highlighted that auditors need to improve the quality of work on PPE valuations across the sector. We have increased the volume and scope of our audit work to reflect this.	£3,000
Total		£9,000

The revised fee for the year is subject to approval by Public Sector Appointments Ltd (PSAA). The £112,884 represents a 17% statutory audit fee reduction on the prior year.



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