

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Pension Fund

Annual Audit Letter for the year ended 31 March 2016

October 2016

Ernst & Young LLP

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Purpose.....	5
Responsibilities.....	7
Financial Statement Audit	10
Value for Money	13
Other Reporting Issues.....	16
Focused on your future.....	19
Appendix A Audit Fees	22

In April 2015 Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) issued ‘Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies 2015-16’. It is available from the Chief Executive of each audited body and via the PSAA website (www.psa.co.uk)

The Statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between appointed auditors and audited bodies. It summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas.

The ‘Terms of Appointment from 1 April 2015’ issued by PSAA sets out additional requirements that auditors must comply with, over and above those set out in the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice (the Code) and statute, and covers matters of practice and procedure which are of a recurring nature.

This Annual Audit Letter is prepared in the context of the Statement of responsibilities. It is addressed to the Members of the audited body, and is prepared for their sole use. We, as appointed auditor, take no responsibility to any third party.

Our Complaints Procedure – If at any time you would like to discuss with us how our service to you could be improved, or if you are dissatisfied with the service you are receiving, you may take the issue up with your usual partner or director contact. If you prefer an alternative route, please contact Steve Varley, our Managing Partner, 1 More London Place, London SE1 2AF. We undertake to look into any complaint carefully and promptly and to do all we can to explain the position to you. Should you remain dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, you may of course take matters up with our professional institute. We can provide further information on how you may contact our professional institute.

A hand with white nail polish is writing on a document with a blue pen. In the background, there is a calculator, a laptop, and a white mug. A yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

We are required to issue an annual audit letter to Oxfordshire County Council (the Council) and Oxfordshire Pension Fund (the Pension Fund) following our audit for the year ended 31 March 2016.

Below are the results and conclusions on the significant areas of the audit.

Area of Work	
Opinion on the Council's and the Pension Fund's: ▶ Financial statements	Unqualified – the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and Pension Fund as at 31 March 2016 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended.
▶ Consistency of other information published with the financial statements	Other information published with the financial statements was consistent with the Annual Accounts.
Concluding on Oxfordshire County Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness	We concluded that you have put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in your use of resources.

Area of Work	Conclusion
Reports by exception: ▶ Consistency of Governance Statement	The Governance Statement was consistent with our understanding of Oxfordshire County Council.
▶ Public interest report	Subject to the determination of the objection that we have received to the Council's accounts, we have no matters to report in the public interest.
▶ Written recommendations to the Council, which should be copied to the Secretary of State	We had no matters to report.
▶ Other actions taken in relation to our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014	Subject to the determination of the objection that we have received to the Council's accounts, we have no matters to report.

Area of Work	Conclusion
Reporting to the National Audit Office (NAO) on our review of Oxfordshire County Council's Whole of Government Accounts return (WGA).	We had no matters to report.

As a result of the above we have also:

Area of Work	Conclusion
Issued a report to those charged with governance of the Council communicating significant findings resulting from our audit.	Our Audit Results Reports for the Council and the Pension Fund were issued on 14 September 2016.
Issued a certificate that we have completed the audit in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice.	We have not yet issued our audit completion certificate; this is because we received an objection to the 2015/16 accounts from a member of the public which we are currently considering. We were able to conclude that the objections raised did not impact our financial statement opinion or value for money conclusion, but we are unable to issue our certificate until the objection is determined.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council and Pension Fund's staff for their assistance during the course of our work.

Paul King

Executive Director
For and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP

Purpose



Purpose

The Purpose of this Letter

The purpose of this annual audit letter is to communicate to Members and external stakeholders, including members of the public, the key issues arising from our work, which we consider should be brought to the attention of Oxfordshire County Council.

We have already reported the detailed findings from our audit work in our 2015/16 Audit Results Reports to the 14 September 2016 Audit and Governance Committee, representing those charged with governance. We do not repeat those detailed findings in this letter. The matters reported here are the most significant for the Council.



Responsibilities

Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the Appointed Auditor

Our 2015/16 audit work has been undertaken in accordance with the Council Audit Plan that we issued on 12 February 2016 and the Pension Fund Audit Plan issued on 13 July 2016 and is conducted in accordance with the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland), and other guidance issued by the National Audit Office.

As auditors we are responsible for:

- ▶ Expressing an opinion:
 - ▶ on the 2015/16 financial statements; and
 - ▶ on the consistency of other information published with the financial statements.
- ▶ Forming a conclusion on the arrangements the Council has to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- ▶ Reporting by exception:
 - ▶ if the annual governance statement is misleading or not consistent with our understanding of Oxfordshire County Council;
 - ▶ any significant matters that are in the public interest;
 - ▶ any written recommendations to the Council, which should be copied to the Secretary of State; and
 - ▶ if we have discharged our duties and responsibilities as established by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and Code of Audit Practice.

Alongside our work on the financial statements, we also review and report to the National Audit Office (NAO) on your Whole of Government Accounts return.

Responsibilities of the Council

The Council is responsible for preparing and publishing its statement of accounts accompanied by an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). As administering authority for the Pension Fund, it is responsible for preparing the Pension Fund's statement of accounts to be published within the Pension Fund's annual report. In the AGS, the Council reports publicly each year on how far it complies with its own code of governance, including how it has monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in year, and any changes planned in the coming period.

The Council is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

A blurred office desk with a laptop, glasses of water, and financial documents. The scene is brightly lit, likely from a window with blinds in the background. A yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Financial Statement Audit'.

Financial Statement Audit

Financial Statement Audit

Key Issues

The Council's Statement of Accounts is an important tool for the Council to show how it has used public money and how it can demonstrate its financial management and financial health.

We audited the Council's Statement of Accounts in line with the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland), and other guidance issued by the National Audit Office and issued an unqualified audit report on 29 September 2016.

Our detailed findings were reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 14 September 2016.

The key issues identified as part of our audit were as follows:

Significant Risk	Conclusion
<p>Management override of controls</p> <p>A risk present on all audits is that management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of its ability to manipulate accounting records directly or indirectly, and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.</p> <p>Auditing standards require us to respond to this risk by testing the appropriateness of journals, testing accounting estimates for possible management bias and obtaining an understanding of the business rationale for any significant unusual transactions.</p>	<p>We obtained a full list of journals posted to the general ledger during the year, and analysed these journals using criteria we set to identify any unusual journal types or amounts. We then tested a sample of journals that met our criteria and tested these to supporting documentation.</p> <p>We considered accounting estimates relating to the Local Government Pension Scheme and Property, Plant and Equipment and found that estimates are reasonable, and there was no indication of bias in the calculation of the estimates.</p> <p>We did not identify any:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ material weaknesses in controls or evidence of material management override;▶ instances of inappropriate judgements being applied; or▶ any other transactions during our audit, which appeared unusual, or outside the Council's normal course of business.

Revenue and expenditure recognition

Under ISA240 there is a presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to improper recognition of revenue.

In the public sector, this requirement is modified by Practice Note 10, issued by the Financial Reporting Council, which states that auditors should also consider the risk that material misstatements may occur by the manipulation of expenditure recognition.

Our testing identified no issues that we needed to report to you.

Other Key Findings

Conclusion

Accounts production and close down

This will be the first year that the Council will have prepared its financial statements since it joined the Integrated Business Centre (IBC) with Hampshire County Council. There is a risk that procedures may not work as smoothly as they have done in the past as Council staff gets used to working with the IBC.

Our testing of the close down procedures and arrangements did not identify any issues that we needed to report to you.

Expenditure testing

The Council contracts with third party suppliers for the provision of services. Within Adult Social Care a new financial system has been implemented part way through the year. There is a risk due to the change in systems that the systems may not have been working as intended.

Our testing of expenditure related to Adult Social Care did not identify any issues that we needed to report to you.

A close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a stack of gold coins. The coins are stacked vertically, with the edges of several coins visible. The lighting is warm, highlighting the metallic texture and the embossed details on the coins. A bright yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "Value for Money".

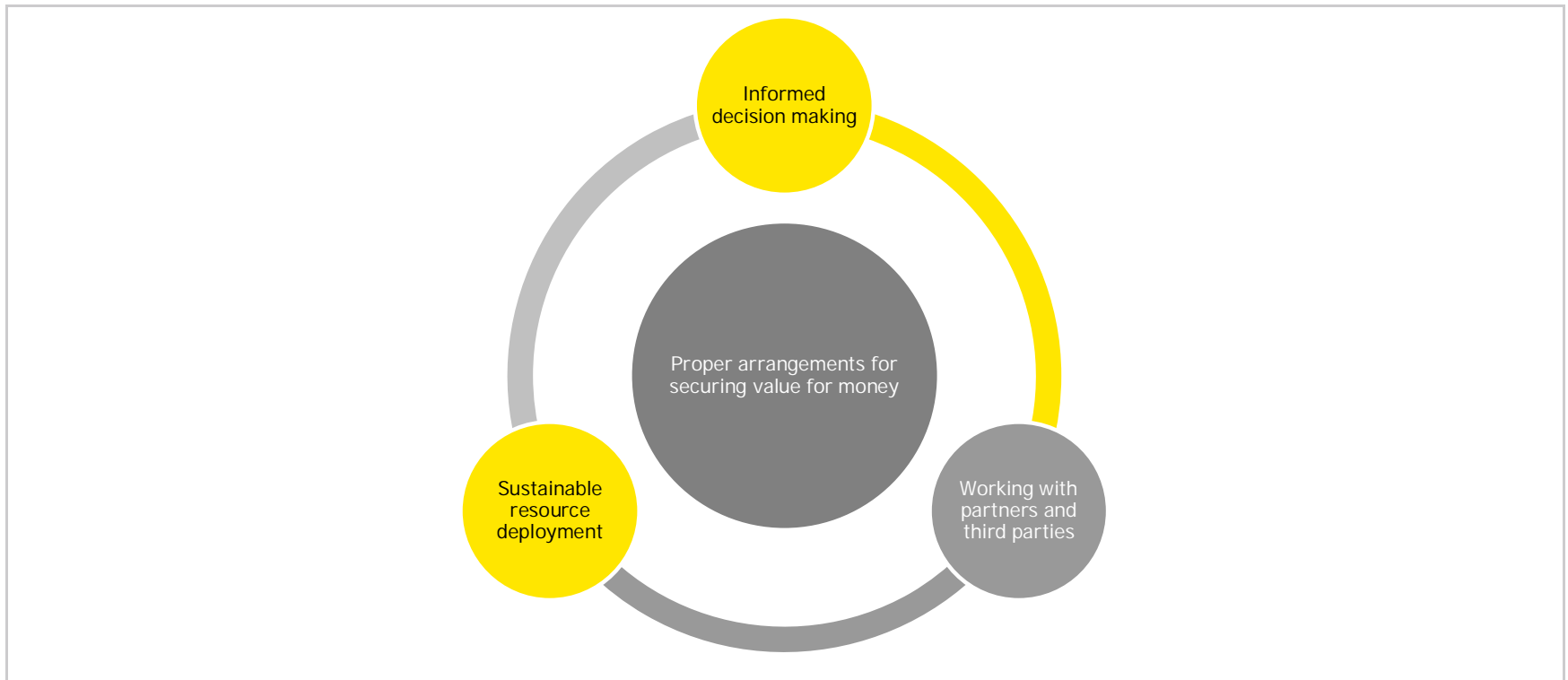
Value for Money

Value for Money

We are required to consider whether the Council has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources. This is known as our value for money conclusion.

Proper arrangements are defined by statutory guidance issued by the National Audit Office. They comprise your arrangements to:

- Take informed decisions;
- Deploy resources in a sustainable manner; and
- Work with partners and other third parties.



We issued an unqualified value for money conclusion on 29 September 2016.

Our audit did not identify any significant matters in relation to the Council's arrangements. We did however identify the following areas to bring to your attention.

Key Findings

The Council achieved its planned budget for 2015/16, and we considered the assumptions in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016-2020 to be realistic.

We did however identify the following areas to bring to your attention – the monitoring and reporting performance against savings could be reported more quickly and with more details of performance against savings plans. We understand that the Council are developing new reporting arrangements



Other Reporting
Issues

Other Reporting Issues

Whole of Government Accounts

We performed the procedures required by the National Audit Office on the accuracy of the consolidation pack prepared by the Council for Whole of Government Accounts purposes.

We had no issues to report.

Pension Fund Annual Report

We performed procedures to ensure that information within the Pension Fund Annual Report was consistent with the audited financial statements. We had no issues to report.

Annual Governance Statement

We are required to consider the completeness of disclosures in the Council's annual governance statement, identify any inconsistencies with the other information of which we are aware from our work, and consider whether it is misleading.

We completed this work and did not identify any areas of concern.

Report in the Public Interest

We have a duty under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to consider whether, in the public interest, to report on any matter that comes to our attention in the course of the audit in order for it to be considered by the Council or brought to the attention of the public.

We did not identify any issues which required us to issue a report in the public interest.

Written Recommendations

We have a duty under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to designate any audit recommendation as one that requires the Council to consider it at a public meeting and to decide what action to take in response.

We did not identify any issues which required us to issue a written recommendation.

Objections Received

We received an objection to the 2015/16 accounts from a member of the public.

The objection asked whether Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) loans that the Council entered into was unlawful, on the basis that the decision was irrational and unreasonable. Similar objections have been received at a number of other councils. We accepted this objection as it met the criteria for consideration. We have asked the Council to provide information relating to the loans, which has recently been received. We will review the information provided and determine the objection as soon as practicable.

We were able to conclude that the objection raised did not have an impact on our financial statement opinion. This is because we do not believe that they represent a risk of material misstatement in relation to items in the 2015/16 statement of accounts.

Our value for money conclusion considers whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources in 2015/16. We did not consider that the objection indicates that the Council had improper arrangements in 2015/16.

We issued our audit opinion and value for money conclusion, but cannot issue our certificate until the objection is determined. Our work on the objection is currently ongoing.

Other Powers and Duties

To date, we have identified no issues during our audit that require us to use our additional powers under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Independence

We communicated our assessment of independence in our Audit Results Report to the Audit and Governance Committee on 14 September 2016. In our professional judgement the firm is independent and the objectivity of the audit engagement partner and audit staff has not been compromised within the meaning regulatory and professional requirements.

Control Themes and Observations

As part of our work, we obtained an understanding of internal control sufficient to plan our audit and determine the nature, timing and extent of testing performed. Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control, we are required to communicate to you significant deficiencies in internal control identified during our audit. We have not identified any significant deficiencies in the design or operation of an internal control that might result in a material misstatement in the financial statements and which the Council does not know about.

A close-up photograph of a person's face as they look through a pair of black binoculars. The person's eyes are focused on the lenses, and their hands are visible holding the device. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white. A bright yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "Focused on your future".

Focused on your
future

Focused on your future

Area	Issue	Impact
Highways Network Assets	The 2016/17 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting includes the requirement for local authorities to measure Highways Network Assets using depreciated replacement cost for the first time.	<p>The change in the measurement of Highway Network Assets will result in an adjustment to the opening balance of these assets at 1 April 2016.</p> <p>The value of these assets will be significant to the Council's balance sheet. There is a higher inherent risk of material misstatement due to value of this class of assets.</p> <p>We are providing training sessions to clients to support key officers with the new accounting requirements and our expectations as your auditors.</p>
Faster close	From the 2017/18 financial year, the deadline for preparing the Council's financial statements will move to 31 May from 30 June. In addition, the deadline for completing the statutory audit will move to 31 July from 30 September.	<p>The faster closedown timetable requires the Council to adjust its timetable for preparing the accounts, as well as the budget setting process and the timing of committee meetings.</p> <p>It requires upfront planning to identify areas of the accounts that can be prepared earlier, before the 31 March, and there will be a need to establish robust basis for estimations across a wider number of entries in the financial statements.</p> <p>For the 2016/17 audit, we are working with officers to bring our work forward to support the transition ahead of the new deadlines in 2017/18.</p>
Appointment of auditors	<p>The current audit contracts expire on the completion of the 2017/18 audit. The expiry of contracts also marks the end of the current mandatory regime for auditor appointments.</p> <p>After this the Council can exercise choice about whether it decides to opt in to the authorised national scheme, or whether to make other arrangements to appoint its own auditors.</p> <p>In July 2016, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local</p>	<p>Appointment of auditors for the 2018/19 financial year is required by 31 December 2017.</p> <p>The Council should consider whether it intends to opt into the appointed person scheme to appoint your auditors from 2018/19 or whether the Council should make its own arrangements following the legislative requirements.</p>

Area	Issue	Impact
	<p>Government specified Public Sector Audit Appointments limited (PSAA) as an appointing person under regulation 3 of the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015.</p> <p>PSAA will be able to appoint an auditor to relevant authorities that choose to opt into its national collective scheme.</p>	

Appendix A

Audit Fees



Appendix A Audit Fees

Our fee for the 2015/16 audit is in line with the scale fee set by the PSAA and reported in our Annual Results Report.

Description	Final Fee 2015/16 £	Planned Fee 2015/16 £	Scale Fee 2015/16 £	Final Fee 2014/15 £
Total Audit Fee – Code work	109,958	109,958	109,958	161,161
Total Audit Fee – Fee for objections	TBC ¹	TBC	0	0
Total Audit Fee – pension fund	24,108	24,108	24,108	24,108

¹ The work in relation to considering and responding to the objection is not included within the scale fee set by PSAA. The work to consider the objection is ongoing and the fee will be reported when the work is complete.

We confirm that the only non-audit work outside of the PSAA's requirements undertaken in 2015/16 relates to the certification of the Council's Major Transport Claim with a fee of £15,100.

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ED None

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