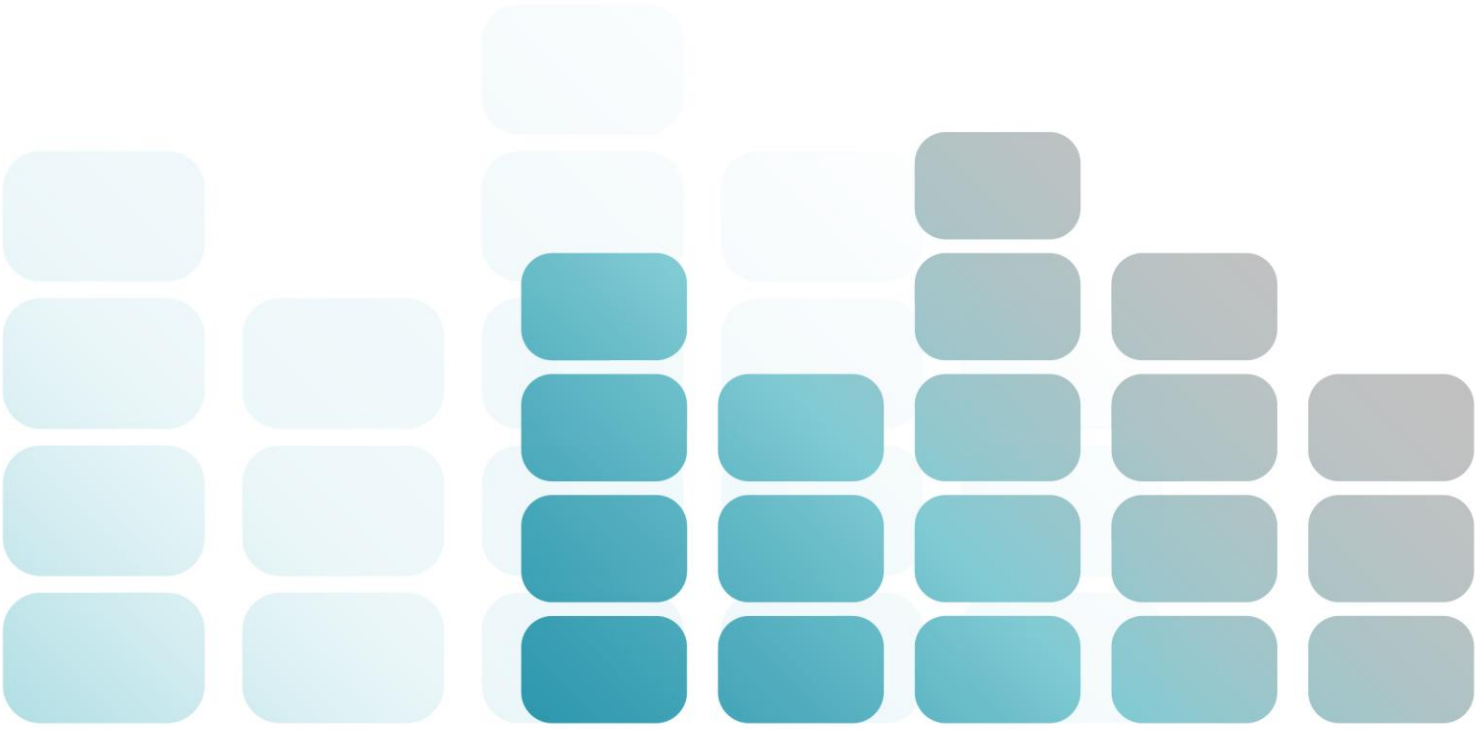


West Lothian Council

Annual Audit Plan 2025/26



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Accessibility

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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 West Lothian Council's 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. Claire Gardiner, of Audit Scotland, has appointed by the Accounts Commission as external auditor of West Lothian Council, hereafter referred to as 'the council', for the period 2023/24 until 2026/27.

3. The appointed auditor and audit team are independent of the 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. 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 the council 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 and an opinion on the audited part of the Remuneration Report.
- Conclusions on the council's arrangements in relation to the wider scope areas: Financial Management, Financial Sustainability, Vision, Leadership, and Governance, and Use of Resources to Improve Outcomes.
- Reporting on the council's arrangements for securing Best Value.
- Providing assurance on the Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim, Non-Domestic Rates Return and the Whole of Government Accounts return.
- A review of the council's arrangements for preparing and publishing statutory performance information.
- 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 the council 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 the council's arrangements in place for the wider scope areas and to secure Best Value.

The council's responsibilities

8. The council 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 the council and its group are outlined in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1

2025/26 Materiality levels for the council and its group

Materiality	The council	Group
Materiality – based on an assessment of the needs of users of the financial statements and the nature of the council 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.	£20.2 million	£20.4 million

Materiality	The council	Group
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 75% of planning materiality.	£15.1 million	£15.3 million
Reporting threshold – all misstatements greater than the reporting threshold will be reported.	£1.0 million	£1.0 million

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 the council, 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](#). 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 this table.

15. The risk assessment process is an iterative and dynamic process. The assessment of risks set out in this Annual Audit Plan may change as more information and evidence is obtained over the course of the audit. Where such changes occur, these will be reported to the council 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 accounting estimates and assess these for evidence of management bias. • Substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions around the year-end to confirm they are accounted for in the correct financial year. • Focused testing of accounting accruals and prepayments.
<p>Valuation of property, plant and equipment</p> <p>The council held £2 billion of property, plant, and equipment (PPE) at 31 March 2025, of which £1.6 billion was land and building assets.</p> <p>The council is required to value land and building assets at existing use value where an active market exists for these assets. Where there is no active market, these assets are valued on a depreciated cost replacement (DRC) basis. As a result, there is a significant degree of subjectivity in these valuations which</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the design and implementation of controls over the valuation process. • Review the information provided to the valuer and assess this for completeness and accuracy. • Evaluate the competence, capabilities, and objectivity of the valuer. • Obtain an understanding of management's involvement in the valuation process to assess if appropriate oversight has occurred. • Review the appropriateness of the key data and assumptions used in the current financial audit year valuation process, and challenge these where required.

Risk of material misstatement	Planned audit response
<p>are based on specialist assumptions, and changes in the assumptions can result in material changes to valuations.</p> <p>From 2025/26, CIPFA/LASAAC's revised Code introduces HM Treasury's reforms, moving local authorities to quinquennial valuations with annual indexation applied in intervening years. The first year of implementation brings an increased risk of material misstatement due to the change in accounting treatment and the new judgements required, particularly when selecting appropriate indices to apply.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the indices applied by management to assets not subject to valuation in 2025/26 and assess if these are reasonable and have been correctly applied.

Source: Audit Scotland

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. The matters determined to be key audit matters will be communicated in the Annual Audit Report. [Exhibit 2](#) outlines the significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements that have been identified, including those that have greatest impact on the planned audit procedures and require most attention when performing the audit.

19. In addition to the significant risks of material misstatement, 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: The valuation requires the use of an actuarial methodology based on a range of assumptions including financial and demographic assumptions. Small movements in the assumptions can result in material changes to valuations. We will assess the scope, independence and competence of the professionals engaged in providing estimates for pensions and review appropriateness of actuarial assumptions and results including comparison with other councils. We will establish officer's arrangements for ensuring the reasonableness of professional estimations and the accuracy of information provided to the actuary by the council.

Group audit

20. The council is part of a group and prepares group financial statements. The group is made up of four components, including the council which is the parent of the group.

21. Risk assessment procedures have been performed on the group audit to identify if there are any risks of material misstatement to the group financial statements, or any components where audit procedures are required for the purposes of the group audit. The outcome of the risk assessment procedures on the group audit is outlined in [Exhibit 3](#).

Exhibit 3

Outcome of risk assessment procedures on the group audit

Group component	Accounting treatment	Risk of material misstatement	Audit procedures required	Auditor
West Lothian Council	Parent body	Yes – Exhibit 2	Yes – full scope audit	Audit Scotland
West Lothian Integration Joint Board (Joint Venture)	Accounted for on equity basis	No – not material to group financial statements	Yes – analytical procedures at group level	Audit Scotland
Lothian Valuation Joint Board (Associate)	Accounted for on equity basis	No – not material to group financial statements	Yes – analytical procedures at group level	Audit Scotland
West Lothian Leisure (Subsidiary)	Consolidated on a line-by-line basis	No – not material to group financial statements	Yes – analytical procedures at group level	Azets

Source: Audit Scotland

Wider scope audit

Introduction

22. 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, which are summarised below:

- **Financial Management** – this means having sound budgetary processes. Factors that can impact on the council being able to secure sound financial management include the strength of the financial management culture, accountability, and arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and other irregularities, bribery and corruption.
- **Financial Sustainability** – this 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 council's medium to longer-term planning for service delivery.

This area remains a significant business risk across the local government sector for all councils including West Lothian, especially in the longer term. This area is being actively managed by the council with appropriate financial plans in place which are subject to regular review. We will continue to review and assess the arrangements in place at the council to ensure operations are financially sustainable.

- **Vision, Leadership and Governance** – this means having a clear vision and strategy, with set priorities within the vision and strategy. This is assessed by considering the clarity of plans in place to deliver the vision and strategy and the effectiveness of the governance arrangements to support delivery.
- **Use of Resources to Improve Outcomes** – this means using resources to meet stated outcomes and improvement objectives through effective planning and working with partners and communities. This is assessed by considering the council's arrangements for ensuring resources are deployed to improve strategic outcomes, meet the needs of service users, and deliver continuous improvement.

23. A conclusion on the effectiveness and appropriateness of arrangements the council has in place for each of the wider scope areas will be reported in the Annual Audit Report.

Significant wider scope risks

No significant risks in the wider scope areas were identified from the risk assessment process.

Best Value audit

Introduction

24. Under the Code of Audit Practice, the audit of Best Value in councils is fully integrated within the annual audit. As part of the annual audit, auditors are required to take a risk-based approach to assessing and reporting on whether the council has made proper arrangements for securing Best Value, including follow up of findings previously reported in relation to Best Value.

25. The Accounts Commission also reports nationally on thematic aspects of councils' approaches to, and performance in, meeting their Best Value duties. As part of the annual audit, thematic reviews, as directed by the Accounts Commission, are conducted on the council. The thematic review for 2025/26 is on the subject of asset management and involves considering how the council is managing its assets to ensure high quality services whilst also responding to the challenges around financial sustainability and climate change. Conclusions and judgements on the thematic review will be reported in a separate Management Report and summarised in the Annual Audit Report, where required.

26. At least once over the five-year appointment, the Controller of Audit will report to the Accounts Commission on the council's performance in meeting its Best Value duties. The third year of this programme runs from October 2025 to August 2026.

27. The Controller of Audit will report to the Accounts Commission on the council's performance in the fourth year of the programme between October 2026 and August 2027.

Statutory Performance Information

28. Auditors have a statutory duty to satisfy themselves that councils have made proper arrangements for preparing and publishing statutory performance information in accordance with the [Statutory Performance Information Direction 2024](#) (the Direction) issued by the Accounts Commission. The outcome of this will be reported in the Annual Audit Report, which will include:

- A conclusion on the council's arrangements for preparing and publishing the statutory performance information.
- Any instances where the arrangements or reporting are not in accordance with the Direction.
- Areas where the arrangements require to be improved.

29. In addition, the Accounts Commission requires auditors to include a summary of Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) indicators that the council has reported in the Annual Audit Report.

Significant Best Value risks

30. No significant Best Value risks were identified from the risk assessment process. Audit work on the wider scope areas will help support conclusions around Best Value.

Reporting arrangements, timetable and audit fee

Audit outputs

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

- This Annual Audit Plan.
- An Independent Auditor's Report to the council and the Accounts Commission setting out opinions on the annual accounts.
- A Best Value Thematic Report (BV4) Asset Management on how well the council is managing its assets to achieve corporate priorities, the changing needs of its population and net zero targets
- An Annual Audit Report to the council 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.

32. The matters to be reported in the outputs will be discussed with the council 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.

33. 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.

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

Audit timetable

35. 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 4](#) 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 the council and reported to those charged with governance, where required.

Exhibit 4 2025/26 audit timetable

Audit activity	The council target date	Audit team target date	Relevant committee date
Issue of Annual Audit Plan		By 31 March 2026	20 March 2026
Annual Accounts:			
Consideration of unaudited annual accounts by those charged with governance	26 June 2026		26 June 2026
Latest submission of unaudited annual accounts and all working papers to audit team	30 June 2026		
Latest date for audit clearance meeting	25 August 2026	25 August 2026	
Issue of draft Letter of Representation, proposed Independent Auditor's Report, and proposed Annual Audit Report		11 September 2026	22 September 2026
Agreement of audited and unsigned annual accounts	15 September 2026	15 September 2026	
Approval by those charged with governance and signing of audited annual accounts	22 September 2026		22 September 2026
Signing of Independent Auditor's Report and issue of Annual Audit Report	22 September 2026	22 September 2026	
Best Value (Year 4) report on Asset Management:			
Issue of Best Value Management Report		26 June 2026	26 June 2026
Grant claims and Whole of Government Accounts (WGA):			
Certification of Whole of Government Accounts		30 September 2026	

Audit activity	The council target date	Audit team target date	Relevant committee date
Certification of Non-Domestic Rates Return		30 November 2026	
Certification of Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim		31 December 2026	

Source: Audit Scotland

Audit fee

36. The council's audit fee is determined in line with Audit Scotland's fee setting arrangements. The audit fee for the 2025/26 audit is £437,050 (2023/24: £414,750). This includes a 1% (£4,300) uplift on the expected fee to account for the recurring additional time required to complete the Non-Domestic Rates audit work during the current appointment period.

37. In setting the audit fee, it is assumed that the council continues to have 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

38. The council 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.

39. 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

40. 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](#).

41. 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.

42. 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.

43. 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.

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

West Lothian Council

Annual Audit Plan 2025/26



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