

# Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority audit plan

**Year ending 31 March 2021**

28 July 2021



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

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# Key matters

## Factors

### Police and Crime Commissioner

Under the provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) may submit a business case to the Home Secretary for the PCC to take over governance of the Fire Authority. The PCC for West Mercia (which covers the Hereford and Worcester Fire area) submitted a business case and in March 2018 the Home Secretary indicated that the governance change would take place with effect from 1st June 2018. The transfer has been subject to two judicial reviews. Although the first review confirmed the Home Secretary's original decision, the second was withdrawn by mutual consent. As a consequence the government confirmed that the Home Secretary's decision in March 2018 was withdrawn and that there will need to be a new or updated business case; which would be subject to the statutory procedure for consultation and criteria for decision. It has also been confirmed that the earliest that the Home Office would consider a business case was after the PCC elections in May 2021.

### Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS)

The Authority's HMICFRS report was published in December 2018. The Service was found to be 'good' within the effectiveness area but 'requiring improvement' when considering efficiency and people. In response the Authority prepared a Improvement Plan, and has since provided quarterly updates to Members. We note that many of the actions are complete and, despite the significant impact currently being experienced due to the Covid – 19 pandemic, sound progress is being made to discharge the remaining requirements of the Plan.

### Chief Fire Officer

The Chief Fire Officer retired on 31 March 2021. After a thorough Options Analysis, the Authority agreed the permanent appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer with the requisite operational command and strategic Fire Service management experience. The new Chief Fire Officer is the former Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

### Impact of Covid 19 pandemic

The Authority has adapted and responded well to the impact of Covid-19. Internally, business continuity has been good, with officers working from home and from Hindlip as required. Externally, the Authority has supported the regional response, including distributing PPE.

## Our response

- As a firm, we are absolutely committed to audit quality and financial reporting in the local government sector. Our proposed work and fee, as set further in our Audit Plan, has been agreed with the Director of Finance.
- We will consider your arrangements for managing and reporting your financial resources, and continued response to the HMICFRS Report and the Covid-19 pandemic as part of our work in completing our Value for Money work.
- The Authority's valuer reported a material uncertainty in regards to the valuation of properties in 2019/20 due to the Covid 19 pandemic and we expect significant uncertainty will continue in 2020/21. We identified a significant risk in regards to the valuation of properties – please refer to page 6.

# Introduction and headlines

## Purpose

This document provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority ('the Authority') for those charged with governance.

## Respective responsibilities

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

## Scope of our audit

The scope of our audit is set in accordance with the Code and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the Authority's financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Audit & Standards Committee).

We are also responsible for undertaking sufficient work to be able to satisfy ourselves as to whether, in our view, the Authority has put arrangements in place that support the achievement of value for money.

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

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

## Significant risks

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

- Under ISA (UK&I) 240 it is presumed that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities.
- The Authority's pension fund net liability as reflected in its balance sheet represent significant estimates in the financial statements.
- The valuation of the Authority's land and buildings.

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

## Materiality

We have determined planning materiality to be £0.8m (PY £0.688m) for the Authority, which equates to 2% of your prior year gross expenditure. We are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. Clearly trivial has been set at £40k (PY £34.4k).

## Value for Money arrangements

Our risk assessment regarding your arrangements to secure value for money has not identified any risks of significant weakness.

## Audit logistics

Our interim visit will take place in March and our final visit will take place in June - September. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan, our Audit Findings Report and Auditor's Annual Report. Our audit approach is detailed in Appendix A.

Our fee for the audit will be £40,061 (PY: £35,145) for the Authority, subject to the Authority delivering a good set of financial statements and working papers.

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

# Significant risks identified

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

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
The revenue cycle includes fraudulent transactions (rebutted)	Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Authority, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition</li> <li>• opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited</li> <li>• the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Hereford &amp; Worcester Fire Authority, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable.</li> </ul> <p>Therefore we do not consider this to be a significant risk for Hereford &amp; Worcester Fire Authority.</p>
Fraudulent expenditure recognition (rebutted)	Practice Note 10 states that as most public bodies are net spending bodies, then the risk of material misstatement due to fraud related to expenditure may be greater than the risk of material misstatements due to fraud related to revenue recognition.	<p>We have rebutted this risk for Hereford &amp; Worcester Fire Authority because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expenditure is primarily related to employee costs</li> <li>• opportunity to manipulate contract variations is low</li> </ul> <p>We therefore do not consider this to be a significant risk for Hereford &amp; Worcester Fire Authority.</p> <p>We will continue to review material expenditure transactions as part of our audit ensuring that it remains appropriate to rebut the risk of expenditure recognition for Hereford &amp; Worcester Fire Authority.</p>

# Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Management over-ride of controls	<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>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular journals, management estimates and transactions outside the course of business as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate the design effectiveness of management controls over journals</li> <li>• analyse the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals</li> <li>• test unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration</li> <li>• gain an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence</li> <li>• evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.</li> </ul>
Valuation of land and buildings	<p>The Authority revalues its land and buildings on an annual basis. This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions. Additionally, management will need to ensure the carrying value in the financial statements is not materially different from the current value or the fair value (for surplus assets) at the financial statements date, where a rolling programme is used.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of land and buildings, particularly revaluations and impairments, as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work</li> <li>• evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert</li> <li>• write to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out</li> <li>• challenge the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding</li> <li>• test revaluations made during the year to see if they have been input correctly into the Authority's asset register</li> <li>• evaluate the assumptions made by management for those assets not revalued during the year and how management has satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value at year end.</li> </ul>

# Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Valuation of the pension fund net liability	<p>The Authority's pension fund net liability, as reflected in its balance sheet as the net defined benefit liability, represents a significant estimate in the financial statements. The pension fund net liability is considered a significant estimate due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of the estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of the Authority's pension fund net liability as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• update our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Authority's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluate the design of the associated controls</li> <li>• evaluate the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work</li> <li>• assess the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Authority's pension fund valuation</li> <li>• assess the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Authority to the actuary to estimate the liability</li> <li>• test the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary</li> <li>• undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report</li> <li>• obtain assurances from the auditor of Worcestershire Pension Fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the pension fund financial statements.</li> </ul>



# Accounting estimates and related disclosures

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

## Introduction

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

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

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

Specifically do Audit & Standards Committee members:

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





# Accounting estimates and related disclosures

## Additional information that will be required

To ensure our compliance with this revised auditing standard, we will be requesting further information from management and those charged with governance during our audit for the year ended 31 March 2021.

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

- Valuations of land and buildings properties
- Depreciation
- Valuation of defined benefit net pension fund liabilities
- Fair value estimates in respect of surplus assets and PWLB borrowing

## The Authority's Information systems

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

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

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

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

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



### Estimation uncertainty

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Planning enquiries

As part of our planning risk assessment procedures we have prepared and agreed with management a separate document (Informing the audit risk assessment 2020-21) that will be being presented to the Audit & Standards Committee alongside this audit plan.

### Further information

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

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

# Other matters

## Other work

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

- We read your Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement to check that they are consistent with the financial statements on which we give an opinion and our knowledge of the Authority.
- We carry out work to satisfy ourselves that disclosures made in your Annual Governance Statement are in line with requirements set by CIPFA.
- We carry out work on your consolidation schedules for the Whole of Government Accounts process in accordance with NAO group audit instructions.
- We consider our other duties under legislation and the Code, as and when required, including:
  - giving electors the opportunity to raise questions about your 2020/21 financial statements, consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the 2020/21 financial statements;
  - issuing a report in the public interest or written recommendations to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act).
  - application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under section 28 or a judicial review under section 31 of the Act
  - issuing an advisory notice under section 29 of the Act
- We certify completion of our audit.

## Other material balances and transactions

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

## Going concern

As auditors, we are required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding, and conclude on:

- whether a material uncertainty related to going concern exists; and
- the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements.

The Public Audit Forum has been designated by the Financial Reporting Council as a "SORP-making body" for the purposes of maintaining and updating Practice Note 10: Audit of financial statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom (PN 10). It is intended that auditors of public sector bodies read PN 10 in conjunction with (ISAs) (UK).

PN 10 has recently been updated to take account of revisions to ISAs (UK), including ISA (UK) 570 on going concern. The revisions to PN 10 in respect of going concern are important and mark a significant departure from how this concept has been audited in the public sector in the past. In particular, PN 10 allows auditors to apply a 'continued provision of service approach' to auditing going concern, where appropriate. Applying such an approach should enable us to increase our focus on wider financial resilience (as part of our VfM work) and ensure that our work on going concern is proportionate for public sector bodies. We will review the Authority's arrangements for securing financial sustainability as part of our Value for Money work and provide a commentary on this in our Auditor's Annual Report (see page 13).

# Materiality

## The concept of materiality

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

## Materiality for planning purposes

We have determined financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the gross expenditure of the Authority for the prior financial year. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. Materiality at the planning stage of our audit is £0.8m (PY £0.688m) for the Authority, which equates to 2% of your prior year gross expenditure. We design our procedures to detect errors in specific accounts at a lower level of precision. We have set a separate lower materiality level for the disclosure note on remuneration of individual senior managers. In view of the sensitivity of this note to the reader of the accounts, we have set a materiality level of £50,000.

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

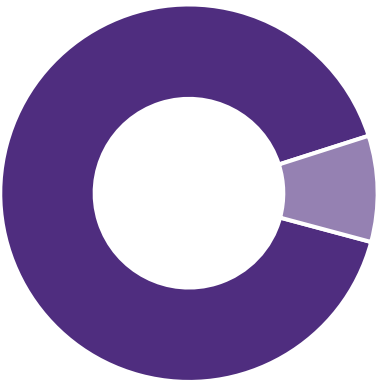
## Matters we will report to the Audit & Standards Committee

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our opinion on the financial statements as a whole, we nevertheless report to the Audit & Standards Committee any unadjusted misstatements of lesser amounts to the extent that these are identified by our audit work. Under ISA 260 (UK) ‘Communication with those charged with governance’, we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are ‘clearly trivial’ to those charged with governance. ISA 260 (UK) defines ‘clearly trivial’ as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. In the context of the Authority, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £40k (PY £34.4k).

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

## Prior year gross operating costs

£40.5m Authority  
(PY: £34.4m)



■ Prior year gross operating costs

## Materiality

£0.8m  
Authority  
financial  
statements  
materiality  
(PY: £0.688m)



£40k  
Misstatements  
reported to the  
Audit & Standards  
Committee  
(PY: £34.4k)

# Value for Money arrangements

## Revised approach to Value for Money work for 2020/21

On 1 April 2020, the National Audit Office introduced a new Code of Audit Practice which comes into effect from audit year 2020/21. The Code introduced a revised approach to the audit of Value for Money. (VFM)

There are three main changes arising from the NAO's new approach:

- A new set of key criteria, covering financial sustainability, governance and improvements in economy, efficiency and effectiveness
- More extensive reporting, with a requirement on the auditor to produce a commentary on arrangements across all of the key criteria, rather than the current 'reporting by exception' approach
- The replacement of the binary (qualified / unqualified) approach to VFM conclusions, with far more sophisticated judgements on performance, as well as key recommendations on any significant weaknesses in arrangements identified during the audit.

The Code require auditors to consider whether the body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria. These are as set out opposite.

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



### Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

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



### Financial Sustainability

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



### Governance

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





# Audit logistics and team



## Avtar Sohal, Key Audit Partner

Avtar's role will be to:

- be a key contact for the Chief Fire Officer, the Director of Finance & Assets (Treasurer) and the Audit & Standards Committee; and
- take overall responsibility for the delivery of a high quality audit, meeting the highest professional standards and adding value to the Authority.

## Neil Preece, Audit Manager

Neil's role will be to manage the delivery of a high quality audit, meeting the highest professional standards and adding value to the Authority.

## Harvinder Panesar, Audit Incharge

Harvinder's role will be to:

- be the day to day contact for Authority finance staff;
- take responsibility for ensuring there is effective communication and understanding by finance team of audit requirements;
- focus on the more technical aspect of the audit and to discuss emerging national technical matters as they arise and deal with technical matters raised by the you throughout the year in a timely manner.

## Audited body responsibilities

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

## Our requirements

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

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



# Audit fees

In 2017, PSAA awarded a contract of audit for Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority to begin with effect from 2018/19. The fee agreed in the contract was £25,311. Since that time, there have been a number of developments, particularly in relation to the revised Code and ISA's which are relevant for the 2020/21 audit.

As referred to on page 13, the 2020/21 Code introduces a revised approach to our VFM work. This requires auditors to produce a commentary on arrangements across all of the key criteria, rather than the current 'reporting by exception' approach. Auditors now have to make far more sophisticated judgements on performance, as well as issue key recommendations if any significant weaknesses in arrangements are identified during the audit. We will be working with the NAO and other audit firms to discuss and share learning in respect of common issues arising across the sector.

The new approach will be more challenging for audited bodies, involving discussions at a wider and more strategic level. Both the reporting, and the planning and risk assessment which underpins it, will require more audit time, delivered through a richer skill mix than in previous years. Our estimate is that for your audit, this will result in an increased fee of £40,061 (58%). This is in line with increases we are proposing at all our local audits.

Additionally, across all sectors and firms, the FRC has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge and to undertake additional and more robust testing, as noted in the number of revised ISA's issued by the FRC that are applicable to audits of financial statements commencing on or after 15 December 2019, as detailed in Appendix 1..

As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and public sector financial reporting. Our proposed work and fee for 2020/21, as set out below, is detailed overleaf and has been agreed with the Director of Finance.

	Actual Fee 2018/19	Actual Fee 2019/20	Proposed fee 2020/21
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority Audit	£27,311	£35,145	£40,061
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	£27,311	£35,145	£40,061

## Assumptions

In setting the above fees, we have assumed that the Authority will:

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

## Relevant professional standards

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

# Audit fees – detailed analysis

Scale fee published by PSAA		£25,311
<i>Ongoing increases to scale fee first identified in 2019/20</i>		
Raising the bar/regulatory factors	£750	
Enhanced audit procedures for Property, Plant and Equipment	£1,750	
Enhanced audit procedures for Pensions	£1,750	
		£4,250
<b>Revised Audit fee 2019/20</b>		<b>£29,561</b>
<i>New issues for 2020/21</i>		
Additional work on Value for Money (VfM) under new NAO Code	£5,500	
Increased audit requirements of revised ISAs	£5,000	
<i><b>Proposed increase to agreed 2019/20 fee</b></i>		<i><b>£10,500</b></i>
<b>Total audit fees (excluding VAT)</b>		<b>£40,061</b>

# Independence and non-audit services

## Auditor independence

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

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

A Grant Thornton employee, based in our Birmingham Office, is the Son of a key member of Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority's finance team, who worked on the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial statements. The member of the finance team was a key contact for our audit work in those two years. As the 2020/21 financial statements will include comparative figures for 2019/20 we have applied the following safeguards:

- The Grant Thornton employee will not work on the Authority audit
- The Grant Thornton employee will not people manage anyone working on the audit
- All files will be restricted so that the Grant Thornton employee is unable to gain access to client information
- The resourcing, audit team and the Grant Thornton employee's people manager have been made aware
- The relationship will be declared on annual declarations going forward.

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

## Other services

No other services provided by Grant Thornton were identified.



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