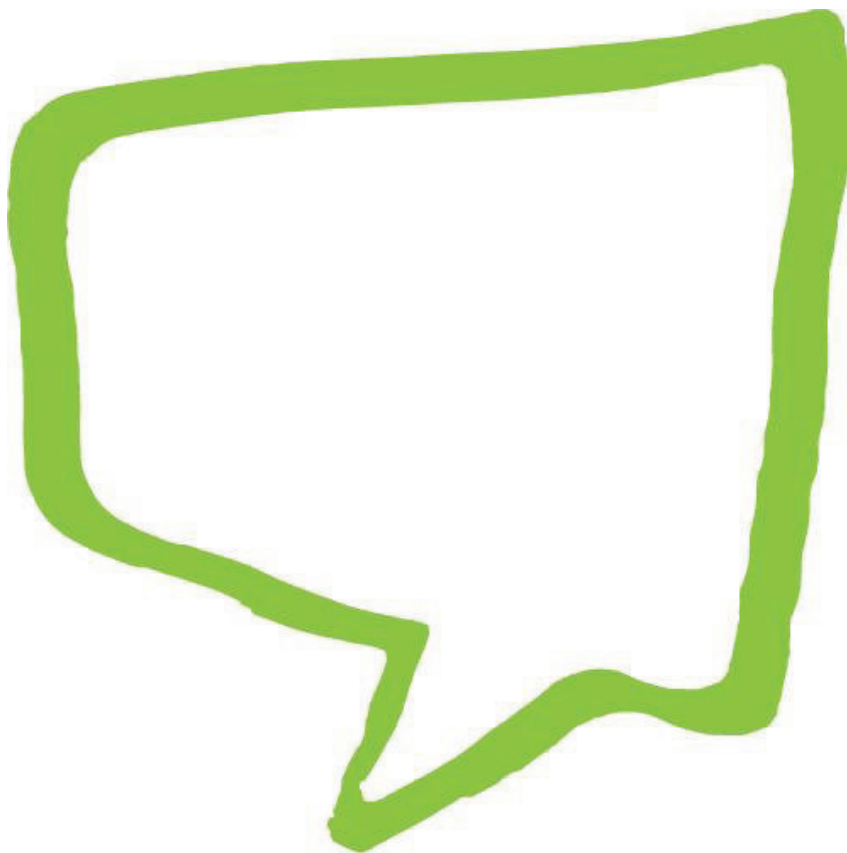


Audit Opinion Plan

Somerset County Council

Audit 2009/10

June 2010



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Status of our reports

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

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

- 1 This plan sets out the audit work that we propose to undertake for the audit of the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2010. The plan is based on the Audit Commission's risk-based approach to audit planning. It reflects:
 - audit work specified by the Audit Commission for 2009/10;
 - current national risks relevant to your local circumstances; and
 - your local risks.

Responsibilities

- 2 The Audit Commission's Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies sets out the respective responsibilities of the auditor and the audited body. The Audit Commission has issued a copy of the Statement to every audited body.
- 3 The Statement summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body begin and end, and our audit work is undertaken in the context of these responsibilities.
- 4 We comply with the statutory requirements governing our audit work, in particular:
 - the Audit Commission Act 1998; and
 - the Code of Audit Practice.

Fee for the audit of financial statements

- 5 The overall fee for the audit of the financial statements is £132,400 as indicated in our Annual Audit Fee 2009/10 letter of 13 March 2009.
- 6 In setting the fee, we have assumed that:
 - the level of risk in relation to the audit of accounts is higher owing to the introduction of SAP; and
 - Internal Audit undertakes appropriate work on all material systems and this is available for our review.
- 7 Where these assumptions are not met, I will be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee. Where this is the case, we will discuss this in the first instance with the Corporate Director - Resources and we will issue supplements to the plan to record any revisions to the risk and the impact on the fee.
- 8 Further information on the basis for the fee is set out in Appendix 1.

Specific actions Somerset County Council could take to reduce its audit fees

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

Auditors report on the financial statements

- 10 I will carry out the audit of the financial statements in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Auditing Practices Board (APB).
- 11 I am required to issue an audit report giving my opinion on whether the accounts give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2010.

Identifying opinion audit risks

- 12 As part of our audit risk identification process, we need to fully understand the audited body to identify any risk of material misstatement whether due to fraud or error in the financial statements. We do this by:
- identifying the business risks facing the Council, including assessing your own risk management arrangements;
 - considering the financial performance of the Council;
 - assessing internal control - including reviewing the control environment, the IT control environment and Internal Audit; and
 - assessing the risk of material misstatement arising from the activities and controls within the Council's information systems.

Identification of specific risks

- 13 We have considered the additional risk that is appropriate to the current opinion audit and have set this out below.

Table 1 Specific risks

Specific opinion risks identified

Risk area	Audit response
Implementation of SAP The implementation of new corporate systems (SAP) has been challenging. Following the transition there is a risk that the shortcomings experienced are not appropriately resolved, adversely affecting the reliance being placed on financial system controls. In addition the quality of the accounts produced may be affected.	We will undertake additional year end testing of transactions and of reconciliations.
Icelandic Banks The Council has about £22 million of frozen investments remaining in Icelandic banks.	Monitor progress in recovering the money and ensure that the correct accounting treatment is used.
Changes in accounting regulations 2009/10	
Preparation for International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) The introduction of international financial reporting standards (IFRS) for 2010/11 onwards will entail the Council addressing a number of complex issues. The change will entail the re-stating of the 2009/10 closing balances into the new format. This increases the risk of error and misreporting by bodies in the financial statements.	We will work closely with officers to ensure that sufficient information is available at an early stage to re-state the 2009/10 closing balances into the IFRS format.

Risk area	Audit response
<p>Service Concessions</p> <p>The Council will have to account for 'service concessions' in 2009/10 in accordance with international financial reporting standard IFRIC12. Determining what is covered under 'service concessions' is important. The Council will need to provide evidence of this review.</p>	<p>We will discuss with officers whether the Council has any service concessions, which need to be accounted for in 2009/10 in accordance with international financial reporting standard IFRIC12.</p>
<p>Senior Officer Remuneration</p> <p>Recent amendments made to the Accounts and Audit Regulations (SI 2009/3322) issued in December 2009, mean that from 2009/10 local authorities are required to disclose the names, pay and benefits (including severance payments) of senior employees in a note to the financial statements. This is a significant issue given the ongoing media interest in public sector pay and pensions.</p>	<p>We will review the accounting treatment in the statement of accounts.</p>

Testing strategy

- 14 On the basis of risks identified above we will produce a testing strategy, which will consist of testing key controls where appropriate and substantive testing of transaction streams and material account balances at the year end. At this stage of the audit it is proposed that a substantive testing approach be followed for the majority of systems with reliance on key control testing for payroll.
- 15 Our testing can be carried out both before and after the draft financial statements have been produced.
- 16 Wherever possible, we seek to rely on the work of Internal Audit to help meet our responsibilities. For 2009/10, we have made as much use as possible of the results of their work on testing the main financial systems including the general ledger, payroll, income collection and creditor payments. However, as noted in Table 1 we have identified widespread weaknesses in the operation of key controls during the year, which will necessitate additional audit procedures. Where this occurs, we will follow the procedure set out in paragraph 7 above to agree with you the additional fee required.

Key milestones and deadlines

- 17 The Council is required to prepare the financial statements by 30 June 2010. We are required to complete our audit and issue our opinion by 30 September 2010. The key stages in the process of producing and auditing the financial statements are shown in Table 2.
- 18 We will agree with you a schedule of working papers required to support the entries in the financial statements.
- 19 We will liaise on a regular basis with the Council's key contact and review the status of all queries. If appropriate, we will meet with the Head of Finance and Property to discuss the number and importance of issues arising.

Table 2 **Proposed timetable**

Task	Deadline
Control testing	February/March 2010
Receipt of accounts	June 2010
Forwarding audit working papers to the auditor	July 2010
Start of detailed testing	July 2010
Progress meetings	Weekly
Present report to those charged with governance at the Audit Committee	23 September 2010
Issue opinion	By 30 September 2010

The audit team

20 The key members of the audit team for the 2009/10 audit are shown in the table below.

Table 3 Audit team

Name	Contact details	Responsibilities
Brian Bethell District Auditor	b-bethell@audit-commission.gov.uk 07887 825584	Responsible for the overall delivery of the audit including the quality of outputs, signing the opinion and vfm conclusion, and liaison with the Chief Executive.
Kieron Marston Audit Manager	k-marston@audit-commission.gov.uk 07769 932607	Manages and coordinates the different elements of the audit work. Key point of contact for the Corporate Director - Resources and Head of Finance and Property.
Jackie Saunders Principal Auditor/Team Leader	ja-saunders@audit-commission.gov.uk 07779 336590	Undertakes and supervises day to day delivery of audit programme

Independence and objectivity

- 21 I am not aware of any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the District Auditor and the audit staff, which we are required by auditing and ethical standards to communicate to you.
- 22 I comply with the ethical standards issued by the APB and with the Commission's requirements in respect of independence and objectivity as summarised in Appendix 2.

Meetings

- 23 The audit team will maintain knowledge of your issues to inform our risk-based audit through regular liaison with key officers. Our proposals are set out in Appendix 3.

Quality of service

- 24** We are committed to providing you with a high quality service. If you are in any way dissatisfied, or would like to discuss how we can improve our service, please contact me in the first instance. Alternatively, you may wish to contact the Head of Operations, Bill Sanderson.
- 25** If we are unable to satisfy your concerns, you have the right to make a formal complaint to the Audit Commission. The complaints procedure is set out in the leaflet 'Something to Complain About' which is available from the Commission's website or on request.

Planned outputs

- 26** Reports will be discussed and agreed with the appropriate officers before being issued to the Audit Committee.

Table 4 **Planned outputs**

Planned output	Indicative date
Opinion audit plan	June 2010
Audit of the financial systems	June 2010
Annual governance report	September 2010
Auditor's report giving an opinion on the financial statements	September 2010
Final accounts memorandum	October 2010

Appendix 1 – Basis for fee

- 1 The Audit Commission is committed to targeting its work where it will have the greatest effect, based upon assessments of risk and performance. This means planning work to address areas of risk relevant to our audit responsibilities and reflecting this in the audit fees.
- 2 The risk assessment process starts with the identification of the significant financial and operational risks applying to the Council with reference to:
 - our cumulative knowledge of the Council;
 - planning guidance issued by the Audit Commission;
 - the specific results of previous and ongoing audit work;
 - interviews with Council officers; and
 - liaison with Internal Audit.

Assumptions

- 3 In setting the fee, I have assumed that:
 - the level of risk in relation to the audit of the financial statements is higher than in 2008/09 largely because of the introduction of SAP;
 - you will inform us of significant developments impacting on the audit;
 - Internal Audit meets the appropriate professional standards;
 - Internal Audit undertakes appropriate work on all systems that provide material figures in the financial statements sufficient that we can place reliance for the purposes of our audit;
 - good quality working papers and records will be provided to support the financial statements by 30 June 2010;
 - requested information will be provided within agreed timescales;
 - prompt responses will be provided to draft reports; and
 - additional work will not be required to address questions or objections raised by local government electors.
- 4 Where these assumptions are not met, I will be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee.

Appendix 2 – Independence and objectivity

- 1 Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are required to comply with the Commission's Code of Audit Practice and Standing Guidance for Auditors, which defines the terms of the appointment. When auditing the financial statements, auditors are also required to comply with auditing standards and ethical standards issued by the Auditing Practices Board (APB).
- 2 The main requirements of the Code of Audit Practice, Standing Guidance for Auditors and the standards are summarised below.
- 3 International Standard on Auditing (UK and Ireland) 260 (Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance) requires that the appointed auditor:
 - discloses in writing all relationships that may bear on the auditor's objectivity and independence, the related safeguards put in place to protect against these threats and the total amount of fee that the auditor has charged the client; and
 - confirms in writing that the APB's ethical standards are complied with and that, in the auditor's professional judgement, they are independent and their objectivity is not compromised

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

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

Appendix 2 – Independence and objectivity

- 5 The Standing Guidance for Auditors includes a number of specific rules. The key rules relevant to this audit appointment are as follows.
- Appointed auditors should not perform additional work for an audited body (ie work over and above the minimum required to meet their statutory responsibilities) if it would compromise their independence or might give rise to a reasonable perception that their independence could be compromised. Where the audited body invites the auditor to carry out risk-based work in a particular area that cannot otherwise be justified as necessary to support the auditor's opinion and conclusions, it should be clearly differentiated within the Audit and Inspection Plan as being 'additional work' and charged for separately from the normal audit fee.
 - Auditors should not accept engagements that involve commenting on the performance of other auditors appointed by the Commission on Commission work without first consulting the Commission.
 - The District Auditor responsible for the audit should, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, be changed at least once every five years.
 - The District Auditor and senior members of the audit team are prevented from taking part in political activity on behalf of a political party, or special interest group, whose activities relate directly to the functions of local government or NHS bodies in general, or to a particular local government or NHS body.
- 6 The District Auditor and members of the audit team must abide by the Commission's policy on gifts, hospitality and entertainment.

Appendix 3 – Working together

Meetings

- 1 The audit team will maintain knowledge of your issues to inform our risk-based audit through regular liaison with key officers.
- 2 Our proposal for the meetings is as follows.

Table 5 Proposed meetings with officers

Council officers	Audit Commission staff	Timing	Purpose
Corporate Director - Resources	District Auditor Audit Manager and Team Leader	bi-monthly	General update plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • audit plan • accounts progress • annual governance report
Head of Finance and Property	Audit Manager and Team Leader	Quarterly	Update on audit issues.
Group Manager (Governance)	Audit Manager and Team Leader	Quarterly	Update on audit issues together with IA liaison.
Chair of Audit Committee	District Auditor, Audit Manager and Team Leader as appropriate	As determined by the Committee	Formal reporting of: Audit Plan April 2010, Annual governance report (23 September 2010) Other issues as appropriate

Sustainability

- 3 The Audit Commission is committed to promoting sustainability in our working practices and we will actively consider opportunities to reduce our impact on the environment. This will include:
 - reducing paper flow by encouraging you to submit documentation and working papers electronically;
 - use of video and telephone conferencing for meetings as appropriate; and
 - reducing travel.

The Audit Commission

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

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

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

Copies of this report

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