

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Audit and Scrutiny Panel

for approval for noting

Ref: KA/ASP/Mar21

Date 25/03/2021

External Audit – Annual Plan 2020-21

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to enable the Council's appointed external auditors, Audit Scotland, to present to the Panel a document setting out their planned audit activities and how they intend to discharge their responsibilities as laid out in Audit Scotland's Code of Audit Practice and relevant International Standards on Auditing for the audit of the Council for the year-ending 31 March 2021.

The external auditors will speak to the Panel about their plan at the meeting and highlight to members any issues arising that they wish to bring to the Panel's attention.

Recommendations

The Panel is requested to invite Audit Scotland to comment on their planned audit approach and to note the work proposed in undertaking the 2020-21 audit of the Council.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire:

Priority: All priorities

Ambition statement All ambition statements

1. Background

- 1.1 The Accounts Commission appointed Audit Scotland as the Council's external auditor for the five-year period from 2016-17. As a result of the pandemic impacting on the process for new appointments and a desire to achieve continuity, all local government audit appointments were extended nationally by the Accounts Commission in October 2020 for an additional year and will now conclude with finalisation of the 2021-22 audits.
- 1.2 Audit Scotland's Code of Audit Practice and International Standards on Auditing stipulate that areas to be examined and expected outputs to be produced by the external auditors require to be outlined each year in their annual planning document.
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2. Key issues arising

- 2.1 The attached document produced by Audit Scotland outlines their planned activities and key expected audit outputs for the audit of the Council for the year ending 31 March 2021. Core elements of the work include
- providing an audit opinion on the Council's 2020-21 financial statements and those of relevant registered charities administered by the Council;
 - undertaking and reporting on interim audit fieldwork reviewing the Council's accounting procedures, relevant financial systems and key corporate governance arrangements; and
 - work associated with the wider dimensions of public sector audit including considerations relating to value for money, best value, financial sustainability and financial management.
- 2.2 Panel members should note that good professional practice requires the external auditor communicate and discuss planned external audit activity with the senior management of a body and with those elected members charged with governance matters, but it is for the external auditor alone to determine the work considered necessary by him/her to fulfil his/her responsibilities.
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3. Equality and Diversity

Fairer Scotland:	No requirement to carry out a Fairer Scotland assessment in this instance.
Equality Impact Assessment:	No requirement to carry out an equality impact assessment in this instance.

4. Implications

Financial Impact:	None identified
HR/Policy/Legislative Impact	None identified
Environmental Impact	None identified
Risk Impact	None identified

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 The external auditors report annually to the Council and the Controller of Audit on the results of their work.
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6. Supporting Documents

Appendix 1 Audit Scotland Annual Plan 2020-21



Ken Adamson, Audit and Risk Manager

North Lanarkshire Council

Annual Audit Plan 2020/21



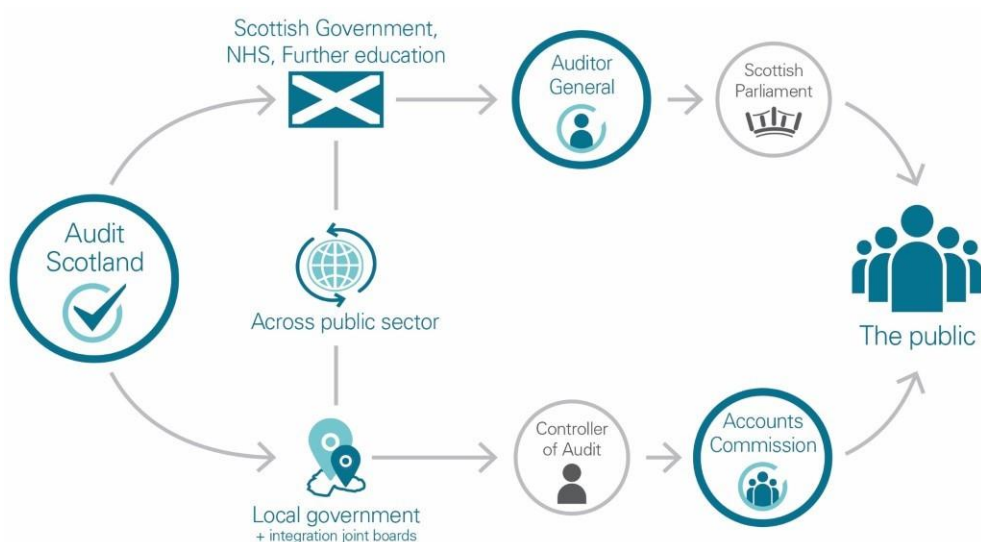
 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for North Lanarkshire Council
March 2021

Who we are

The Auditor General, the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland work together to deliver public audit in Scotland:

- The Auditor General is an independent crown appointment, made on the recommendation of the Scottish Parliament, to audit the Scottish Government, NHS and other bodies and report to Parliament on their financial health and performance.
- The Accounts Commission is an independent public body appointed by Scottish ministers to hold local government to account. The Controller of Audit is an independent post established by statute, with powers to report directly to the Commission on the audit of local government.
- Audit Scotland is governed by a board, consisting of the Auditor General, the chair of the Accounts Commission, a non-executive board chair, and two non-executive members appointed by the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, a commission of the Scottish Parliament.



About us

Our vision is to be a world-class audit organisation that improves the use of public money.

Through our work for the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission, we provide independent assurance to the people of Scotland that public money is spent properly and provides value. We aim to achieve this by:

- carrying out relevant and timely audits of the way the public sector manages and spends money
- reporting our findings and conclusions in public
- identifying risks, making clear and relevant recommendations.

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Risks and planned work

- 1.** This annual audit plan contains an overview of the planned scope and timing of our audit which is carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs), the [Code of Audit Practice](#), and guidance on planning the audit. This plan sets out the work necessary to allow us to provide an independent auditor's report on the annual accounts and meet the wider scope requirements of public sector audit including the audit of Best Value.
- 2.** The wider scope of public audit contributes to assessments and conclusions on financial management, financial sustainability, governance and transparency and value for money.
- 3.** The public health crisis caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant and profound effect on every aspect of Scottish society. Public services have been drastically affected, requiring immediate changes to the way they are provided. The impact on public finances has been unprecedented, which has necessitated both the Scottish and UK governments providing substantial additional funding for public services as well as support for individuals, businesses and the economy. It is likely that further financial measures will be needed and that the effects will be felt well into the future.
- 4.** Public audit has an important contribution to the recovery and renewal of public services. The Auditor General, the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland are responding to the risks to public services and finances from COVID-19 across the full range of audit work including annual audits and the programme of performance audits. The well-being of audit teams and the delivery of high-quality audits remain paramount. Maintaining a pragmatic and flexible approach will enable change at short notice as new issues emerge, or current risks change in significance. Where this impacts on annual audits, an addendum to this annual audit plan may be necessary.

Adding value


- 5.** We aim to add value to the council through our external audit work by being constructive and forward looking, by identifying areas for improvement and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In so doing, we intend to help the the council promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making and more effective use of resources.

Audit risks


- 6.** Based on our discussions with staff, attendance at committee meetings and a review of supporting information we have identified the following significant risks for North Lanarkshire Council. We have categorised these risks into financial statements risks and wider dimension risks, although the Covid-19 risk has elements of both. The key audit risks, which require specific audit testing, are detailed in [Exhibit 1](#).


Exhibit 1

2020/21 Significant audit risks

 Audit risk	Source of assurance	Planned audit work
<p>1 Risk of material misstatement due to fraud caused by management override of controls</p> <p>International Auditing Standards require that audits are planned to consider the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements caused by fraud, which is presumed to be a significant risk in any audit. This includes the risk of fraud due to the management override of controls.</p>	<p><i>Owing to the nature of this risk, assurances from management are not applicable in this instance.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed testing of journal entries. • Review of accounting estimates. • Focused testing of accruals and prepayments. • Identification and evaluation of significant transactions that are outside the normal course of business.
<p>2 Risk of error in areas of estimation and judgement</p> <p>There is a significant degree of subjectivity in the measurement and valuation of non-current assets and pensions. The extent of judgement involved increases the risk of material misstatement and requires a specific audit focus.</p> <p>A material uncertainty was disclosed in the 2019/20 accounts over non-current asset valuations as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The council has a rolling programme of valuations with specific categories revalued each year. For 2020/21 leisure properties are being revalued, with a desktop exercise being carried out for council housing.</p> <p>Given categories of assets have not been subject to valuation since the impact of Covid-19, there is a risk of material uncertainty over non-current asset valuations in the 2020/21 accounts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of clearly defined methodologies and procedures including specialist professionals, as appropriate, when making significant estimations and judgements. • Management review by qualified finance staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the scope, independence and competence of the professionals engaged in providing estimates for non-current assets and pensions. • Review appropriateness of actuarial assumptions and results including comparison with other councils. • Walkthrough the process of valuation to understand the basis for significant judgements. • Establish officers' arrangements for ensuring the completeness and accuracy of professional estimations for non-current assets and pensions. • Establish officer's arrangements for getting assurances over the impact of Covid-19 on the accuracy of non-current assets not subject to valuation in year. • Review actual experience of significant estimates made in the prior year.
<p>3 Risks relating to Covid-19</p> <p>Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the council in the 2020/21 audit year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management - additional funding and expenditure. CoSLA analysis indicates that council income has increased by 9 per cent and over £1.3bn of additional support to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified finance staff review, interpret and apply appropriate accounting guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the additional funding streams the council has received in year, what it has been spent on and the impact on outturn and reserves and how this is

 Audit risk	Source of assurance	Planned audit work
<p>business has been routed through councils as a result of COVID.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management - The Scottish Government has allowed for flexibility to be applied to certain areas of council funding and accounting practices. 	<p>and proper accounting practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID funding tracker developed and incorporated into financial monitoring. 	<p>reported in financial statements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Internal Audit work on financial management and sustainability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial reporting – The council is projecting a surplus on outturn of £4.7 million, but reports a balanced position in relation to Covid-19 income and expenditure. Covid-19 may have affected bad debt experience and the position of organisations in the wider group. • Financial reporting - The council require to make judgements on the correct accounting treatment in relation to additional funding arrangements – whether the council is acting as agent or principle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Solutions management team review and maintain a risk register which includes financial sustainability. • Introduction of additional financial controls to capture and report on the financial impact of COVID; including the development of principles around supplier relief payments and adapting the process to monitor and report. • Regular reporting of financial position and management action to Corporate Management Team and Committee. • Internal Audit have carried out a review of financial management and sustainability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of any Scottish Government and CIPFA/LASAAC guidance on accounting. • Discussions with management during the year to consider the accounting treatment of significant business grants and use of financial flexibilities. • Review of disclosures and balances in annual accounts and ensure that this is consistent with any guidance issued. • Review of Internal Audit work on financial management and sustainability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraud and controls - There is an increased risk of fraud for some Covid-19 related grants. Due to the nature of the schemes, there may not have been adequate consideration of internal control frameworks and the impact of remote working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit have worked closely with the relevant services to advise on appropriate controls in the design and implementation of a variety of Covid-19 support schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the most significant grants (by value), establish the conditions attached and the associated controls implemented over these. • Confirm existence and operation of these controls by completing a walkthrough. • Review potential NFI data matches. • Establish the impact on collection rates and assess the impact on the bad debt provision. • Review of Internal Audit work on Covid-19 grants.

 Audit risk	Source of assurance	Planned audit work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group - Covid-19 raised issues over going concern for some of the council's group bodies in 2019/20. Given the economic impact which has been felt during 2020/21, there is an increased risk to the going concern principle for some of the group components. Performance – Covid-19 grants have been disbursed at different rates across councils and there are different experiences of rejection rates. Without appropriate processes in place there is a risk that grants may be awarded to ineligible applicants or eligible applicants may not receive funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular monitoring of company financial performance by qualified council finance staff. The council continues to seek assurances over the financial sustainability of group companies in accordance with the council's Financial Governance of ALEOs arrangements. Appropriately skilled staff assess relevant guidance and eligibility criteria to put in place robust processes to ensure appropriate disbursement of grants. Engagement with Internal Audit to review processes and systems in place Development of training manuals around discretionary funding Regular communication with relevant staff to ensure any changes to processes/procedures are being shared and implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the impact of Covid-19 in the wider group including furlough and any issues raised by component auditors. Assess any national Early engagement with appropriate component auditors. Assess any national reporting of business grant performance and discuss any issues with officers.
<p>4 Risk of inaccurate accounting for children, families and justice social work services</p> <p>The IJB's budget disaggregation exercise to reflect the transfer of discretionary services back to the council is now complete. A further £15.6 million has been transferred out of the IJB budget and into the council in 2020/21 (£36.3 million in total). The service level agreement between the council and the IJB has been set out in principle but the detail is still being developed.</p> <p>There is a risk that budgets have not been correctly identified and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualified finance staff review and carry out the disaggregation of budgets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of specific codes transferred from the IJB to the council and substantive testing of these to confirm classification of expenditure. Substantive testing of wider social work and non social work expenditure items . Provide assurances to the North Lanarkshire IJB auditor. <p>Review of Internal Audit work on financial management and sustainability.</p>

	Audit risk	Source of assurance	Planned audit work
	transferred resulting in inaccuracies in financial reporting.		
Wider dimension risks			
5	<p>Financial sustainability</p> <p>The council has revised its medium term financial plan to incorporate the impact of Covid-19 known at that time. This forecasts a budget gap of £46.7 million for the three year period to 2023/24. The medium term financial plan highlights that significant savings will need to be achieved to address funding gaps.</p> <p>It is likely that there will be further cost pressures to the council on top of the immediate response to the Covid-19 crisis. There is a risk to the long term financial sustainability of the council given the additional cost pressures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound Medium Term Financial Planning process updated to consider impact of COVID. • 2020/21 budget setting approved 3 year savings programme with 2021/22 continuing this process. No further savings required for 2021/22. • Further development of medium term financial forecasting of change management fund requirements. • Analysis of Local Government Finance Settlement to inform budget setting. • Use of Reserves Policy approved by Policy and Strategy Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the development of a 3 year rolling budget process. • Consider the 2021/22 revenue budget and required savings target. • Review the financial monitoring during the year, including the use of reserves and delivery of planned savings.

Source: Audit Scotland

7. We have considered the risk of fraud in ISA 240 including over income recognition and over expenditure in accordance with Practice Note 10. We have rebutted the presumption that a material risk exists, with the exception of management override above. This is on the basis of the extent of income and expenditure which is received and issued to other parts of the public sector (including Scottish Government Funding and expenditure on the IJB, other NHS boards and councils).

8. For the areas that are subject to some risk, we have considered the incidence of fraud using National Fraud Initiative and Counter Fraud Service outcomes. We have assessed that the volume of transactions, that would need to be fraudulent to prove a material risk, is implausible. Our audit testing is directed towards testing significant and unusual transactions and towards assessing accounting estimates to address any residual risk, as part of our standard fraud procedures. We review controls over key areas of risk and will review any additional controls required due to Covid-19 additional funding and expenditure.

Reporting arrangements

9. Audit reporting is the visible output for the annual audit. All annual audit plans and the outputs as detailed in [Exhibit 2](#), and any other outputs on matters of public interest will be published on our website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk.

10. Matters arising from our audit will be reported on a timely basis and will include agreed action plans. Draft management reports will be issued to the relevant officer(s) to confirm factual accuracy.

11. We will provide an independent auditor's report to North Lanarkshire Council and the Accounts Commission setting out our opinions on the annual accounts. We will also provide the members of North Lanarkshire Council and Accounts Commission with an annual report on the audit containing observations and recommendations on significant matters which have arisen during the audit.

Exhibit 2

2020/21 Audit outputs

Audit Output	Target date	Committee Date
Annual Audit Plan	12 March 2021	25 March 2021
Management Report	9 June 2021	23 June 2021
Independent Auditor's Report	TBC	TBC
Annual Audit Report	TBC	TBC

Source: Audit Scotland

The audit of trusts registered as Scottish charities

12. The preparation and audit of financial statements of registered charities is regulated by the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. The 2006 Regulations require charities to prepare annual accounts and require an accompanying auditor's report where any legislation requires an audit. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 specifies the audit requirements for any trust fund where some or all members of a council are the sole trustees. Therefore, a full and separate audit and independent auditor's report is required for each register charity where members of North Lanarkshire Council are sole trustees, irrespective of the size of the charity. This applies to the JC McNaught Poor Children's Holiday Fund and the North Lanarkshire Council Educational Endowments.

13. There are no specific risks for these audits which we require to bring to your attention.

Audit fee

14. The proposed audit fee for the 2020/21 audit of North Lanarkshire Council is £530,310 (£518,190 in 2019/20). In determining the audit fee we have taken account of the risk exposure of the council, the planned management assurances in place and the level of reliance we plan to take from the work of internal audit. Our audit approach assumes receipt of the unaudited annual accounts with a complete working papers package on 30th June 2021.

15. Where our audit cannot proceed as planned through, for example, late receipt of unaudited annual accounts or being unable to take planned reliance from the work of internal audit, a supplementary fee may be levied. An additional fee may also be required in relation to any work or other significant exercises out with our planned audit activity.

Responsibilities

Chief Executive and Audit and Scrutiny Panel

16. Audited bodies have the primary responsibility for ensuring the proper financial stewardship of public funds, compliance with relevant legislation and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety and regularity that enable them to successfully deliver their objectives.

17. The audit of the annual accounts does not relieve management, or the Audit and Scrutiny Panel, of their responsibilities.

Appointed auditor

18. Our responsibilities as independent auditors are established by the 1973 Act for local government, and the Code of Audit Practice (including supplementary guidance) and guided by the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard.

19. Auditors in the public sector give an independent opinion on the financial statements and other information within the annual accounts. We also review and report on the arrangements within the audited body to manage its performance and use of resources. In doing this, we aim to support improvement and accountability.

20. Our audit team membership has changed since last year. Alasdair Craik will be taking over the Senior Audit Manager role from Carole Grant. The rest of the audit team remains unchanged.

Audit scope and timing

Annual accounts

21. The annual accounts, which include the financial statements, will be the foundation and source for most of the audit work necessary to support our judgements and conclusions. We also consider the wider environment and challenges facing the public sector. Our audit approach includes:

- understanding the business of North Lanarkshire Council and the associated risks which could impact on the financial statements
- assessing the key systems of internal control, and establishing how weaknesses in these systems could impact on the financial statements
- identifying major transaction streams, balances and areas of estimation and understanding how the council will include these in the financial statements
- assessing the risks of material misstatement in the financial statements
- determining the nature, timing and extent of audit procedures necessary to provide us with sufficient audit evidence as to whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement.

22. We will give an opinion on whether the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the council and its group as at 31 March 2021 and of the income and expenditure of the council and its group for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the financial reporting framework.

Other information in the annual accounts

23. We also review and report on statutory other information published within the annual accounts including the management commentary, annual governance statement and the remuneration report. We give an opinion on whether these have been compiled in accordance with the appropriate regulations and frameworks in our independent auditor's report.

24. We also review the content of the annual report for consistency with the financial statements and with our knowledge. We report any uncorrected material misstatements in statutory other information.

Materiality

25. We apply the concept of materiality in planning and performing the audit. It is used in evaluating the effect of identified misstatements on the audit, and of any uncorrected misstatements, on the financial statements and in forming our opinions in the independent auditor's report.

26. We calculate materiality at different levels as described below. The calculated materiality values for North Lanarkshire Council are set out in [Exhibit 3](#).



characteristics



responsibilities



principal activities



risks



governance arrangements

Exhibit 3

Materiality values

Materiality	Amount
Planning materiality – This is the figure we calculate to assess the overall impact of audit adjustments on the financial statements. It has been set at 1% of gross expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2020 based on the latest audited accounts.	£14 million
Performance materiality – This acts as a trigger point. If the aggregate of errors identified during the financial statements audit exceeds performance materiality this would indicate that further audit procedures should be considered. Using our professional judgement, we have calculated performance materiality at 50% of planning materiality.	£7 million
Reporting threshold (i.e., clearly trivial) – We are required to report to those charged with governance on all unadjusted misstatements more than the 'reporting threshold' amount. This has been calculated at approximately 2% of planning materiality.	£250 thousand



Source: Audit Scotland

Timetable

27. To support the efficient use of resources it is critical that the annual accounts timetable is agreed with us to produce the unaudited accounts. We have included an agreed timetable at [Exhibit 4](#).

Exhibit 4

Annual accounts timetable

 Key stage	 Date
Consideration of unaudited annual report and accounts by those charged with governance	23 June 2021
Latest submission date of unaudited annual report and accounts with complete working papers package	30 June 2021
Latest date for receipt of assurances from Group's Component Auditors	26 August 2021
Issue of draft annual audit report for clearance	TBC
Latest date for final clearance meeting with Head of Financial Solutions	TBC
Agreement of audited unsigned annual accounts	TBC
Issue of annual audit report, letter of representation and proposed independent auditor's report	
Consideration of audited annual accounts and audit reporting by those charged with governance	TBC
Latest date for the signing of independent auditors report	TBC

Internal audit

28. Internal audit is provided by the in-house internal audit section at North Lanarkshire Council. As part of our planning process we carry out an annual

assessment of the internal audit function to ensure that it operates in accordance with the main requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). ISA (UK) 610 requires an assessment on whether the work of the internal audit function can be used for the purposes of external audit. This includes:

- the extent to which the internal audit function's organisational status and relevant policies and procedures support the objectivity of the internal auditors
- the level of competence of the internal audit function
- whether the internal audit function applies a systematic and disciplined approach, including quality control.

29. We will report any significant findings to management on a timely basis.

Using the work of internal audit

30. International Auditing Standards require internal and external auditors to work closely together to make best use of available audit resources. We seek to rely on the work of internal audit wherever possible to avoid duplication. We plan to consider the findings of the work of internal audit as part of our planning process to minimise duplication of effort and to ensure the total resource is used efficiently or effectively.

31. From our initial review of internal audit plans we plan to take assurance from internal audit work on creditors and payroll and any work undertaken around Covid-19 related grants. For our wider dimension audit work we will also consider internal audit's work on financial management and sustainability.

Audit dimensions

32. Our audit is based on four audit dimensions that frame the wider scope of public sector audit requirements as shown in [Exhibit 5](#).

Exhibit 5 Audit dimensions



Source: Code of Audit Practice

33. In the local government sector, the appointed auditor's annual conclusions on these four dimensions will help contribute to an overall assessment and assurance on best value.

Financial sustainability

34. As auditors we consider the appropriateness of the use of the going concern basis of accounting as part of the annual audit. We will also comment on financial sustainability in the longer term. We define this as medium term (two to five years) and longer term (longer than five years) sustainability. We will carry out work and conclude on:

- the effectiveness of financial planning in identifying and addressing risks to financial sustainability in the short, medium and long term
- the appropriateness and effectiveness of arrangements in place to address any identified funding gaps
- whether North Lanarkshire Council can demonstrate the affordability and effectiveness of funding and investment decisions it has made.

Financial management

35. Financial management is concerned with financial capacity, sound budgetary processes and whether the control environment and internal controls are operating effectively. We will review, conclude and report on:

- whether arrangements are in place to ensure systems of internal control are operating effectively
- the effectiveness of budgetary control systems in communicating accurate and timely financial performance can be demonstrated
- how North Lanarkshire Council has assured itself that its financial capacity and skills are appropriate
- whether there are appropriate and effective arrangements in place for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption.

Governance and transparency

36. Governance and transparency is concerned with the effectiveness of scrutiny and governance arrangements, leadership and decision – making and transparent reporting of financial and performance information. We will review, conclude and report on:

- whether North Lanarkshire Council can demonstrate that the governance arrangements in place are appropriate and operating effectively (including services delivered by, or in partnership with, others such as ALEOs).
- whether there is effective scrutiny, challenge and transparency on the decision-making and finance and performance reports.
- the quality and timeliness of financial and performance reporting.

Value for money

37. Value for money refers to using resources effectively and continually improving services. We will review, conclude and report on whether the council can demonstrate :

- the timely and appropriate distribution of new Covid related grants
- value for money in the use of resources
- there is a clear link between money spent, output and outcomes delivered.
- that outcomes are improving.
- there is sufficient focus on improvement and the pace of it.

Best Value

38. The Accounts Commission agreed the overall framework for a new approach to auditing Best Value in June 2016. The introduction of the new approach coincided with the new five-year audit appointments. Auditors started using the framework for their audit work from October 2016.

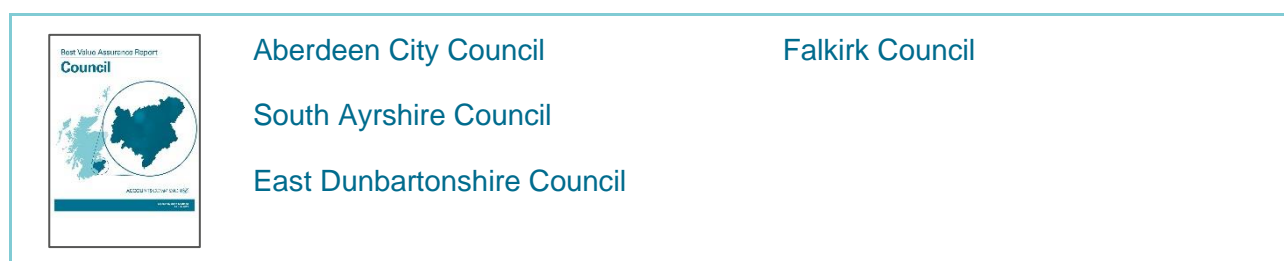
39. A key feature of the new approach is that it integrates Best Value into the wider scope annual audit, which will influence audit planning and reporting. Best Value will be assessed comprehensively over the five-year audit appointment, both through the ongoing annual audit work, and through discrete packages of work to look at specific issues. Conclusions and judgements on Best Value will be reported through:

- The Annual Audit Report for each council that will provide a rounded picture of the council overall.
- An annual assurance and risks report that the Controller of Audit will provide to the Commission that will highlight issues from across all 32 council annual audit reports.
- A Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) for each council that will be considered by the Accounts Commission at least once in a five-year period.

40. The four councils on which a BVAR will be published during the fifth year of the new approach are listed in [Exhibit 6](#). Reports will be considered by the Accounts Commission in the period between March and November 2021.

Exhibit 6

2020/21 Best Value Assurance Reports



Source: Audit Scotland

41. The work planned in North Lanarkshire Council this year will focus on following up on the council's progress on the recommendations identified in the Best Value Assurance Report published in May 2019. The results of this work will be reported in the Annual Audit Report.

Independence and objectivity

42. Auditors appointed by the Accounts Commission or Auditor General must comply with the Code of Audit Practice and relevant supporting guidance. When auditing the financial statements auditors must also comply with professional standards issued by the Financial Reporting Council and those of the professional accountancy bodies. These standards impose stringent rules to ensure the independence and objectivity of auditors. Audit Scotland has robust arrangements in place to ensure compliance with these standards including an annual "fit and proper" declaration for all members of staff. The arrangements are overseen by the Director of Audit Services, who serves as Audit Scotland's Ethics Partner.

43. The engagement lead (i.e. appointed auditor) for North Lanarkshire Council is Brian Howarth, Audit Director. Auditing and ethical standards require the appointed auditor to communicate any relationships that may affect the independence and

objectivity of audit staff. We are not aware of any such relationships pertaining to the audit of North Lanarkshire Council.

Quality control

44. International Standard on Quality Control 1 (ISQC1) requires that a system of quality control is established, as part of financial audit procedures, to provide reasonable assurance that professional standards and regulatory and legal requirements are being complied with and that the independent auditor's report or opinion is appropriate in the circumstances.

45. The foundation of our quality framework is our Audit Guide, which incorporates the application of professional auditing, quality and ethical standards and the Code of Audit Practice (and supporting guidance) issued by Audit Scotland and approved by the Auditor General for Scotland. To ensure that we achieve the required quality standards Audit Scotland conducts peer reviews and internal quality reviews. Additionally, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS) have been commissioned to carry out external quality reviews.

As part of our commitment to quality and continuous improvement, Audit Scotland will periodically seek your views on the quality of our service provision. We welcome feedback at any time and this may be directed to the engagement lead.

North Lanarkshire Council

Annual Audit Plan 2020/21

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