

Falkirk Council Annual Audit Plan 2023/24



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for Falkirk Council
March 2024

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Introduction

Summary of planned audit work

1. This document summarises the work plan for the 2023/24 audit of Falkirk Council. 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 other statutory information published with the financial statements in the annual accounts, including the Performance Report, the Annual Governance Statement, and the Remuneration 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
- consideration of Best Value arrangements
- providing assurance on the Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim, Non-Domestic Rates Return and the Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) return
- review of Falkirk Council's arrangements for preparing and publishing statutory performance information
- provision of an Independent Auditor's Report expressing my opinions on the different elements of the annual accounts and an Annual Audit Report setting out conclusions on the wider scope areas.

Respective responsibilities of the auditor and Falkirk Council

2. The [Code of Audit Practice](#) sets out in detail the respective responsibilities of the auditor and Falkirk Council (the council). Key responsibilities are summarised below.

Auditor responsibilities

3. My responsibilities as appointed auditor are established by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and the Code of Audit Practice (including [supplementary guidance](#)) and guided by the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard.

4. Auditors in the public sector give an independent opinion on the financial statements and other information within the annual accounts. We also review and report on the wider scope arrangements in place at the council. In doing this, we aim to support improvement and accountability.

Falkirk Council's responsibilities

5. The council is responsible for maintaining adequate accounting records and internal controls, and preparing financial statements for audit that give a true and fair view. They are also required to produce other reports in the annual accounts in accordance with statutory requirements.

6. The council has the primary responsibility for ensuring the proper financial stewardship of public funds, compliance with relevant legislation, and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety, and regularity that enable them to deliver their objectives.

Adding Value

7. My team and I aim to add value by: tailoring audit work to the circumstances of the council and the audit risks identified; being constructive and forward looking; providing independent conclusions; attending meetings of the Audit Committee; and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In so doing, we will help the council promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making, and more effective use of resources.

Annual accounts

Introduction

8. The annual accounts are an essential part of demonstrating the council's stewardship of resources and its performance in the use of those resources.

9. As appointed auditor, I am required to perform an audit of the financial statements, consider other information within the annual accounts, and express a number of audit opinions in an Independent Auditor's Report in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) in the UK, Practice Note 10 from the Public Audit Forum which interprets the ISAs for the public sector, and guidance from Audit Scotland.

10. My team and I focus our work on the areas of highest risk. As part of our planning process, we perform a risk assessment highlighting the audit risks relating to each of the main financial systems relevant to the production of the financial statements.

Materiality

11. The concept of materiality is applied by auditors in planning and performing the audit, and in evaluating the effect of any uncorrected misstatements on the financial statements. I am required to plan my audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement. The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement over both the amount and the nature of the misstatement.

Materiality levels for the 2023/24 audit

12. The materiality values for Falkirk Council and its group are set out in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1

2023/24 Materiality levels for Falkirk Council and its group

Materiality	Council and Group
Planning materiality – This is the figure we calculate to assess the overall impact of audit adjustments on the financial statements. Materiality has been set based on our assessment of the needs of the users of the financial statements and the nature of the council's operations. For the year ended 31 March 2024, we have set our materiality at 2% of gross expenditure based on the audited financial statements for 2022/23.	£17.2 million
Performance materiality – This acts as a trigger point. If the aggregate of errors identified during the financial statements audit exceeds performance	£10.3 million

materiality, this could indicate that further audit procedures are required. Using our professional judgement, we have assessed performance materiality at 60% of planning materiality.

Reporting threshold (i.e. clearly trivial) – We are required to report to those charged with governance on all unadjusted misstatements more than the 'reporting threshold' amount.	£340,000
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Source: Audit Scotland

Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

13. Our risk assessment draws on our cumulative knowledge of the council, its major transaction streams, key systems of internal control, and risk management processes. It is informed by our discussions with management, meetings with internal audit, attendance at committees, and a review of supporting information.

14. Audit risk assessment is an iterative and dynamic process. Our assessment of risks set out in this plan may change as more information and evidence becomes available during the progress of the audit. Where such changes occur, we will advise management, and where relevant, report them to those charged with governance.

15. Based on our risk assessment process, we identified the following significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements. These are risks which have the greatest impact on our planned audit procedures. [Exhibit 2](#) summarises the nature of the risks, management's sources of assurance over these risks, and the further audit procedures we plan to perform to gain assurance over the risks.

Exhibit 2

2023/24 Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

Significant risk of material misstatement	Management's sources of assurance	Planned audit response
<p>1. Risk of material misstatement due to fraud caused by management override of controls</p> <p>As stated in ISA (UK) 240, management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of management's ability to override controls</p>	<p>Owing to the nature of this risk, assurances from management are not applicable in this instance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the design and implementation of controls over journal entry processing. Make inquiries of individuals involved in the financial reporting process about inappropriate or unusual activity relating to the processing of journal entries and other adjustments. Test journals at the year-end and post-closing entries and focus on significant risk areas. Consider the need to test journal entries and other adjustments throughout the year.

Significant risk of material misstatement	Management's sources of assurance	Planned audit response
that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate significant transactions outside the normal course of business. • Assess the adequacy of controls in place for identifying and disclosing related party relationship and transactions in the financial statements. • Assess any changes to the methods and underlying assumptions used to prepare accounting estimates compared to the prior year. • Substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions around the year-end to confirm they are accounted for in the correct financial year. • Focussed testing of accounting accruals and prepayments.

Source: Audit Scotland

16. As set out in ISA (UK) 240: *The auditor's responsibilities relating to fraud in an audit of financial statement*, there is a presumed risk of fraud over the recognition of revenue. There is a risk that revenue may be misstated resulting in a material misstatement in the financial statements.

17. We have rebutted this risk for Falkirk Council as funding received from the Scottish Government is clearly communicated and can be readily agreed to third party confirmations. In addition, the council's other income streams comprise of a high volume of low value transactions, and we have concluded there is limited opportunity or incentive to manipulate the recognition of income in the financial statements.

18. In line with Practice Note 10: *Audit of financial statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom*, as most public-sector bodies are net spending bodies, the risk of material misstatement due to fraud related to expenditure recognition may in some cases be greater than the risk relating to revenue recognition.

19. We have rebutted this risk for Falkirk Council as the main expenditure streams of the council can be readily forecast based on a predictable pattern of spend and mainly comprise a high volume of relatively low value items. We also consider there to be limited incentive and opportunity for the manipulation of expenditure recognition in the financial statements.

20. We have not, therefore, incorporated specific work into our audit plan in these areas over and above our standard audit procedures.

Other areas of audit focus

21. As part of our assessment of audit risks, we have identified other areas where we consider there are also risks of material misstatement to the financial statements. Based on our assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of the risks, we do not consider these to represent significant risks. We will keep these areas under review as our audit progresses.

22. The areas of specific audit focus are:

- **Estimations in valuation of land and buildings:** There is a significant degree of subjectivity in the valuation of land and buildings. Valuations are based on specialist and management assumptions and changes in these can result in material changes to valuations. All non-current assets are revalued on a five-year rolling basis. Values may also change year on year, and it is important that the council ensures the financial statements accurately reflect the value of the land and buildings.
- We will assess the approach the council has adopted to assess the risk that assets not subject to valuation are materially misstated and consider the robustness of that approach. We will also review the work of management's expert in this area.
- **Estimations in valuation of pension assets and liabilities:** There is a significant degree of subjectivity in the measurement and valuation of the pension assets and liabilities. The valuation is based on specialist actuarial assumptions and estimates. We will review the work of management's experts in this area, including a review of the appropriateness of actuarial assumptions and management's assessment of these.

Group Consideration

23. As group auditors, we are required under ISA (UK) 600: *Audits of group financial statements (including the work of component auditors)* to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence on which to base our audit opinion on the group financial statements.

24. The council has a group which comprises component entities, including associates, and joint ventures. Our planned audit approach for the components is informed by our assessment of risk at the component bodies and our consideration of the size and nature of assets, liabilities, and transaction streams.

25. The audits of the financial information of some of the components are performed by other auditors. We plan to place reliance on the work of the component auditors. We will obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence in relation to the consolidation process and the financial information of the components on which to base our group audit opinion.

Audit of the trusts registered as Scottish charities

26. The Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 require charities to prepare annual accounts and require an accompanying auditor's report where any legislation requires an audit. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 specifies the audit requirements for any trust fund where some or all members of a council are the sole trustees. Therefore, a full and separate audit and Independent Auditor's Report is required for each registered charity where members of the Council are sole trustees, irrespective of the size of the charity.

27. Members of the council are sole trustees for one trust registered as Scottish charity, with total assets of £0.162 million. The preparation and audit of financial statements of registered charities is regulated by the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006.

28. Other than a significant risk of management override of controls, which has also been identified as a significant risk in respect of the council's annual accounts, no specific planning risks were identified in respect of the charity's accounts.

Materiality levels for the 2023/24 audit of trusts registered as Scottish charities

29. Materiality levels for the trust is set out in [Exhibit 3](#).

Exhibit 3

2023/24 Materiality levels for charitable trusts

Charitable trust	Planning Materiality	Performance Materiality	Reporting Threshold
Falkirk Temperance Trust	£3,200 (Based on 2% of audited 2022/23 net asset value)	£2,300 (Based on 70% of planning materiality)	£160

Source: Audit Scotland

Wider Scope and Best Value

Introduction

30. Reflecting the fact that public money is involved, public audit is planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector. The Code of Audit Practice sets out the four areas that frame the wider scope of public sector audit, and requires auditors to consider and conclude on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the arrangements in place for each wider scope area in audited bodies.

31. In summary, the four wider scope areas are:

- **Financial management** – this means having sound budgetary processes. We note that at the time of preparing this plan, the capital budget for 2024/25 has not yet been set by the Council due to uncertainty around capital funding. We will consider the arrangements to secure sound financial management, including the strength of the financial management culture, accountability, and arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error, and other irregularities.
- **Financial sustainability** – we will look ahead to consider whether the body is planning effectively to continue to deliver services, also comment on financial sustainability in the medium (two to five years) to longer term (longer than five years). The council faces significant financial uncertainty with a budget gap of £62.5 million identified over the next five years, £30.8 million of which falls in 2024/25. There is a risk that in the longer term the council is unable to deliver the efficiencies required to balance its budget while meeting its strategic priorities.
- **Vision, leadership, and governance** – we conclude on the clarity of plans in place to deliver the vision, strategy, and priorities adopted by the council. We also consider the effectiveness of the governance arrangements to support delivery.
- **Use of resources to improve outcomes** – we will consider how the council demonstrates economy, efficiency, and effectiveness through the use of financial and other resources.

Wider scope risks

32. Our planned work on the wider scope areas is risk based and proportionate, and in addition to local risks, we may be asked by the Accounts Commission to consider specific risk areas which are impacting the public sector as a whole. We have not been asked to consider specific risks for 2023/24 audits, but we will remain cognisant of challenges identified in prior years such as climate change.

Best Value

33. Under the Code of Audit Practice, the audit of Best Value in councils is fully integrated within our annual audit work. Auditors are required to evaluate and report on the performance of councils in meeting their Best Value duties.

34. The arrangements to secure Best Value at the council will be assessed over the period of the audit appointment and will include an annual evaluation of risks and improvement areas and public performance reporting. We will also follow up findings reported previously on Best Value to assess the pace and depth of improvement. This work will be integrated with the wider scope audit areas discussed above.

35. As part of our annual work on Best Value, we conduct thematic reviews as directed by the Accounts Commission. In 2023/24, the thematic review across the sector will be on workforce innovation and will consider how councils are responding to the current workforce challenge through building capacity, increasing productivity, and innovation. Our conclusions and judgements will be reported in a separate report to management and summarised in our Annual Audit Report.

36. At least once every five years, the Controller of Audit will report to the Accounts Commission on the council's performance in meeting its Best Value duties. The first year of the programme is from October 2023 to August 2024. Falkirk Council is included in that programme with the Controller of Audit Report being taken to the Accounts Commission in April 2024.

Reporting arrangements, timetable, and audit fee

Reporting arrangements

37. Matters arising from our audit will be reported on a timely basis and will include agreed action plans. Draft reports will be shared with the relevant officers to confirm factual accuracy.

38. We will provide:

- an Independent Auditor's Report to the council and the Accounts Commission setting out our opinions on the annual accounts
- the council and the Accounts Commission with an Annual Audit Report containing observations and recommendations on significant matters which have arisen during the audit and conclusions on wider scope areas.

39. [Exhibit 4](#) outlines the target dates for our audit outputs set by the Accounts Commission. In determining this date, due regard is paid to the target date of 30 September for approving the annual accounts as set out in the regulations.

40. We will be unable to achieve the target date outlined above. We may not be able to achieve the target date outlined above. This reflects the decision of Audit Scotland management that priority should be given to completion of those audits that require to be completed by 30 September to provide assurance for related audited bodies in 2023/24.

41. We are working towards completion of the audit by the later date of 18 November 2024. We will work towards delivering the audit and audit outputs by target dates over the period of the audit appointment.

Exhibit 4 2023/24 Audit outputs

Audit Output	Target date	Audit Committee Date
Annual Audit Plan	31/03/2024	15/04/2024
Best Value Management Report	28/06/2024	28/06/2024
Independent Auditor's Report	31/10/2024	29/10/2024
Annual Audit Report	31/10/2024	29/10/2024

Source: Audit Scotland

42. All Annual Audit Plans and the outputs detailed in [Exhibit 5](#), and any other outputs on matters of public interest, will be published on our website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk.



Timetable

43. To support an efficient audit, it is critical that the timetable for producing the annual accounts for audit is achieved. We have included a proposed timetable for the audit at [Exhibit 5](#) that has been discussed with management.

44. We will continue to work closely with management to identify the most efficient approach as appropriate and will keep timeframes and logistics for the completion of the audit under review. Progress will be discussed with management and finance officers over the course of the audit.

Exhibit 5

Proposed annual accounts timetable

 Key stage	 Provisional Date
Consideration of the unaudited annual accounts by those charged with governance	26 June 2024
Latest submission date for the receipt of the unaudited annual accounts with complete working papers package.	30 June 2024
Latest date for final clearance meeting with the Chief Finance Officer	24 September 2024
Issue of draft Letter of Representation and proposed Independent Auditor's Report	1 October 2024
Agreement of audited and unsigned annual accounts	8 October 2024
Issue of Annual Audit Report to those charged with governance	15 October 2024
Signed Independent Auditor's Report	29 October 2024
Certified Non-Domestic Rates Return	By 31 December 2024
Certified Housing Benefit subsidy claim	By 31 December 2024
Latest date for WGA assurance (if required)	To be confirmed

Source: Audit Scotland

Audit fee

45. In determining the audit fee, we have taken account of the risk exposure of the council and the planned management assurances in place. Fee levels are also impacted by inflation which increases the cost of audit delivery. The proposed audit fee for 2023/24 is £398,510 (£375,970 in 2022/23). In addition, the proposed audit fee for the charitable trust is £2,600 (£2,500 in 2022/23).

46. In setting the fee for 2023/24, we have assumed that the council has effective governance arrangements and will prepare a comprehensive and accurate set of annual accounts for audit in line with the agreed timetable for the audit. The audit fee assumes there will be no major change in respect of the scope of the audit during the year and where our audit cannot proceed as planned, a supplementary fee may be levied.

Other matters

Internal audit

47. It is the responsibility of the council to establish adequate internal audit arrangements. We will review the internal audit plan and the results of internal audit's work.

48. We understand that there is some slippage on the 2023/24 internal audit plan due to capacity issues within the team. Work has been prioritised for 2023/24 and any reviews not undertaken in year will be carried forward into the 2024/25 audit plan.

49. While we are not planning to place formal reliance on the work of internal audit in 2023/24, we will review internal audit reports and assess the impact of the findings on our financial statements and wider scope audit responsibilities.

Independence and objectivity

50. I am independent of Falkirk Council in accordance with relevant ethical requirements, including the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard. This standard imposes stringent rules to ensure the independence and objectivity of auditors.

51. Audit Scotland has robust arrangements in place to ensure compliance with Ethical Standard including an annual 'fit and proper' declaration for all members of staff. The arrangements are overseen by the Executive Director of Innovation and Quality, who serves as Audit Scotland's Ethics Partner.

52. The Ethical Standard requires auditors to communicate any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the audit team. I am not aware of any such relationships pertaining to the audit of the council.

Audit Quality

53. Audit Scotland is committed to the consistent delivery of high-quality public audit. Audit quality requires ongoing attention and improvement to keep pace with external and internal changes. A document explaining the arrangements for providing assurance on the delivery of high-quality audits is available from the Audit Scotland website.

54. The International Standards on Quality Management (ISQM) applicable to Audit Scotland for 2023/24 audits are:

ISQM (UK) 1 which deals with an audit organisation's responsibilities to design, implement and operate a system of quality management (SoQM) for audits. Our SoQM consists of a variety of components, such as: our governance arrangements and culture to support audit quality, compliance with ethical

requirements, ensuring we are dedicated to high-quality audit through our engagement performance and resourcing arrangements, and ensuring we have robust quality monitoring arrangements in place. Audit Scotland carries out an annual evaluation of our SoQM and has concluded that we comply with this standard.

ISQM (UK) 2 which sets out arrangements for conducting engagement quality reviews, which are performed by senior management not involved in the audit to review significant judgements and conclusions reached by the audit team, and the appropriateness of proposed audit opinions of high-risk audit engagements.

55. To monitor quality at an individual audit level, Audit Scotland also carries out internal quality reviews of a sample of audits. Additionally, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW) carries out independent quality reviews.

56. Actions to address deficiencies identified by internal and external quality reviews are included in a rolling Quality Improvement Action Plan which is used to support continuous improvement. Progress with implementing planned actions is regularly monitored by Audit Scotland's Quality and Ethics Committee.

57. Audit Scotland may periodically seek your views on the quality of our service provision. The team would also welcome feedback more informally at any time.

Falkirk Council

Annual Audit Plan 2023/24

Audit Scotland's published material is available for download on the website in a number of formats. For information on our accessibility principles, please visit:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accessibility

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