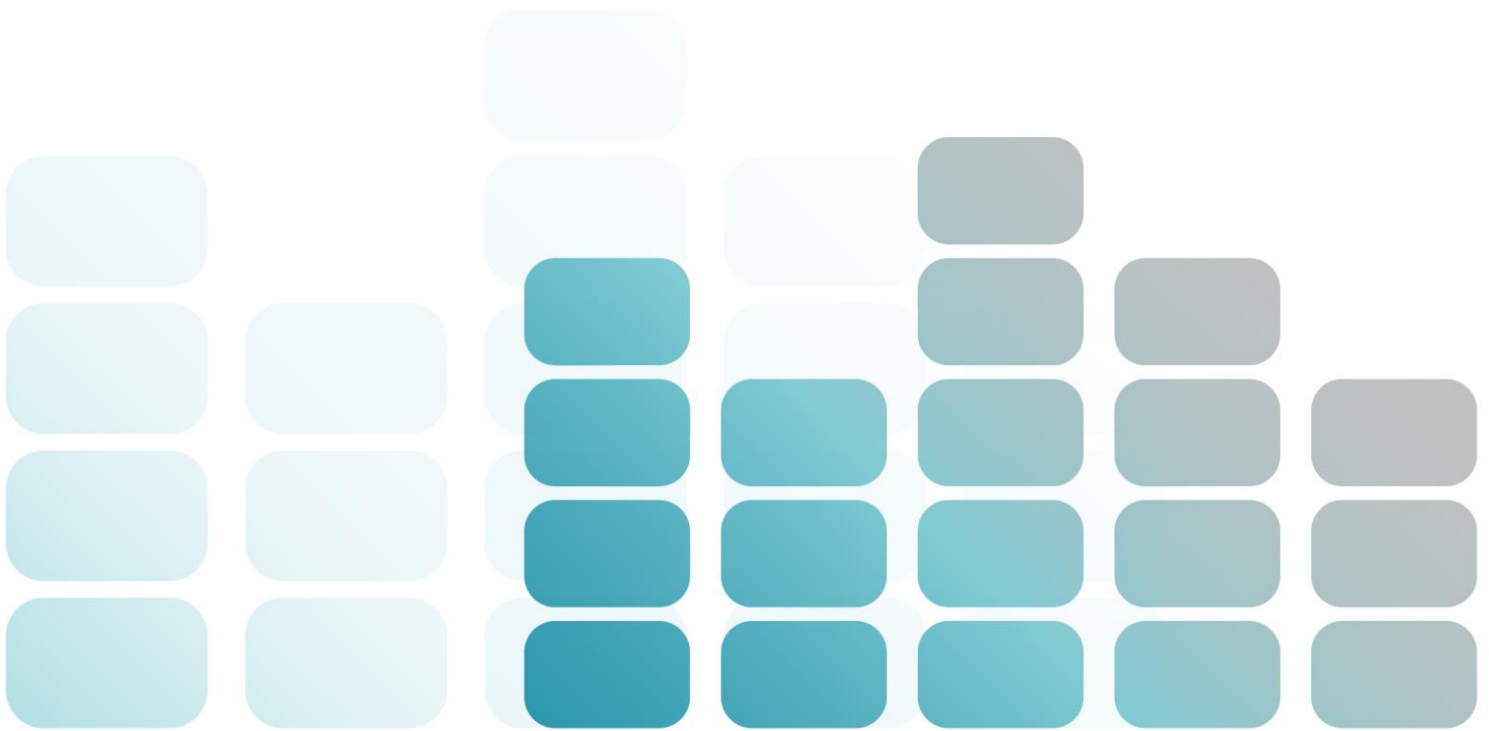


The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership

Annual Audit Plan 2025/26



Prepared for The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership

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Introduction

Purpose of the Annual Audit Plan

1. The purpose of this Annual Audit Plan is to provide an overview of the planned scope and timing of the 2025/26 audit of The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership's (HITRANS) annual accounts. It outlines the audit work planned to meet the audit requirements set out in [auditing standards](#) and the [Code of Audit Practice](#), including supplementary guidance.

Appointed auditor and independence

2. Adam Haahr, of Audit Scotland, was appointed by the Accounts Commission as external auditor of HITRANS for the period from 2025/26 until 2026/27.

3. Adam Haahr and the audit team are independent of HITRANS 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. Audit Scotland has robust arrangements in place to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The arrangements are overseen by the Executive Director of Innovation and Quality, who serves as Audit Scotland's Ethics Partner.

4. The Ethical Standard requires auditors to communicate any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the audit team. There are no such relationships pertaining to the audit of HITRANS to communicate.

Audit scope and responsibilities

Scope of the audit

5. The audit is performed in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, including supplementary guidance, International Standards on Auditing (UK), and relevant legislation. These set out the requirements for the scope of the audit which includes:

- 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 opinion on statutory other information published with the financial statements in the annual accounts, namely the Management Commentary and the Annual Governance Statement.
- An opinion on the audited part of the Remuneration Report.
- Concluding on the financial sustainability of the body and a review of the Annual Governance Statement.
- Reporting on the HITRANS's arrangements for securing Best Value.
- Provision of an Annual Audit Report setting out significant matters identified from the audit of the annual accounts and the wider scope areas specified in the Code of Audit Practice.

Responsibilities

6. The Code of Audit Practice sets out the respective responsibilities of HITRANS and the auditor. A summary of the key responsibilities is outlined below.

Auditor's responsibilities

7. The responsibilities of auditors in the public sector are established in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. These include providing an independent opinion on the financial statements and other information reported within the annual accounts, and concluding on HITRAN's arrangements in place for the wider scope areas and to secure Best Value.

The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership's responsibilities

8. HITRANS has primary responsibility for ensuring 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:

- Establishing arrangements to ensure the proper conduct of its affairs.
- Preparation of annual accounts, comprising financial statements that give a true and fair view and other information.
- Establishing arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud, error and irregularities, and bribery and corruption.
- Implementing arrangements to ensure its financial position is soundly based.
- Making arrangements to secure Best Value.
- Establishing an internal audit function.

Audit of the annual accounts

Introduction

9. The audit of the annual accounts is driven by materiality and the risks of material misstatement in the financial statements, with greater attention being given to the significant risks of material misstatement. This chapter outlines materiality, the significant risks of material misstatement that have been identified, and the impact these have on the planned audit procedures.

Materiality

10. The concept of materiality is applied by auditors in planning and performing an audit, and in evaluating the effect of any uncorrected misstatements on the financial statements or other information reported in the annual accounts.

11. Broadly, the concept of materiality is to determine whether matters identified during the audit could reasonably be expected to influence the decisions of users of the financial statements. Auditors set a monetary threshold when determining materiality, although some issues may be considered material by their nature. Therefore, materiality is ultimately a matter of the auditor's professional judgement.

12. The materiality levels determined for the audit of HITRANS are outlined in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1

2025/26 Materiality levels for HITRANS

Materiality	HITRANS
Materiality – based on an assessment of the needs of users of the financial statements and the nature HITRANS operations, the benchmark used to determine materiality is gross expenditure based on the audited 2024/25 financial statements. Materiality has been set at 2% of the benchmark.	£60,000
Performance materiality – this acts as a trigger point. If the aggregate of misstatements identified during the audit exceeds performance materiality, this could indicate that further audit procedures are required. Using professional judgement, performance materiality has been set at 55% of planning materiality.	£33,000

Materiality	HITRANS
Reporting threshold – all misstatements greater than the reporting threshold will be reported.	£3,000

Source: Audit Scotland

Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

13. The risk assessment process draws on the audit team’s cumulative knowledge of HITRANS, including the nature of its operations and its significant transaction streams, the system of internal control, governance arrangements and processes, and developments that could impact on its financial reporting.

14. Based on the risk assessment process, significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements have been identified and these are summarised in [Exhibit 2, page 8](#). These are the risks which have the greatest impact on the planned audit approach, and the planned audit procedures in response to the risks are outlined in Exhibit 2.

15. The risk assessment process is an iterative and dynamic process. The assessment of risks set out in this Annual Audit Plan and Exhibit 2 may change as more information and evidence is obtained over the course of the audit. Where such changes occur, these will be reported to HITRANS and those charged with governance, where relevant.

Exhibit 2

Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

Risk of material misstatement	Planned audit response
<p>Fraud caused by management override of controls</p> <p>Management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of management's ability to override controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate 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. • Test journals entries, focusing on those that are assessed as higher risk, such as those affecting revenue and expenditure recognition around the year-end. • Evaluate significant transactions outside the normal course of business. • Assess the adequacy of controls in place for identifying and disclosing related party relationships and transactions in the financial statements. • Assess changes to the methods and underlying assumptions used to prepare any significant accounting estimates and assess these for evidence of management bias. • Substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions processed over the course of the year and around the year-end, focusing on transactions within significant income and expenditure streams and those that are at greatest risk of fraud, to ensure income and expenditure has been recognised in line with accounting policies and in the correct period. • Substantive testing of deferred and accrued income to ensure income has been recognised in line with accounting policies and in the correct period. • Substantive testing of accruals and payables to ensure expenditure has been recognised in line with accounting policies and in the correct period.

Key audit matters

16. The Code of Audit Practice requires public sector auditors to communicate key audit matters. Key audit matters are those matters, that in the auditor's professional judgement, are of most significance to the audit of the financial statements and require most attention when performing the audit.

17. In determining key audit matters, auditors consider:

- Areas of higher or significant risk of material misstatement.
- Areas where significant judgement is required, including accounting estimates that are subject to a high degree of estimation uncertainty.
- Significant events or transactions that occurred during the year.

18. In addition to the significant risks of material misstatement in [Exhibit 2, page 8](#) the following key audit matters have been identified as part of our planning process and will be reported on in our Annual Audit Report.

- **Pension valuation:** There is a significant degree of subjectivity in the estimation of the pension balance as the estimation is based on specialist assumptions, and changes in the assumptions can result in material changes to the estimation. We will evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary. We will also obtain an understanding of the management's involvement in the estimation process to assess if appropriate oversight has occurred. Audit Scotland uses PwC as an auditor's expert, therefore, the audit team will also review the information provided by PwC and reflect this in the planned audit procedures where required.

19. The matters determined to be key audit matters will be communicated in the Annual Audit Report.

Wider scope and Best Value audit

Wider scope

20. Reflecting the fact that public money is involved, the Code of Audit Practice requires that public audit is planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector. The wider scope audit set out by the Code of Audit Practice broadens the audit of the annual accounts to include consideration of additional aspects or risks in four wider scope areas.

21. Due to the nature and size of the body and its limited financial activity, it is considered a less complex body for the wider scope audit. Therefore, the wider scope audit does not consider all four wider scope areas and is instead limited to concluding on the financial sustainability of the body.

22. Financial sustainability means looking forward over the medium and longer term in planning the services to be delivered and how they will be delivered effectively. This is assessed by considering the body's medium to longer-term planning for service delivery. A conclusion on the financial sustainability of the body will be reported in the Annual Audit Report.

Best Value

23. Under the Code of Audit Practice, the duty on auditors to consider the arrangements an audited body has in place to secure Best Value applies to audited bodies that fall within section 106 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, which the body does.

24. Consideration of the arrangements the body has in place to secure Best Value will be carried out alongside the wider scope audit, and a conclusion on the arrangements the body has in place will be reported in the Annual Audit Report.

Reporting arrangements, timetable and audit fee

Audit outputs

25. The outputs from the 2025/26 audit include:

- This Annual Audit Plan.
- An Independent Auditor's Report to HITRANS and the Accounts Commission setting out opinions on the annual accounts.
- An Annual Audit Report to HITRANS and the Accounts Commission setting out significant matters identified from the audit of the annual accounts, conclusions from the wider scope and Best Value audit, recommendations, where required, and any good practice identified.

26. The matters to be reported in the outputs will be discussed with HITRANS for factual accuracy before they are issued. All outputs from the audit will be published on [Audit Scotland's website](#), apart from the Independent Auditor's Report, which is included in the audited annual accounts.

27. Target dates for the audit outputs are set by the Accounts Commission. In setting the target dates for the audit outputs, consideration is given to the statutory date for approving the annual accounts, which is 30 September 2026 for local government bodies.

28. The Independent Auditor's Report and Annual Audit Report are planned to be issued by the target date of 30 September 2026.

Audit timetable

29. Achieving the timetable for production of the annual accounts, supported by complete and accurate working papers, is critical to delivery of the audit to agreed target dates. [Exhibit 3, page 12](#) includes a timetable for the audit, which has been agreed with management. Agreed target dates will be kept under review as the audit progresses, and any changes required, and their potential impact, will be discussed with HITRANS and reported to those charged with governance, where required.

Exhibit 3

2025/26 audit timetable

Audit activity	HITRANS target date	Audit team target date	Partnership Board
Issue of Annual Audit Plan		31 March 2026	
Presentation of Annual Audit Plan		24 April 2026	24 April 2026
Annual Accounts:			
• Preparation of unaudited annual accounts by those charged with governance	30 June 2026		30 June 2026
• Submission of unaudited annual accounts and all working papers to audit team	10 August 2026		
• Latest date for audit clearance meeting	1 September 2026	1 September 2026	
• Issue of draft Letter of Representation, proposed Independent Auditor's Report, and proposed Annual Audit Report		4 September 2026	4 September 2026
• Agreement of audited and unsigned annual accounts	4 September 2026	4 September 2026	
• Approval by those charged with governance and signing of audited annual accounts			11 September 2026
• Signing of Independent Auditor's Report and issue of Annual Audit Report		14 September 2026	

Source: Audit Scotland

Audit fee

30. HITRANS's audit fee is determined in line with Audit Scotland's fee setting arrangements. The proposed audit fee for the 2025/26 audit is £13,360 (2024/25: £12,800).

31. In setting the audit fee, it is assumed that HITRANS has effective governance arrangements in place and the complete annual accounts will

be provided for audit in line with the agreed timetable. The audit fee assumes there will be no significant changes to the planned scope of the audit. Where the audit cannot proceed as planned, for example, due to incomplete or inadequate working papers, the audit fee may need to be increased.

Other matters

Internal audit

32. HITRANS is responsible for establishing an internal audit function as part of an effective system of internal control. As part of the audit, the audit team will obtain an understanding of internal audit, including its nature, responsibilities, and activities.

33. While internal audit and external audit have differing roles and responsibilities, external auditors may seek to rely on the work of internal audit where it is considered appropriate. A review of internal audit's 2025/26 audit plan was carried out to identify if there were any areas where the audit team could rely on its work. The audit team concluded it will not rely on internal audit's work. However, the audit team will review internal audit's reports and assess if there is any impact on the audit.

Audit quality

34. Audit Scotland is committed to the consistent delivery of high-quality audit. Audit quality requires ongoing attention and improvement to keep pace with external and internal changes. Details of the arrangements in place for the delivery of high-quality audits is available from the [Audit Scotland website](#).

35. The International Standards on Quality Management (ISQM) applicable to Audit Scotland for 2025/26 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. Audit Scotland's SoQM consists of a variety of components, such as governance arrangements and culture to support audit quality, compliance with ethical requirements, ensuring Audit Scotland is dedicated to high-quality audit through engagement performance and resourcing arrangements, and ensuring there are robust quality monitoring arrangements in place. Audit Scotland carries out an annual evaluation of its SoQM and has concluded it complies with this standard.
- ISQM (UK) 2, which sets out arrangements for conducting engagement quality reviews, which are performed by senior management not involved in an audit, to review significant judgements and conclusions reached by the audit team, and the appropriateness of proposed audit opinions on high-risk audits.

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

37. 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 monitored on a regular basis by Audit Scotland's Quality and Ethics Committee.

38. Audit Scotland may periodically seek the views of HITRANS on the quality of audit services provided. The audit team would also welcome feedback at any time.

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