

Harlow District Council Audit results report

Year ended 31 March 2018

30 August 2018



Building a better
working world



Audit and Standards Committee
Harlow Council, Civic Centre
The Water Gardens
Harlow , CM20 1WG

30 August 2018

Dear Audit & Standards Committee Members

We are pleased to attach our Audit Results Report for the forthcoming meeting of the Audit & Standards Committee. This report summarises our audit conclusion in relation to the audit of Harlow District Council for 2017/18 and is a follow up to the report we issued on 24 July and presented to the 31 July Committee meeting.

At the date of this report our audit is complete other than a final review of the Authority's final version of the statement of accounts and our subsequent concluding procedures. Subject to the satisfactory completion of these procedures we confirm that we expect to issue an unqualified audit opinion on the financial statements in the form in Section 3.

This report is intended solely for the use of the Audit & Standards Committee, other members of the Authority, and senior management. It should not be used for any other purpose or given to any other party without obtaining our written consent.

We would like to thank your staff for their help during the engagement.

Yours faithfully

Suresh Patel
Associate Partner
For and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP
Encl

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In April 2015 Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) issued "Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies". It is available from the via the PSAA website (www.PSAA.co.uk). The Statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between appointed auditors and audited bodies. It summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas. The "Terms of Appointment (updated February 2017)" issued by the PSAA sets out additional requirements that auditors must comply with, over and above those set out in the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice (the Code) and in legislation, and covers matters of practice and procedure which are of a recurring nature. This report is made solely to the Audit & Standards Committee and management of Harlow District Council in accordance with the statement of responsibilities. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Audit & Standards Committee, and management of Harlow Council those matters we are required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Audit & Standards Committee and management of Harlow Council for this report or for the opinions we have formed. It should not be provided to any third-party without our prior written consent.



01 Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Scope update

In our Audit Planning Report presented at the 14th March 2018 Audit Committee meeting, we provided you with an overview of our audit scope and approach for the audit of the financial statements. We carried out our audit in accordance with this plan, with the following exception:

Changes in materiality

We updated our planning materiality assessment using the draft accounts and have also reconsidered our risk assessment. Based on our materiality measure of gross expenditure on provision of services, we have updated our overall materiality assessment to £2.91 million (Audit Planning Report – £3.058 million). This results in updated performance materiality, at 75% of overall materiality, of £2.243 million, and an updated threshold for reporting misstatements of £146k.

We also identified areas where misstatement at a lower level than materiality might influence the reader and developed a specific audit strategy for them. They include:

Remuneration disclosures including any severance payments, exit packages and termination benefits

Our audit strategy was to check the bandings reported in note 29 of the financial statements, test the completeness of the disclosure and make sure that the disclosure was compliant with the Code. We sample checked transactions back to the payroll system and supporting documentation. No issues have been noted.

Related party transactions

Our audit strategy was to obtain and review declarations from senior officers and members of the Council for any material disclosures and make sure that the disclosure in note 33 was compliant with the Code. We carried out a sample check of Companies House searches on contracts from the Council's contract register to identify whether any key decision-makers in the Council had an interest in the company. We carried out a sample check of Companies House searches between decision-makers in the Council and companies to which they were linked, to test the completeness of the disclosure. We obtained confirmation that there were no related party transactions within the declarations made by Member's at committee meetings they attended. No issues have been noted.

Members' allowances

Our audit strategy was to test the completeness of the disclosure note 28 and make sure that the disclosure was compliant with the Code by sample checking transactions back to the payroll system and the Council's Constitution. No issues have been noted.

Executive Summary

Status of the audit

We have undertaken our audit in line with the timetable agreed with the finance team and at the date of this report the audit remains in progress. We have engaged effectively with the finance team throughout the year and have now reached a conclusion on the two significant accounting matters we reported to the July Committee meeting. Subject to satisfactory completion of the following outstanding items we expect to issue an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements in the form which appears at Section 4. However until the following work is complete, further amendments may arise:

- Review of the final version of the financial statements including all audit adjustments.
- Completion of subsequent events review.
- Receipt of the signed management representation letter.
- Completion and Manager and Associate Partner review of the completed audit work.
- Completion of the Whole of Government Accounts submission.

We will provide a verbal update of completion of the above at the committee meeting.

Audit differences

There is one unadjusted audit difference relating to one of the significant accounting matters - HRA depreciation. There is £1.1m

The Authority has adjusted for all other audit differences we have identified to date.

Areas of audit focus

Our Audit Planning Report identified key areas of focus for our audit of Harlow District Council's financial statements. This report sets out our observations and conclusions, including our views on areas which might be conservative, and where there is potential risk and exposure. We summarise our consideration of these matters, and any others identified, in the "Key Audit Issues" section of this report.

We ask you to review these and any other matters in this report to ensure:

- ▶ There are no other considerations or matters that could have an impact on these issues
- ▶ You agree with the resolution of the issue
- ▶ There are no other significant issues to be considered.

There are no matters, apart from those reported by management or disclosed in this report, which we believe should be brought to the attention of the Audit & Standards Committee.



Executive Summary

Other reporting issues

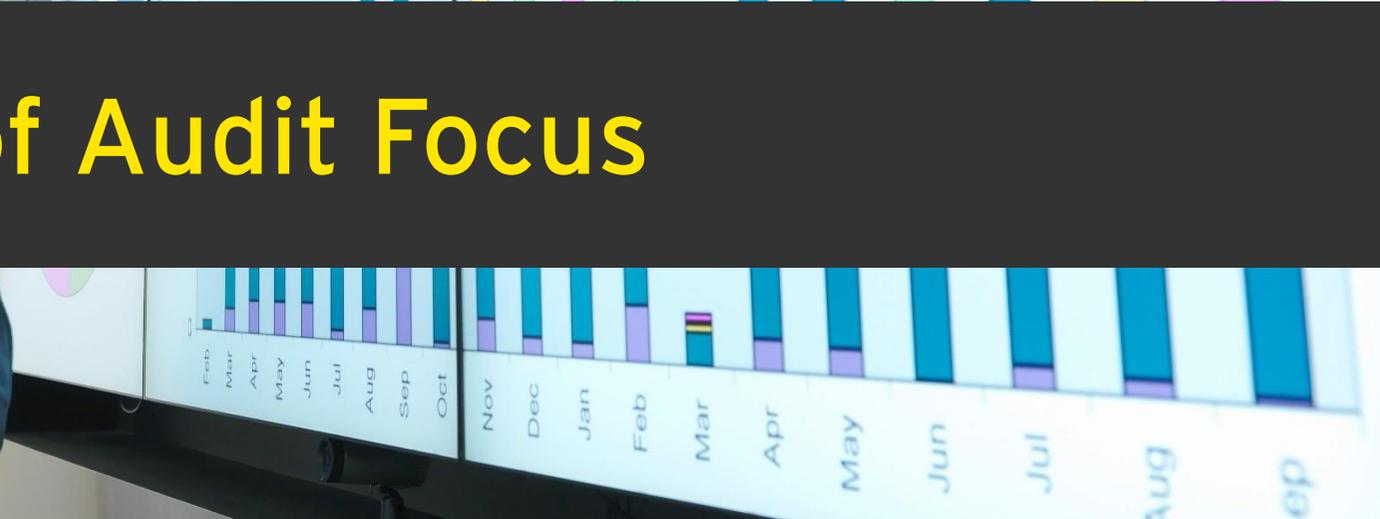
We have reviewed the information presented in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for consistency with our knowledge of the Authority. The AGS have been updated to reflect the weaknesses identified in the Digital Transformation Programme, and we do not have any matters to report as a result of this work.

Once we have completed the review of the final version of the statements of account we will complete the Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) assurance statement we need to issue to the NAO. As the Authority falls below the NAO's threshold we have not undertaken any specific procedures on the Authority's WGA submission.

We have no other matters to report.

Independence

Please refer to Section 10 for our update on Independence.



02

Areas of Audit Focus



Areas of Audit Focus

Significant risk

Misstatements due to fraud or error

Significant Risk

What is the risk?

The financial statements as a whole are not free of material misstatements whether caused by fraud or error.

As identified in ISA (UK and Ireland) 240, management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of its ability to manipulate accounting records directly or indirectly and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. We identify and respond to this fraud risk on every audit engagement.

We identify and respond to this fraud risk on every audit engagement.

What judgements are we focused on?

We focused on aspects of the financial statements where management could inappropriately inflate income or understate expenditure, primarily:

- Material accounting estimates.
- Accruals near year end
- Journal entries.
- Unusual transactions.

What did we do?

- Wrote to the s151 officer, Chair of the Audit & Standards Committee, Head of Internal Audit and Monitoring Officer about risks of fraud and the controls in place to address those risks and reviewed their responses.
- Documented our understanding of the controls relevant to this significant risk and considered if they have been appropriately designed.
- Tested the appropriateness of journal entries recorded in the general ledger and other adjustments made in preparing the financial statements.
- Obtained breakdown of capital additions in the year and reviewed the descriptions to identify any items that could be revenue in nature. We amended our sample sizes when testing additions to reflect the existence of this risk and agreed samples to source documentation to ensure the capital/revenue split was reasonable.
- Reviewed accounting estimates and year end manual accruals for evidence of management bias.
- Evaluated the business rationale for any significant unusual transactions.

What are our conclusions?

We have not identified any material weaknesses in controls or evidence of material management override.

We have not identified any instances of inappropriate judgements being applied.

We did not identify any other transactions during our audit which appeared unusual or outside the Council's normal course of business.

We did not identify any capital expenditure which had been inappropriately capitalised.

Overall, our audit work has not identified any material issues, inappropriate judgements or unusual transactions which indicate that there has been any misreporting of the Authority's financial position or that management has overridden controls.



Areas of Audit Focus

Other areas of focus

Property, plant and equipment valuation

What is the risk?

Material misstatement of the net assets of the Authority as a result of inappropriate judgemental inputs and/or estimation techniques to calculate the year-end balances recorded in the balance sheet.

The fair value of Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE) represent significant balances in the Council's accounts and are subject to valuation changes, impairment reviews and depreciation charges. Management is required to make material judgemental inputs and apply estimation techniques to calculate the year-end balances recorded in the balance sheet.

ISAs (UK and Ireland) 500 and 540 require us to undertake procedures on the use of management experts and the assumptions underlying fair value estimates.

What judgements are we focused on?

We focused on the following:

- The adequacy of the scope of the work performed by the value including their professional capabilities
- The reasonableness of the underlying assumptions used by the Authority's expert valuer

What did we do?

- Considered the work performed by the Council's valuers, including the adequacy of the scope of the work performed, their professional capabilities and the results of their work.
- Sample tested key asset information used by the valuers in performing their valuation.
- Considered the annual cycle of valuations to ensure that assets have been valued within a 5 year rolling programme as required by the Code for PPE. We also considered if there were any specific changes to assets that had occurred and that these had been communicated to the valuer.
- Reviewed assets not subject to valuation in 2017/18 to confirm that the remaining asset base is not materially misstated.
- Considered changes to useful economic lives as a result of the most recent valuation.
- Tested accounting entries had been correctly processed in the financial statements.
- Reviewed the valuation of the new beacon (dwelling) valuers, which due to its nature we have engaged our own expert - EY Real Estates.

What are our conclusions?

Our testing to date has not identified any material misstatements from inappropriate judgements being applied to the property valuation estimates.

The expert valuers possess the relevant qualifications and experience, and undertook a review of all of the Council's assets.

We considered the underlying assumptions made by the expert valuer and concluded that they were reasonable.



Areas of Audit Focus



Further details on procedures relating to valuation of dwellings

We focussed on the following judgemental areas:

- i. The reasonableness of the use of the same component proportions for different property types.
- ii. Whether basing component proportions on a new build property rather than reflecting current condition reasonable.
- iii. Whether the assumption that all asset lives have a remaining life of 45-46 years is reasonable.
- iv. Assessment of the vacant possession values to determine an open market value to compare to the valuers value for reasonableness.
- v. Review of the componentisation and remaining useful lives calculations for reasonableness.
- vi. Consideration of the reasonableness of the Land & Buildings split.

Due to the technical nature of these matters and the extent of judgement applied by the Authority's expert (the valuer) we have engaged our own expert, EY Real Estates.

Our work in this area has now been concluded and an uncorrected misstatement of £1,019k has been identified.



Areas of Audit Focus

Other areas of audit focus

Pension liability valuation

What is the risk?

The Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting and IAS19 require the Authority to make extensive disclosures within its financial statements regarding the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) in which it is a scheduled body.

The Authority's current pension fund deficit is a material and sensitive item and the Code requires that this liability be disclosed on the Authority's balance sheet. The information disclosed is based on the IAS 19 report issued to the Authority by the actuary to the administering body. Accounting for this scheme involves significant estimation and judgement.

ISAs (UK and Ireland) 500 and 540 require us to undertake procedures on the use of management experts and the assumptions underlying fair value estimates.

What judgements are we focused on?

We focused on the following:

- The reasonableness of the underlying assumptions used by the Authority's expert -Barnett Waddingham.
- Ensuring the information supplied to the actuary in relation to Harlow District Council was complete and accurate
- Ensuring the accounting entries and disclosures made in the financial statements were consistent with the report from Barnett Waddingham.

What did we do?

- Liaised with the auditors of the administering authority (Essex County Council), to obtain assurances over the information supplied to the actuary in relation to Harlow District Council.
- Assessed the work of the Pension Fund actuary including the assumptions they have used by relying on the work of PWC - Consulting Actuaries commissioned by National Audit Office for all Local Government sector auditors, and considering the review of these by the EY actuarial team.
- Reviewed and tested the accounting entries and disclosures made within the Authority's financial statements in relation to IAS19.
- Reviewed the Authority's proposal for the pension accounting of HTS (P&E) Ltd.

What are our conclusions?

We have received reports from the Essex Pension Auditor and the EY actuarial team.

The report has identified material movements in the Authority's pension assets and related disclosures as a result of significant movements in the asset values between the date of the estimates used by the actuary to produce the IAS19 report and the year end.

The Authority have obtained the revised IAS 19 report and made the relevant changes to the accounts.

We have concluded that the pension accounting in relation to HTS (see overleaf) is now appropriately reflected in the Authority's accounts.



Areas of Audit Focus



Further details on procedures in relation to accounting for HTS Ltd pensions

We focussed on the following judgemental areas:

- i. Understanding of the pension accounting between the Authority and its wholly owned subsidiary, HTS (P&E) Ltd as well as the effect of the transfer of staff from Kier Harlow. This would also include a consideration of in whose accounts the pension liability would lie.
- ii. Review of prior year adjustments and restatements in relation to the pension costs and liabilities.
- iii. Review of the revised accounting requirements for pension accounting due to the changes in the Tripartite agreement to take into account pooling arrangement, and updated IAS 19 reports.
- iv. Review of the amendments to the group accounts as a result of the above.

At the 31 July Committee meeting our work in this area was still in progress. We have now concluded our work and agreed with the Authority's revised accounting treatment and disclosure. We are currently in the process of agreeing the changes to the final version of the accounts.



03 Audit Report



Audit Report

Our opinion on the financial statements

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF HARLOW DISTRICT COUNCIL

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Harlow District Council for the year ended 31 March 2018 under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. The financial statements comprise the:

- Authority and Group Movement in Reserves Statement,
- Authority and Group Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement,
- Authority and Group Balance Sheet,
- Authority and Group Cash Flow Statement,
- Related notes 1 to 42 and the Expenditure and Funding Analysis
- Housing Revenue Account Income and Expenditure Statement, the Movement on the Housing Revenue Account Statement and the related notes 1 to 13, and
- Collection Fund Account and the related notes 1 to 3

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18.

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of Harlow District Council and Group as at 31 March 2018 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended; and
- have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report below. We are independent of the group in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard and the Comptroller and Auditor General's (C&AG) AGN01, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the S151 Officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the S151 Officer has not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the Authority's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report set out on pages 1 to 10, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The S151 Officer is responsible for the other information.



Audit Report

Our opinion on the financial statements

Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in this report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of the other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters prescribed by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit, having regard to the guidance issued by the C&AG in November 2017, we are satisfied that, in all significant respects, Harlow District Council put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2018.

Matters on which we report by exception

We report to you if:

- in our opinion the annual governance statement is misleading or inconsistent with other information forthcoming from the audit or our knowledge of the Council;
- we issue a report in the public interest under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014;

- we make written recommendations to the audited body under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014;
- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014;
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have nothing to report in these respects.

Responsibility of the S151 Officer

As explained more fully in the Statement of the S151 Officers Responsibilities set out on page 13, the S151 Officer is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which includes the financial statements, in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18, and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view.

In preparing the financial statements, the S151 Officer is responsible for assessing the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Authority either intends to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. 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.



Audit Report

Our opinion on the financial statements

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.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at <https://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Scope of the review of arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources

We have undertaken our review in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in November 2017, as to whether Harlow District Council had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people. The Comptroller and Auditor General determined this criterion as that necessary for us to consider under the Code of Audit Practice in satisfying ourselves whether the Authority put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2018.

We planned our work in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice. Based on our risk assessment, we undertook such work as we considered necessary to form a view on whether, in all significant respects, the Harlow District Council had put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

We are required under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to satisfy ourselves that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office (NAO) requires us to report to you our conclusion relating to proper arrangements

We report if significant matters have come to our attention which prevent us from concluding that the Authority has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We are not required to consider, nor have we considered, whether all aspects of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

Certificate

We certify that we have completed the audit of the accounts of Harlow District Council in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the members of Harlow District Council, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and for no other purpose, as set out in paragraph 43 of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies published by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Authority and the Authority's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Suresh Patel (Key Audit Partner)
Ernst & Young LLP (Local Auditor)
Luton, xx September 2018

The maintenance and integrity of Harlow District Council's web site is the responsibility of the directors; the work carried out by the auditors does not involve consideration of these matters and, accordingly, the auditors accept no responsibility for any changes that may have occurred to the financial statements since they were initially presented on the web site. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.



04 Audit Differences





Audit Differences

In the normal course of any audit, we identify misstatements between amounts we believe should be recorded in the financial statements and the disclosures and amounts actually recorded. These differences are classified as “known” or “judgemental”. Known differences represent items that can be accurately quantified and relate to a definite set of facts or circumstances. Judgemental differences generally involve estimation and relate to facts or circumstances that are uncertain or open to interpretation.

Summary of adjusted differences

We report misstatements greater than £146k which have been corrected by management that were identified during the course of our audit.

Pension assets

- The actuary performed a roll forward technique to estimate the value of the Pension Fund scheme assets as at 31 March 2017 to be £6.63 million. The Pension Fund asset value at year end was, however, materially greater than that estimated by the Actuary when they produced their initial IAS19 report. The Authority obtained an updated IAS 19 report and updated the accounts to reflect these new figures. We are still in the progress of reviewing the adjustments as they will be combined with those adjustments required in response to the further amended IAS19 report.
- It should be noted that the assumptions used by the actuary have been reviewed by both PwC and our EY actuarial team who have both concluded that the assumptions and methodology used are considered to be appropriate. As the movement in the scheme assets is material to the Authority, equates to a less than 1% variance, and forms part of an overall estimated balance, fed by a number of assumptions we have concluded that the estimate is considered to be reasonable.

Pensions and HTS

- Following conclusion of our audit procedures which included using a specialist auditor, several adjustments have been made to the statements most notably a £13.9m reduction in the pensions liability (and associated changes to the movement in reserves statement and the CIES)

Others

- Understatement of loss on disposal of EZ Land: £129k decrease/credit on PPE (OLB), Loss on disposal in the CIES increase/debit £129k, increase/credit to MiRS of £129k and decrease/debit in Unusable Reserves, £129k.
- Overstatement of gain on sale of asset: increase/credit on CIES - HRA for the loss on disposal
- Understatement of assets due to prior year uplifts not written back: Increase/debit in PPE £384k, increase/credit to the Revaluation Reserve, increase to Other Comprehensive Income (OCI) and Capital Adjustment Account of £40k, decrease/credit to Assets Held for Sale and MiRS of £40k.
- Understatement of PPE due to depreciation not added back: increase/debit on PPE OLB £489k and Surplus Assets £2k, increase/credit of £491k to the Revaluation Reserve, credit/increase to OCI £491k and debit/decrease in MiRS.

Summary of adjusted differences

There is one misstatement which management have not agreed to adjust relating to HRA depreciation. Following our audit review, which included use of our own expert, we determined that the HRA depreciation charge is understated by £1.019 million.



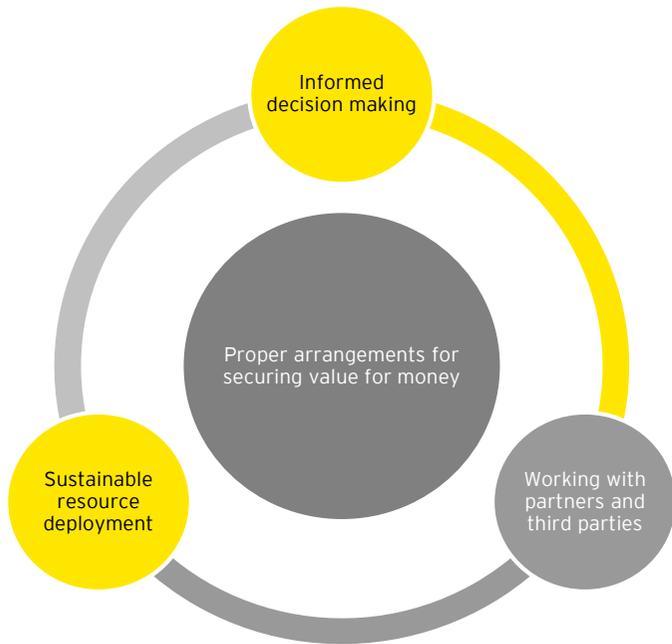
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Value for Money Risks





Value for Money



Background

We are required to consider whether the Authority has put in place 'proper arrangements' to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness on its use of resources. This is known as our value for money conclusion.

For 2017/18 this is based on the overall evaluation criterion:

"In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people"

Proper arrangements are defined by statutory guidance issued by the National Audit Office. They comprise your arrangements to:

- Take informed decisions;
- Deploy resources in a sustainable manner; and
- Work with partners and other third parties.

In considering your proper arrangements, we will draw on the requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework for local government to ensure that our assessment is made against a framework that you are already required to have in place and to report on through documents such as your annual governance statement.

Overall conclusion

At planning we did not identify any significant risks around these arrangements.

We therefore expect having no matters to report about your arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources.



Value for Money

Commentary on financial resilience

We concluded that the Authority gives appropriate attention to internal control. The Authority's high level policies and procedures are updated and regularly communicated to officers and members. Officers monitor the design and effectiveness of controls and pro-actively seek to make improvements.

Our audit of the Authority's 2017/18 financial statements has not identified any matters that would cast doubt (for example, unrecorded expenditure) over the basis of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). In January 2018 Cabinet received and agreed a MTFS projecting a budget gap across the 2018/19 - 2020/21 financial years of £661,000. This is a significant improvement on the position the Authority has faced in previous years and is a reflection of the sound financial planning, delivery of savings combined with the decision to continue to raise Council Tax in previous years. The Authority opted like the majority of councils to enter the 4 year funding deal offered by the Government which, whilst delivering no respite from the reduction and removal of grant funding, it has given a degree of certainty in future budget projections.

The Authority has produced a balanced budget for 2017/18 and is working on reducing the 2018/19 budget gap as well.

The Authority does have a history of bridging budget gaps and has an adequate level of reserves. Therefore on this basis, we have not identified any other factors that lead us to report any matters in relation to our VFM Conclusion.



06 Other reporting issues



Other reporting issues

Other reporting issues

Consistency of other information published with the financial statements, including the Annual Governance Statement

We must give an opinion on the consistency of the financial and non-financial information in the Statement of Accounts 2017/18 with the audited financial statements.

We must also review the Annual Governance Statement for completeness of disclosures, consistency with other information from our work, and whether it complies with relevant guidance.

Financial information in the Statement of Accounts 2017/18 and published with the financial statements was consistent with the audited financial statements.

We have reviewed the Annual Governance Statement and can confirm it is consistent with other information from our audit of the financial statements and we have no other matters to report.

Whole of Government Accounts

Alongside our work on the financial statements, we also review and report to the National Audit Office on your Whole of Government Accounts return. The extent of our review, and the nature of our report, is specified by the National Audit Office.

Harlow District Council are below the threshold therefore do not require full procedures to be undertaken.

Other powers and duties

We have a duty under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to consider whether to report on any matter that comes to our attention in the course of the audit, either for the Authority to consider it or to bring it to the attention of the public (i.e. "a report in the public interest"). We did not identify any issues which required us to issue a report in the public interest.

We also have a duty to make written recommendations to the Authority, copied to the Secretary of State, and take action in accordance with our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. We did not identify any issues.

Other reporting issues

Other matters

As required by ISA (UK&I) 260 and other ISAs specifying communication requirements, we must tell you significant findings from the audit and other matters if they are significant to your oversight of the Authority's financial reporting process. They include the following:

- Significant qualitative aspects of accounting practices including accounting policies, accounting estimates and financial statement disclosures;
- Any significant difficulties encountered during the audit;
- Any significant matters arising from the audit that were discussed with management;
- Written representations we have requested;
- Expected modifications to the audit report;
- Any other matters significant to overseeing the financial reporting process;
- Related parties;
- External confirmations;
- Going concern; and
- Consideration of laws and regulations.

We have nothing to report in respect of these issues.

Assessment of new Accounting Standards

- IFRS 9 Financial Instruments: The 2018/19 Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting for the United Kingdom introduces IFRS 9 on financial instruments. The Authority's view is that the impact of this standard on the Authority's financial statements will be immaterial. The Authority will need to keep this standard under continued focus during 2018/19 because statutory overrides may be introduced by Central Government
- IFRS 15 Revenue from Contracts with Customers: Similarly the 2018/19 Code determines how IFRS 15 Revenue from Customers with Contracts will be adopted by local government bodies. In the Authority's view IFRS 15 will not have a material impact on the Authority's financial statements as the vast majority of the Authority's income streams are taxation or grant based.



07

Assessment of Control Environment



Assessment of Control Environment

Financial controls

It is the responsibility of the Authority to develop and implement systems of internal financial control and to put in place proper arrangements to monitor their adequacy and effectiveness in practice. Our responsibility as your auditor is to consider whether the Authority has put adequate arrangements in place to satisfy itself that the systems of internal financial control are both adequate and effective in practice.

As part of our audit of the financial statements, we obtained an understanding of internal control sufficient to plan our audit and determine the nature, timing and extent of testing performed. As we have adopted a fully substantive approach, we have therefore not tested the operation of controls.

Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control we are required to communicate to you significant deficiencies in internal control.

We have not identified any significant deficiencies in the design or operation of an internal control that might result in a material misstatement in your financial statements of which you are not aware.



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Independence

Confirmation

We confirm that there are no changes in our assessment of independence since our confirmation in our audit planning board report dated March 2018.

We complied with the APB Ethical Standards and the requirements of the PSAA's Terms of Appointment. In our professional judgement the firm is independent and the objectivity of the audit engagement partner and audit staff has not been compromised within the meaning of regulatory and professional requirements.

We consider that our independence in this context is a matter which you should review, as well as us. It is important that you and your Audit Committee consider the facts known to you and come to a view. If you would like to discuss any matters concerning our independence, we will be pleased to do this at the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee on 5 September 2018.

We confirm we have not undertaken non-audit work outside the PSAA Code requirements.

Relationships, services and related threats and safeguards

The FRC Ethical Standard requires that we provide details of all relationships between Ernst & Young (EY) and your Authority, and its directors and senior management and its affiliates, including all services provided by us and our network to your Authority, its directors and senior management and its affiliates, and other services provided to other known connected parties that we consider may reasonably be thought to bear on the our integrity or objectivity, including those that could compromise independence and the related safeguards that are in place and why they address the threats. There are no relationships from 1 April 2017 to the date of this report, which we consider may reasonably be thought to bear on our independence and objectivity.

Services provided by Ernst & Young

Below includes a summary of the fees that you have paid to us (and we have agreed) in the year ended 31 March 2018 in line with the disclosures set out in FRC Ethical Standard and in statute. We confirm that none of the non-audit services undertaken been provided on a contingent fee basis.

Independence

Fee analysis

As part of our reporting on our independence, we set out below a summary of the fees for the year ended 31 March 2018.

For 2017/18 we undertake the housing benefits certification work under the PSAA arrangements. The final fee for this work will depend on any issues we identify in undertaking the work (we are due to complete the work by the end of November). We confirm that we have not undertaken any other non-audit work.

The additional fees for 2017/18 are subject to agreement with the Section 151 Officer and then PSAA approval.

	Final fee 2017/18	Planned fee 2017/18	Scale fee 2017/18	Final Fee 2016/17
	£	£	£	£
Standard fee	77,514	77,514	77,514	77,514
Additional audit work:				
- Group accounts	3,980	2,000	-	2,000
- Issues with working papers and resolving audit queries	-	-	-	4,000
- Restatements to PY and volume of audit adjustments to review	1,730	-	-	-
- MRP Review	1,705	-	-	-
- Pensions issue	9,965	10,000	-	-
- HRA Depreciation issue	9,120	10,000	-	-
Total audit fee - code work	104,014	99,514	77,514	83,514
Housing Benefits certification	Tbc	18,695	18,695	22,695
Total fees	Tbc	118,209	96,209	106,209



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Appendices

Appendix A

Required communications with the Audit & Standards Committee

There are certain communications that we must provide to the Audit Committees of UK clients. We have detailed these here together with a reference of when and where they were covered:

 Our Reporting to you		
Required communications	 What is reported?	  When and where
Terms of engagement	Confirmation by the Audit Committee of acceptance of terms of engagement as written in the engagement letter signed by both parties.	The statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between the PSAA's appointed auditors and audited bodies.
Our responsibilities	Reminder of our responsibilities as set out in the engagement letter.	The statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between the PSAA's appointed auditors and audited bodies.
Planning and audit approach	Communication of the planned scope and timing of the audit, any limitations and the significant risks identified.	Audit planning report - March 2018
Significant findings from the audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Our view about the significant qualitative aspects of accounting practices including accounting policies, accounting estimates and financial statement disclosures ▶ Significant difficulties, if any, encountered during the audit ▶ Significant matters, if any, arising from the audit that were discussed with management ▶ Written representations that we are seeking ▶ Expected modifications to the audit report ▶ Other matters if any, significant to the oversight of the financial reporting process 	Audit results report - Aug 2018

Appendix A

		 Our Reporting to you
Required communications	 What is reported?	 When and where
Going concern	<p>Events or conditions identified that may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Whether the events or conditions constitute a material uncertainty ▶ Whether the use of the going concern assumption is appropriate in the preparation and presentation of the financial statements ▶ The adequacy of related disclosures in the financial statements 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Misstatements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Uncorrected misstatements and their effect on our audit opinion ▶ The effect of uncorrected misstatements related to prior periods ▶ A request that any uncorrected misstatement be corrected ▶ Material misstatements corrected by management 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Subsequent events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Enquiry of the audit committee where appropriate regarding whether any subsequent events have occurred that might affect the financial statements. 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Enquiries of the Audit committee to determine whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud affecting the Authority ▶ Any fraud that we have identified or information we have obtained that indicates that a fraud may exist ▶ Unless all of those charged with governance are involved in managing the Authority, any identified or suspected fraud involving: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Management; b. Employees who have significant roles in internal control; or c. Others where the fraud results in a material misstatement in the financial statements. ▶ The nature, timing and extent of audit procedures necessary to complete the audit when fraud involving management is suspected ▶ Any other matters related to fraud, relevant to Audit Committee responsibility. 	Audit results report - Aug 2018

Appendix A

		 Our Reporting to you
Required communications	 What is reported?	 When and where
Related parties	<p>Significant matters arising during the audit in connection with the Authority's related parties including, when applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Non-disclosure by management ▶ Inappropriate authorisation and approval of transactions ▶ Disagreement over disclosures ▶ Non-compliance with laws and regulations ▶ Difficulty in identifying the party that ultimately controls the Authority 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Independence	<p>Communication of all significant facts and matters that bear on EY's, and all individuals involved in the audit, objectivity and independence.</p> <p>Communication of key elements of the audit engagement partner's consideration of independence and objectivity such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The principal threats ▶ Safeguards adopted and their effectiveness ▶ An overall assessment of threats and safeguards ▶ Information about the general policies and process within the firm to maintain objectivity and independence <p>Communications whenever significant judgments are made about threats to objectivity and independence and the appropriateness of safeguards put in place.</p>	Audit results report - Aug 2018
External confirmations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Management's refusal for us to request confirmations ▶ Inability to obtain relevant and reliable audit evidence from other procedures. 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Consideration of laws and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Subject to compliance with applicable regulations, matters involving identified or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations, other than those which are clearly inconsequential and the implications thereof. Instances may also include those that are brought to our attention that are expected to occur imminently or for which there is reason to believe that they may occur ▶ Enquiry of the audit committee into possible instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations that may have a material effect on the financial statements and that the audit committee may be aware of. 	Audit results report - Aug 2018

Appendix A

		Our Reporting to you
Required communications	 What is reported?	  When and where
Significant deficiencies in internal controls identified during the audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Significant deficiencies in internal controls identified during the audit. 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Written representations we are requesting from management and/or those charged with governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Written representations we are requesting from management and/or those charged with governance 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Material inconsistencies or misstatements of fact identified in other information which management has refused to revise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Material inconsistencies or misstatements of fact identified in other information which management has refused to revise 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Auditors report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Any circumstances identified that affect the form and content of our auditor's report 	Audit results report - Aug 2018
Fee Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Breakdown of fee information when the audit planning report is agreed ▶ Breakdown of fee information at the completion of the audit ▶ Any non-audit work 	Audit planning report - March 2018 Audit results report - Aug 2018
Certification work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Summary of certification work 	Annual Certification Report

Appendix B

Management Rep Letter

[To be prepared on the entity's letterhead]
[Date]

Ernst & Young LLP
400 Capability Green
Luton LU1 3LU

This letter of representations is provided in connection with your Harlow District Council ("the Council") for the year ended 31st March 2018. We recognise that obtaining representations from us concerning the information contained in this letter is a significant procedure in enabling you to form an opinion as to whether the consolidated and council financial statements give a true and fair view of the Council's financial position of Harlow District Council as of 31st March 2018 and of its financial performance (or operations) and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with the CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18 for the Council.

We understand that the purpose of your audit of our consolidated and council financial statements is to express an opinion there on and that your audit was conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing, which involves an examination of the accounting system, internal control and related data to the extent you considered necessary in the circumstances, and is not designed to identify nor necessarily be expected to disclose - all fraud, shortages, errors and other irregularities, should any exist.

Accordingly, we make the following representations, which are true to the best of our knowledge and belief, having made such inquiries as we considered necessary for the purpose of appropriately informing ourselves:

A. Financial Statements and Financial Records

1. We have fulfilled our responsibilities for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18 for the Council.
2. We acknowledge, as members of management of the Company, our responsibility for the fair presentation of the consolidated and council financial statements. We believe the consolidated and council financial statements referred to above give a true and fair view of the financial position, financial performance (or results of operations) and cash flows of the Council in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18 and are free of material misstatements, including omissions. We have approved the consolidated financial statements.
3. The significant accounting policies adopted in the preparation of the Council financial statements are appropriately described in the Council financial statements.
4. As members of management of the Council, we believe that the Council have a system of internal controls adequate to enable the preparation of accurate financial statements in accordance with the CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18 for the Council that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.
5. There are no unadjusted audit differences identified during the current audit and pertaining to the latest period presented. **[To be updated by the Authority to reflect the uncorrected HRA Depreciation misstatement]**



Appendix B

Management Rep Letter

B. Non-compliance with law and regulations, including fraud

1. We acknowledge that we are responsible to determine that the Council's activities are conducted in accordance with laws and regulations and that we are responsible to identify and address any non-compliance with applicable laws and regulations, including fraud.

2. We acknowledge that we are responsible for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal controls to prevent and detect fraud.

3. We have disclosed to you the results of our assessment of the risk that the consolidated and Council financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud.

4. We have no knowledge of any identified or suspected non-compliance with laws or regulations, including fraud that may have affected the Council (regardless of the source or form and including without limitation, any allegations by "whistle blowers"), including non-compliance matters:

- ▶ involving financial statements;
- ▶ related to laws and regulations that have a direct effect on the determination of material amounts and disclosures in the consolidated or Council's financial statements;

- ▶ related to laws and regulations that have an indirect effect on amounts and disclosures in the financial statements, but compliance with which may be fundamental to the operations of the Council's activities, its ability to continue to operate, or to avoid material penalties;
- ▶ involving management, or employees who have significant roles in internal controls, or others; or
- ▶ in relation to any allegations of fraud, suspected fraud or other non-compliance with laws and regulations communicated by employees, former employees, analysts, regulators or others.

C. Information Provided and Completeness of Information and Transactions

1. We have provided you with:

- ▶ Access to all information of which we are aware that is relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
- ▶ Additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of the audit; and
- ▶ Unrestricted access to persons within the entity from whom you determined it necessary to obtain audit evidence.

2. All material transactions have been recorded in the accounting records and are reflected in the consolidated and council financial statements.

3. We have made available to you all minutes of the meetings of the Full Council, Cabinet and Finance Resources Audit and Governance committees (or summaries of actions of recent meetings for which minutes have not yet been prepared) held through the year to the most recent meeting on the following date: 5 September 2018.



Appendix B

Management Rep Letter

4. We confirm the completeness of information provided regarding the identification of related parties. We have disclosed to you the identity of the Council's related parties and all related party relationships and transactions of which we are aware, including sales, purchases, loans, transfers of assets, liabilities and services, leasing arrangements, guarantees, non-monetary transactions and transactions for no consideration for the year ended, as well as related balances due to or from such parties at the year end. These transactions have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed in the consolidated and council financial statements.

5. We believe that the significant assumptions we used in making accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value, are reasonable.

6. We have disclosed to you, and the Council has complied with, all aspects of contractual agreements that could have a material effect on the consolidated and council financial statements in the event of non-compliance, including all covenants, conditions or other requirements of all outstanding debt.

D. Liabilities and Contingencies

1. All liabilities and contingencies, including those associated with guarantees, whether written or oral, have been disclosed to you and are appropriately reflected in the consolidated and council financial statements.
2. We have informed you of all outstanding and possible litigation and claims, whether or not they have been discussed with legal counsel.

3. We have recorded and/ or disclosed, as appropriate, all liabilities related litigation and claims, both actual and contingent, and have disclosed to you all guarantees that we have given to third parties.

4. No claims in connection with litigation have been or are expected to be received.

E. Subsequent Events

1. There have been no events subsequent to year end which require adjustment of or disclosure in the consolidated and council financial statements or notes thereto.

F. Other information

1. We acknowledge our responsibility for the preparation of the other information. The other information comprises the Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Statement.

2. We confirm that the content contained within the other information is consistent with the financial statements.



Appendix B

Management Rep Letter

H. Use of the Work of a Specialist

1. We agree with the findings of the specialists that we engaged to evaluate the valuation of non-current assets and have adequately considered the qualifications of the specialists in determining the amounts and disclosures included in the consolidated and council financial statements and the underlying accounting records. We did not give or cause any instructions to be given to the specialists with respect to the values or amounts derived in an attempt to bias their work, and we are not otherwise aware of any matters that have had an effect on the independence or objectivity of the specialists.

I. Accounting Estimates

Valuation of Pension Asset/Liabilities and Property, Plant and Equipment

1. We believe that the measurement processes, including related assumptions and models, used to determine the accounting estimate (s) have been consistently applied and are appropriate in the context of CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18.

2. We confirm that the significant assumptions used in making the estimated valuations of Pension Asset/ Liabilities and Property, Plant and Equipment appropriately reflect our intent and ability to carry out specific courses of action on behalf of the Council.

3. We confirm that the disclosures made in the consolidated and council financial statements with respect to the accounting estimate(s) are complete and made in accordance with CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2017/18.

4. We confirm that no adjustments are required to the accounting estimates and disclosures in the consolidated and council financial statements due to subsequent events.

J. Retirement benefits

1. On the basis of the process established by us and having made appropriate enquiries, we are satisfied that the actuarial assumptions underlying the scheme liabilities are consistent with our knowledge of the business. All significant retirement benefits and all settlements and curtailments have been identified and properly accounted for

Yours faithfully,

Director of Finance (S151 Officer)

Chair of the Audit & Standards Committee

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