

Scottish Ambulance Service

External Audit Annual Plan

Year ended 31 March 2025

January 2025



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Introduction

Purpose

This audit plan highlights the key elements of our proposed audit strategy and provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory external audit of Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) and its Group for the year ended 31 March 2025 for those charged with governance.

The main elements of the audit include:

- an audit of the financial statements and an opinion on whether they give a true and fair view and are free from material misstatement;
- an audit opinion on regularity and other statutory information published with the financial statements in the annual report and accounts, including the Performance Report, Governance Statement, and the Remuneration and Staff Report;
- consideration of arrangements in relation to wider scope areas: financial management; financial sustainability; vision, leadership and governance; and use of resources to improve outcomes; and
- provision of an Independent Auditor's Report expressing our opinions on the different elements of the annual report and accounts and an Annual Audit Report setting out conclusions on the wider scope areas.

Responsibilities of the auditor and SAS

The [Code of Audit Practice](#) outlines the responsibilities of external auditors appointed by the Auditor General for Scotland and it is a condition of our appointment that we follow it.

Auditor responsibilities are derived from statute, International Standards on Auditing (UK) and the Ethical Standard for auditors, other professional requirements and best practice, the Code of Audit Practice and guidance from Audit Scotland.

SAS has primary responsibility for ensuring the proper financial stewardship of public funds. This includes preparing a set of annual report and accounts that are in accordance with proper accounting practices. SAS is also responsible for complying with legislation and putting arrangements in place for governance and propriety that enable it to successfully deliver its objectives.

[Appendix 2](#) provides further details of our respective responsibilities.

Adding Value through the Audit

All of our clients demand of us a positive contribution to meeting their ever-changing business needs. Our aim is to add value through our external audit work by being constructive and forward looking, by identifying areas of improvement and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In this way, we aim to help promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making and more effective use of resources.

Feedback

Any comments you may have on the service we provide, the quality of our work, and our reports would be greatly appreciated at any time. Comments can be reported directly to any member of your audit team.

This plan has been prepared for the sole use of those charged with governance and management and should not be relied upon by third parties. No responsibility is assumed by Azets Audit Services to third parties.

Openness and transparency

This report will be published on Audit Scotland's website <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/>

Audit scope and general approach

Risk-based audit approach

Our objective when performing an audit is to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement and to issue an auditor's report that includes our auditor's opinion.

As part of our risk-based audit approach, we will:

- Perform risk assessment procedures including updating our understanding of SAS and its Group, including its environment, the financial reporting framework and its system of internal control;
- Review the design and implementation of key internal controls;
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, at the financial statement level and the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures;
- Design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, to obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion; and
- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit recognising that circumstances may exist that cause the financial statements to be materially misstated.

We will undertake a variety of audit procedures designed to provide us with sufficient evidence to give us reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error.

Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.

We include an explanation in the auditor's report of the extent to which the audit was capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud and respective responsibilities for prevention and detection of fraud.

Communication with those charged with governance

Auditing standards require us to make certain communications throughout the audit to those charged with governance. These communications will be through the Audit and Risk Committee.

Partnership working

We coordinate our work with Audit Scotland, internal audit, other external auditors and relevant scrutiny bodies, recognising the increasing integration of service delivery and partnership working within the public sector.

Audit Scotland

Although we are independent of Audit Scotland and are responsible for forming our own views and opinions, we do work closely with Audit Scotland throughout the audit. This helps identify common priorities and risks, treat issues consistently across the sector, and improve audit quality and efficiency. We share information about identified risks, good practices and barriers to improvement so that lessons to be learnt and knowledge of what works can be disseminated to all relevant bodies.

Audit Scotland undertakes national performance audits on issues affecting the public sector. We may also be required to provide information to Audit Scotland to support the national performance audits and we may review SAS's arrangements for taking action on any issues reported in the national performance reports which have a local impact. We also consider the extent to which SAS uses the national performance reports as a means to help improve performance at the local level.

During the year we may also be required to provide information to Audit Scotland to support the national performance audits.

Shared systems and functions

Audit Scotland encourages auditors to seek efficiencies and avoid duplication of effort by liaising closely with other external auditors, agreeing an appropriate division of work and sharing audit findings. Assurance reports are prepared by service auditors in the health sector covering the national systems / arrangements. We consider the audit assurance reports when evaluating SAS's systems.

Delivering the audit

Hybrid audit approach

We adopt a hybrid approach to our audit which combines on-site visits with remote working; learning from the better practices developed during the pandemic.

All of our people have the equipment, technology and systems to allow them to work remotely or on-site, including secure access to all necessary data and information. All of our staff are fully contactable by email, phone call and video-conferencing. Meetings can be held over Microsoft Teams or by telephone.

We employ greater use of technology to examine evidence, but only where we have assessed both the sufficiency and appropriateness of the audit evidence produced.

Secure sharing of information

We use a cloud-based file sharing service 'Inflo' that enables users to easily and securely exchange documents and provides a single repository for audit evidence.

Regular contact

During the 'fieldwork' phases of our audit, we will arrange regular catch-ups with key personnel to discuss the progress of the audit. The frequency of these meetings will be discussed and agreed with management.

Materiality

We apply the concept of materiality both in planning and performing the audit, and in evaluating the effect of identified misstatements on the audit and of uncorrected misstatements.

Judgments about materiality are made in the light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by our perception of the financial information needs of users of the financial statements, and by the size or nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both. The basis for our assessment of materiality for the year is set out in [Appendix 1](#).

Planning Materiality: We have set our materiality at 2% of gross expenditure based on the audited financial statements for 2023/24, resulting in £8.931million for the Board and £8.934million for the Group.

Performance Materiality: Using our professional judgement, we have assessed performance materiality at 75% of planning materiality, resulting in £6.698million for the Board and £6.700million for the Group.

Reporting threshold: We are required to report to those charged with governance on all unadjusted misstatements more than the 'reporting threshold' amount. We have set this at approximately 5% of planning materiality, resulting in £0.447million for the Board and £0.447million for the Group.

Specific Materiality: We have applied a lower materiality threshold for disclosures within the Remuneration Report to Senior Management and Board Member Remuneration Tables. Due to the public interest in senior remuneration disclosures, we apply specific audit procedures to this work and set a lower materiality level for this area.

We design our procedures to detect errors in specific accounts at a lower level of precision which we have determined to be applicable for senior remuneration disclosures. We evaluate errors in the remuneration report for both quantitative and qualitative factors against this lower level of materiality. We will apply heightened auditor focus in the completeness and clarity of disclosures in this area and will request amendments to be made if any errors would alter the bandings reported for any individual.

Accounting systems and internal controls

The purpose of an audit is to express an opinion on the financial statements. We will follow a substantive testing approach to gain audit assurance rather than relying on tests of controls. As part of our work, we consider certain internal controls relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such that we are able to design appropriate audit procedures. However, this work does not cover all internal controls and is not designed for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal controls. If, as part of our consideration of internal controls, we identify significant deficiencies in controls, we will report these to you in writing.

Specialised skill or knowledge required to complete the audit procedures

We will consult internally with our Technology Risk team for them to support the audit team by assessing the information technology general controls (ITGC) of the following systems:

- Finance System (eFinancials)
- Active Directory (Network Access)
- Payroll System (provided by National Services Scotland)

Going Concern

Management responsibility

Management is required to make and document an assessment of whether SAS and its Group is a going concern when preparing the financial statements. The review period should cover at least 12 months from the date of approval of the financial statements. Management are also required to make balanced, proportionate and clear disclosures about going concern within the financial statements where material uncertainties exist in order to give a true and fair view.

Auditor responsibility

Under ISA (UK) 570, we are required to consider the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements and consider whether there are material uncertainties about

SAS and its Group's ability to continue as a going concern that need to be disclosed in the financial statements.

In assessing going concern, we will consider the guidance published in the Government's Financial Reporting Manual 2024/25 and Practice Note 10 (PN10), which focuses on the anticipated future provision of services in the public sector rather than the future existence of the entity itself.

Prevention and detection of fraud or error

In order to discharge our responsibilities regarding fraud and irregularity we require any fraud or irregularity issues to be reported to us as they arise. In particular we require to be notified of all frauds which:

- Involve the misappropriation of theft of assets or cash which are facilitated by weaknesses in internal control and;
- Are over £5,000.

We also require a historic record of instances of fraud or irregularity to be maintained and a summary to be made available to us after each year end.

National Fraud Initiative

The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) in Scotland is a biennial counter-fraud exercise led by Audit Scotland and overseen by the Public Sector Fraud Authority for the UK. It uses technology to compare information held by different public bodies, and on different financial systems that might suggest the existence of fraud or error.

Participating bodies will submit datasets for matching in October 2024 and November 2024 and will receive matches for investigation in December 2024 and January 2025.

We will monitor SAS's participation and progress and, where appropriate, include references to NFI in our 2024/25 Annual Audit Report.

Wider audit scope work

The special accountabilities that attach to the conduct of public business, and the use of public money, mean that public sector audits must be planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector. This means providing assurance, not only on the financial statements, but providing audit judgements and conclusions on the appropriateness, effectiveness and impact of corporate governance and performance management arrangements and financial sustainability. [Appendix 2](#) provides detail of the wider scope areas of public sector audit work. Our initial risk assessment and scope of work planned for 2024/25 is outlined in the "Wider scope of public audit" section of this plan.

National risk assessment

Where particular areas of national or sectoral risk have been identified by the Auditor General, they will request auditors to consider and report on those risks as they apply at a local level. For 2024/25 no such risks have been specified. Nevertheless, the arrangements for responding to climate change continues to be an area of particular focus.

Climate change

In 2022/23 we were required to gather information on SAS's response to climate change. Audit Scotland has reviewed the auditor returns assessing climate change and will share the findings from the review with auditors to provide helpful background information for 2024/25 annual audit work.

In addition, Audit Scotland will:

- publish a Good Practice Note on disclosures related to climate change following a review of public bodies' 2022/23 and 2023/24 annual accounts
- provide guidance to auditors on auditing climate change disclosures within the 2024/25 annual accounts of public bodies.

Best Value

Ministerial guidance to Accountable Officers for public bodies sets out their duty to ensure that arrangements are in place to secure Best Value in public services.

Through our wider scope audit work, we will consider the arrangements put in place by the Accountable Officer to meet these Best Value obligations.

Reporting our findings

At the conclusion of the audit we will issue:

- an independent auditor's report setting out our formal audit opinions within the annual report and accounts, and;
- an annual audit report describing our audit findings, conclusions on key audit risks, judgements on the pace and depth of improvement on the wider scope areas, and any recommendations.

Definitions

We will use the following gradings to provide an overall assessment of the arrangements in place as they relate to the wider scope areas. The text provides a guide to the key criteria we use in the assessment, although not all of the criteria may exist in every case.



Group audit scope and risk assessment

As Group auditor under ISA (UK) 600 (Revised September 2022) we are required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding the financial information of the components and the consolidation process to express an opinion on whether the group financial statements are prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework.

The auditing standard for group engagements has been revised, as a result the key changes that are reflected in the audit plan are:

- Revisions to the definitions of a group and component extend the scope of the ISA to encompass a wider range of group scenarios. This means that a single legal entity could fall under the scope of the group's ISA based on its internal structure, while multiple legal entities may sometimes be defined as a single component;
- There is increased leadership responsibilities and involvement requirements for the group engagement leader, particularly when component auditors are utilised;
- There is a specific requirement for all component auditors to confirm their ability and willingness to comply with the FRC's Ethical Standard;
- The analytical/desktop review designation has been removed from the scope of procedures performed over a component in response to risk.

Group audit scope

The Group consists of the following entities:

Component	Nature and extent of further audit procedures	Planned audit approach
Scottish Ambulance Service	Full scope	Full scope statutory audit, as set out in this audit plan.
Scottish Ambulance Service Endowment Fund	None	No procedures planned.

Definitions:

Full Scope Design and perform further audit procedures on the entire financial information of the component, beyond procedures completed to review the consolidation.

Specific Scope Design and perform further audit procedures on one or more classes of transactions, account balances or disclosures, beyond procedures completed to review the consolidation.

None No further audit procedures required, beyond procedures completed to review the consolidation.

Risks at the component-level

The risks identified at SAS are set out in this external audit plan. There are no other significant risks identified in any of the other components above in respect of the Group audit.

Note that a component may require a statutory audit under UK or overseas company law irrespective of whether an audit is required for group reporting purposes. Management should therefore satisfy themselves that all UK and overseas company law requirements are adhered to on a company-by-company basis.

Financial statements - significant audit risks

Significant risks are risks that require special audit consideration and include identified risks of material misstatement that:

- Our risk assessment procedures have identified as being close to the upper range of the spectrum of inherent risk due to their nature and a combination of the likelihood and potential magnitude of misstatement; or
- Are required to be treated as significant risks due to requirements of ISAs (UK), for example in relation to management override of internal controls.

Significant risks at the financial statement level

The table below summarises significant risks of material misstatement identified at the financial statement level. These risks are considered to have a pervasive impact on the financial statements as a whole and potentially affect many assertions for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures.

Management override of controls (Board and group)	Planned audit procedures
Auditing Standards require auditors to treat management override of controls as a significant risk on all audits. This is because management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud by manipulating accounting records and overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Although the level of risk of management override of controls will vary from entity to entity, the risk is nevertheless present in all entities. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, it is a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk.	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include: • Documenting our understanding of the journals posting process and evaluating the design effectiveness of management controls over journals; • Analysing the journals listing and determining the criteria for selecting high risk and/or unusual journals; • Testing high risk and/or unusual journals posted during the year and after the draft accounts stage back to supporting documentation for appropriateness, corroboration and to ensure approval has been

Management override of controls (Board and group)	Planned audit procedures
Specific areas of potential risk include manual journals, management estimates and judgements and one-off transactions outside the ordinary course of the business. Risk of material misstatement: Very High	undertaken in line with the SAS's journals policy; • Gaining an understanding of the key accounting estimates and critical judgements made by management. We will challenge assumptions and consider for reasonableness and indicators of bias which could result in material misstatement due to fraud; and • Evaluating the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.

Significant risks at the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures

Fraud in revenue recognition (Board and group) - Rebutted	Audit approach
Material misstatement due to fraudulent financial reporting relating to revenue recognition is a presumed risk in ISA 240. Having considered the nature of the income streams at SAS, we consider that the risk of fraud in revenue recognition can be rebutted on all income streams because: • There is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition; • Opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are limited due to the majority of revenue received being funding from the Scottish Government; • Income from services commissioned from other NHS Scotland bodies are well forecasted and agreed to in funding letters/inter-Board funding agreements, reducing the opportunity for manipulation; and • There is a low opportunity to manipulate other income since it is non complex and there are sufficient controls in place to prevent and detect fraud from other income streams, we therefore believe that the risk of material fraud is low.	Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA 240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Scottish Ambulance Service, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition for all revenue streams can be rebutted because: • There is little opportunity to manipulate revenue recognition in any meaningful way or to adopt aggressive revenue recognition policies. Therefore, we do not consider this to be a significant risk for the Scottish Ambulance Service and the Group.

Fraud in expenditure recognition (Board and group)	Audit approach
We have also considered Practice Note 10, which comments that for certain public bodies, the risk of manipulating expenditure could exceed the risk of the manipulation of revenue. We have therefore also considered the risk of fraud in expenditure at SAS. Given the financial pressures facing the public sector as a whole, there is an inherent fraud risk associated with the recording of expenditure around the year end leading to a material misstatement in the reported financial position. Inherent risk of material misstatement: • Non-pay expenditure (completeness): High • Accruals (completeness): High	We will perform the below procedures based on their value within the financial statements: • Documenting our understanding of SAS's systems for expenditure to identify significant classes of transactions, account balances and disclosures with a risk of material misstatement in the financial statements; • Evaluating the design of the controls in the key accounting systems, where a risk of material misstatement was identified, by performing a walkthrough of the systems; • Evaluating the Board's accounting policies for recognition of expenditure and compliance with the FReM; • Search for unrecorded liabilities by performing a substantive sample test of invoices input onto the accounts payable system post period end; and • Search for unrecorded liabilities by reviewing cash payments post period end.

Valuation of land and buildings (key accounting estimate) (Board and group)	Planned audit procedures
SAS held land and buildings with a net book value of £24.928million at 31 March 2024, with valuations of all land and building assets reassessed by valuers under a 5-year programme of professional valuations and adjusted in intervening years to take account of movements in prices since the latest valuation. Management engage the services of a qualified valuer, who is a Regulated Member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) to undertake these valuations during the year. The valuations involve a wide range of assumptions and source data and are therefore sensitive to changes in market conditions. ISAs (UK) 500 and 540 require us to undertake audit procedures on the use of external expert valuers and the methods, assumptions and source data underlying the fair value estimates. This represents a key accounting estimate made by management within the financial statements due to the size of the values involved, the subjectivity of the measurement and the sensitive nature of the estimate to changes in key assumptions. We have therefore identified the valuation of land and buildings as a significant risk. We will further pinpoint this risk to specific assets, or asset types, on receipt of the draft financial	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include: • Evaluating management processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to the valuation experts and the scope of their work; • Evaluating the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert; • Considering the basis on which the valuations are carried out and challenging the key assumptions applied; • Evaluating the reasonableness of the valuation movements for assets revalued during the year, with reference to market data; • For unusual or unexpected valuation movements, testing the information used by the valuer to ensure it is complete and consistent with our understanding; • Ensuring revaluations made during the year have been input correctly to the fixed asset register and the accounting treatment within the financial statements is correct; and • Evaluating the assumptions made by management for any assets not revalued during the year and how management are satisfied that these are not materially different to the current value.

Valuation of land and buildings (key accounting estimate) (Board and group)	Planned audit procedures
statements and the year-end updated asset valuations to those assets where the in-year valuation movements falls outside of our expectations. Inherent risk of material misstatement: • Land and Buildings (valuation): High	

Provisions – (key accounting estimate (Board and group))	Planned audit procedures
The Board's financial statements include provisions for legal obligations in respect of: • Clinical and medical obligations • Participation in CNORIS (Clinical Negligence and Other Risks Indemnity Scheme); and • Pensions and similar obligations There is a significant degree of subjectivity in the measurement and valuation of these provisions. This subjectivity represents an increased risk of misstatement in the financial statements. Inherent risk of material misstatement: Provisions (Valuation): High	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include: • Reviewing management's estimation for the provisions and related disclosures; • Considering compliance with the requirements of the FreM and NHS Manual for Accounts; and • Considering the competence, capability and objectiveness of the management expert.

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 those adopted for the risks identified in this report.

Wider scope of public audit

Introduction

The Code of Audit Practice frames a significant part of our responsibilities in terms of four wider scope audit areas:

- Financial sustainability
- Financial management
- Vision, leadership and governance
- Use of resources to improve outcomes.

Our audit approach to the wider scope audit areas

Appointed auditors are required to consider the wider scope areas when:

- identifying significant audit risks at the planning stage of the audit
- reaching conclusions on those risks
- making recommendations for improvement
- where appropriate, setting out conclusions on the audited body's performance.

When reporting on such arrangements, the Code of Audit Practice requires us to structure our commentary under the four areas identified above. [Appendix 2](#) provides further detail on the definition, scope and audit considerations under each wider scope area.

Our planned audit work against these four areas is risk based and proportionate. Our initial assessment builds upon our understanding of SAS's key priorities and risks along with discussions with management and review of board and committee minutes and key strategy documents.

We have identified two significant risks in relation to financial sustainability and financial management as set out in the table below. At this stage, we have not identified any significant risks in relation to the other wider scope areas. Audit planning is a continuous process and we will report all identified significant risks, as they relate to the four wider scope areas, in our annual audit report.

Wider scope significant risks

Financial sustainability

SAS's latest medium term financial plan was approved by the Board in March 2024.

The financial plan presented a forecasted best case scenario of a deficit position of £5.1million, a likely scenario of a deficit position of £11.9million and worst case scenario of a deficit position of £15.5million by 2026/27. This budget gap is inclusive of a challenging savings target of £36million over the three year forecast period, with the assumption that 100% of savings for 2024/25 will be recurring.

The 2025/26 first pass budget was presented to the Board in November 2024. The budget showed a forecasted likely case scenario of a £17.53million deficit position after taking into account unfunded operational pressures and post COVID-19 costs. The challenging financial position for 2025/26 will form part of the updated medium term financial plan which is due to be considered by the Board in March 2025.

SAS continues to face challenges in achieving financial balance due to a mix of COVID-19 legacy and more general pressures on the health service. SAS's ability to develop and maintain its core services in a sustainable manner remains a significant challenge and risk.

Our audit response:

During our audit we will review whether SAS has appropriate arrangements in place to manage its future financial position. Our work will include an assessment of progress made in developing financially sustainable plans which reflect the medium and longer term impact of cost pressures and that continue to support the delivery of SAS's statutory functions and strategic objectives.

Financial management

In March 2024, SAS approved the 2024/25 financial plan which showed a forecasted funding gap of £18.35million after an ambitious savings target totalling £12million.

The latest full year forecast (October 2024) projects a break even position which is highly reliant on the delivery of a savings target of £12million. The savings target is on track to be met in full however, this is expected to be achieved through a higher level of non-recurring savings than previously planned.

There is a continued risk that the 2024/25 financial target will not be achieved.

Our audit response:

During our audit we will consider SAS's approach to identifying and responding to financial challenges that have occurred during the year, including consideration of the overall financial position reached by the Scottish Ambulance Service and the arrangements in place for identifying, monitoring and reporting of savings targets.

Vision, Leadership and Governance

We have not identified a significant risk in relation to SAS's arrangements for vision, leadership and governance from our initial planning and risk assessment work.

Our audit response:

As part of our work on Vision, Leadership and Governance in 2024/25 we will review, conclude and report on:

- The progress made by SAS in delivering the Strategy 2030.
- The progress made by SAS in implementing the actions within the Blueprint for Good Governance improvement plan.
- Whether SAS can demonstrate that the governance arrangements in place are appropriate and operating effectively.
- The transparency of decision-making, financial reporting and performance data and;
- Reasonableness and consistency of the governance statement in relation to other information gathered during our audit.

Use of resources to improve outcomes

We have not identified a significant risk in relation to SAS's arrangements for use of resources to improve outcomes from our initial planning and risk assessment work.

Our audit response:

As part of our work on use of resources to improve outcomes in 2024/25 we will review, conclude and report on:

- Whether SAS can evidence the achievement of value for money in the use of resources and;
- How SAS demonstrates a focus on continuous improvement in the context of continuing and significant financial and operational challenge.

Weaknesses or risks identified by auditors are only those which have come to their attention during their normal audit work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice and may not be all that exist.

Duty of Best Value

Ministerial Guidance to Accountable Officers for public bodies and the Scottish Public Finance Manual (SPFM) explain that Accountable Officers have a specific responsibility to ensure that arrangements have been made to secure Best Value. We will be carrying out a high-level review to confirm that such arrangements are in place within SAS.

Audit team and logistics

Audit team

Our audit team will be as follows:

Role	Name	Contact details
Engagement Lead	Rebecca Lister	Rebecca.Lister@azets.co.uk
Engagement Manager	Amy Hughes	Amy.Hughes@azets.co.uk
In-charge Auditor	Charlotte Barber	Charlotte.Barber@azets.co.uk

Timetable

Please find below confirmation of our proposed timetable for the audit as previously discussed with management:

Event	Date
Planning and risk assessment	17 December 2024
Reporting of plan to Audit and Risk Committee	23 January 2025
Interim audit	February 2025
Receipt of draft accounts and commencement audit fieldwork	May 2025
Audit and Risk Committee to consider accounts and audit report	12 June 2025
Board meeting to approve accounts for signing	25 June 2025
Target date for submission of signed accounts to Scottish Government	30 June 2025

Our expectations and requirements

For us to be able to complete our work in line with the agreed fee and timetable, we require the following:

- Draft financial statements to be produced to a good quality by the deadlines agreed with us. These should be complete including all notes, the Annual Report Performance Report, Accountability Report and the Governance Statement;
- The provision of good quality working papers at the same time as the draft financial statements. These will be discussed in advance to ensure clarity over our expectations;
- The provision of agreed data reports at the start of the audit, fully reconciled to the values in the accounts, to facilitate our selection of samples for testing;
- Ensuring staff are available and on site (as agreed) during the period of the audit;
- Prompt and sufficient responses to audit queries to minimise delays.

The audit process is underpinned by effective project management to co-ordinate and apply our resources efficiently to meet your deadlines. It is essential that the audit team and SAS's finance team work closely together to achieve the above timetable.

Independence, objectivity and other services provided

Auditor Independence

We confirm that we comply with the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) Ethical Standard and are able to issue an objective opinion on the financial statements. We have considered our integrity, independence and objectivity in respect of audit services provided and we do not believe that there are any significant threats or matters which should be brought to your attention.

Other services

No other services were provided by Azets to SAS or any members of the Group.

Other threats and safeguards

Other potential threats for which we have applied appropriate safeguards include:

Other threats to objectivity and independence	Safeguard implemented
The Director of Finance at Scottish Ambulance Service is the parent of an intern who was employed by Azets from June to July 2024 and is due to be commencing a training contract with Azets from August 2025.	We confirm that we have implemented internal safeguards to ensure this employee has no involvement in our audit work and that no members of staff working on the audit discuss any aspects of the audit with them. The individual concerned will not be in employment with Azets during the delivery of the 2024/25 external audit.

Audit Fees

The quality of audit work is an essential requirement in successfully delivering a fully compliant ISA and Code of Audit Practice audit. Audit Scotland sets an expected audit fee that assumes the body has sound governance arrangements in place, has been operating effectively throughout the year, prepares comprehensive and accurate unaudited accounts and meets the agreed timetable for audit.

The expected fee is reviewed by Audit Scotland each year, based on Audit Scotland's overall budget proposals. The budget proposal and fee levels (for the 2024/25 audits) have been developed in the context of a challenging economic financial environment and the challenges facing public services.

The 2024/25 expected audit fee is based on applying a 1.9% increase to the 2023/24 expected audit fee. This increase is applied on a sector basis and reflects the conditions of the public sector market.

As auditors we negotiate a fee with SAS during the planning process. The fee may be varied above the expected fee level to reflect the circumstances and local risks within the body.

The expected fee set by Audit Scotland for the 2024/25 audit of SAS is £105,680. At this stage in the audit we propose setting the 2024/25 audit fee at this level.

It is our policy to bill for overruns or scope extensions e.g., where we have incurred delays, deliverables have been late or of poor quality, where key personnel have not been available, or we have been asked to do extra work.

Fee element	2024/25	2023/24
Auditor remuneration	108,230	103,870
Pooled costs	11,220	12,560
Sectoral cap adjustment	(13,770)	(12,770)
Total fee	105,680	103,660

Appendices



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Appendix 1: Materiality

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our audit opinion, we also report to those charged with governance and management any uncorrected misstatements of lower value errors to the extent that our audit identifies these.

Under ISA (UK) 260 we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA (UK) 260 defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria.

An omission or misstatement is regarded as material if it would reasonably influence the users of the financial statements. The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our assessment of the risk profile of SAS and its Group and the needs of the users.

When planning, we make judgements about the size of misstatements which we consider to be material, and which provide a basis for determining the nature and extent of our audit procedures. Materiality is revised as our audit progresses, should we become aware of any information that would have caused us to determine a different amount had we known about it during our planning.

Our assessment, at the planning stage, of materiality for the year ended 31 March 2025 was calculated as follows.

	Group £million	SAS £million
Overall materiality for the financial statements	8.934	8.931
Performance materiality (75% of materiality)	6.700	6.698
Trivial threshold	0.447	0.447
Materiality	Our initial assessment is based on approximately 2% of gross revenue expenditure as disclosed in the 2023/24 audited annual report and accounts. We consider this to be the principal consideration for the users of the financial statements when assessing financial performance of the Group and Board. The financial statements are considered to be materially misstated where total errors exceed this value.	

Performance materiality	75% of materiality Performance materiality is the working level of materiality used throughout the audit. We use performance materiality to determine the nature, timing and extent of audit procedures carried out. We perform audit procedures on all transactions, or groups of transactions, and balances that exceed our performance materiality. This means that we perform a greater level of testing on the areas deemed to be at significant risk of material misstatement. Performance materiality is set at a value less than overall materiality for the financial statements as a whole to reduce to an appropriately low level the probability that the aggregate of the uncorrected and undetected misstatements exceed overall materiality.
Trivial threshold	5% of overall materiality for the Board and Group. Trivial misstatements are matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. Individual errors above this threshold are communicated to those charged with governance.

In addition to the above, we consider any areas for specific lower materiality.

We have applied a lower materiality threshold for disclosures within the Remuneration Report to Senior Management and Board Member Remuneration Tables. Due to the public interest in senior remuneration disclosures, we apply specific audit procedures to this work and set a lower materiality level for this area.

We design our procedures to detect errors in specific accounts at a lower level of precision which we have determined to be applicable for senior remuneration disclosures. We evaluate errors in the remuneration report for both quantitative and qualitative factors against this lower level of materiality. We will apply heightened auditor focus in the completeness and clarity of disclosures in this area and will request amendments to be made if any errors would alter the bandings reported for any individual.

Appendix 2: Responsibilities of the Auditor and SAS

The Auditor General and Audit Scotland

The Auditor General for Scotland is a Crown appointment and independent of the Scottish Government and Parliament. The Auditor General is responsible for appointing independent auditors to audit the accounts of the Scottish Government and most Scottish public bodies, including NHS bodies, and reporting on their financial health and performance.

Audit Scotland is an independent statutory body that co-ordinates and supports the delivery of high-quality public sector audit in Scotland. Audit Scotland oversees the appointment and performance of auditors, provides technical support, delivers performance audit and Best Value work programmes and undertakes financial audits of public bodies.

Auditor responsibilities

Code of Audit Practice

The Code of Audit Practice (the [2021 Code](#)) describes the high-level, principles-based purpose and scope of public audit in Scotland.

The Code of Audit Practice outlines the responsibilities of external auditors appointed by the Auditor General and it is a condition of our appointment that we follow it.

Our responsibilities

Auditor responsibilities are derived from the Code, statute, International Standards on Auditing (UK) and the Ethical Standard for auditors, other professional requirements and best practice, and guidance from Audit Scotland.

We are responsible for the audit of the accounts and the wider-scope responsibilities explained below. We act independently in carrying out our role and in exercising professional judgement. We report to SAS and others, including Audit Scotland, on the results of our audit work.

Weaknesses or risks, including fraud and other irregularities, identified by auditors, are only those which come to our attention during our normal audit work in accordance with the Code and may not be all that exist.

Wider scope audit work

Reflecting the fact that public money is involved, public audit is planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector.

The wider scope audit specified by the Code broadens the audit of the accounts to include additional aspects or risks in areas of financial management; financial sustainability; vision, leadership and governance; and use of resources to improve outcomes.

Financial management



Financial management means having sound budgetary processes. Audited bodies require to understand the financial environment and whether their internal controls are operating effectively.

Auditor considerations

Auditors consider whether the body has effective arrangements to secure sound financial management. This includes the strength of the financial management culture, accountability, and arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and other irregularities.

Financial sustainability



Financial sustainability means being able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Auditor considerations

Auditors consider the extent to which audited bodies show regard to financial sustainability. They look ahead to the medium term (two to five years) and longer term (over five years) to consider whether the body is planning effectively so it can continue to deliver services.

Vision, leadership and governance

Audited bodies must have a clear vision and strategy and set priorities for improvement within this vision and strategy. They work together with partners and communities to improve outcomes and foster a culture of innovation.



Auditor considerations

Auditors consider the clarity of plans to implement the vision, strategy and priorities adopted by the leaders of the audited body. Auditors also consider the effectiveness of governance arrangements for delivery, including openness and transparency of decision-making; robustness of scrutiny and shared working arrangements; and reporting of decisions and outcomes, and financial and performance information.

Use of resources to improve outcomes

Audited bodies need to make best use of their resources to meet stated outcomes and improvement objectives, through effective planning and working with strategic partners and communities. This includes demonstrating economy, efficiency and effectiveness through the use of financial and other resources, and reporting performance against outcomes.



Auditor considerations

Auditors consider the clarity of arrangements in place to ensure that resources are deployed to improve strategic outcomes, meet the needs of service users taking account of inequalities, and deliver continuous improvement in priority services.

Audit quality

The Auditor General and the Accounts Commission require assurance on the quality of public audit in Scotland through comprehensive audit quality arrangements that apply to all audit work and providers. These arrangements recognise the importance of audit quality to the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission and provide regular reporting on audit quality and performance.

Audit Scotland maintains and delivers an [Audit Quality Framework](#).

The most recent audit quality report can be found at [Quality of public audit in Scotland: Annual report 2023/24 | Audit Scotland](#)

Board responsibilities

SAS has 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 enables it to successfully deliver its objectives. The features of proper financial stewardship include the following:

Area	Board responsibilities
Corporate governance	SAS is responsible for establishing arrangements to ensure the proper conduct of its affairs including the legality of activities and transactions, and for monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements. Those charged with governance should be involved in monitoring these arrangements.
Financial statements and related reports	SAS has responsibility for: • preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view of the financial position and its expenditure and income, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework and relevant legislation; • maintaining accounting records and working papers that have been prepared to an acceptable professional standard and support the balances and transactions in its financial statements and related disclosures; • ensuring the regularity of transactions, by putting in place systems of internal control to ensure that they are in accordance with the appropriate authority; and • preparing and publishing, along with the financial statements, an annual governance statement, management commentary (or equivalent) and a remuneration report in accordance with prescribed requirements. Management commentaries should be fair, balanced and understandable. Management is responsible, with the oversight of those charged with governance, for communicating relevant information to users about the entity and its financial performance, including providing adequate disclosures in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework. The relevant information should be communicated clearly and concisely. SAS is responsible for developing and implementing effective systems of internal control as well as financial, operational and

Area	Board responsibilities
	compliance controls. These systems should support the achievement of its objectives and safeguard and secure value for money from the public funds at its disposal. SAS is also responsible for establishing effective and appropriate internal audit and risk-management functions.
Standards of conduct for prevention and detection of fraud and error	SAS is responsible for establishing arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and irregularities, bribery and corruption and also to ensure that its affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of conduct by putting proper arrangements in place.
Financial position	SAS is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to ensure the financial position is soundly based having regard to: • Such financial monitoring and reporting arrangements as may be specified; • Compliance with statutory financial requirements and achievement of financial targets; • Balances and reserves, including strategies about levels and their future use; • Plans to deal with uncertainty in the medium and long term; and • The impact of planned future policies and foreseeable developments on the financial position.
Best value	The Scottish Public Finance Manual sets out that accountable officers appointed by the Principal Accountable Officer for the Scottish Administration have a specific responsibility to ensure that arrangements have been made to secure Best Value. Accountable Officers are required to ensure accountability and transparency through effective performance reporting for both internal and external stakeholders.

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