

Audit and Inspection Plan

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Audit 2008/09

External audit is an essential element in the process of accountability for public money and makes an important contribution to the stewardship of public resources and the corporate governance of public services.

Audit in the public sector is underpinned by three fundamental principles:

- auditors are appointed independently from the bodies being audited;
- the scope of auditors' work is extended to cover not only the audit of financial statements but also value for money and the conduct of public business; and
- auditors may report aspects of their work widely to the public and other key stakeholders.

The duties and powers of auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are set out in the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the Local Government Act 1999 and the Commission's statutory Code of Audit Practice. Under the Code of Audit Practice, appointed auditors are also required to comply with the current professional standards issued by the independent Auditing Practices Board.

Appointed auditors act quite separately from the Commission and in meeting their statutory responsibilities are required to exercise their professional judgement independently of both the Commission and the audited body.

Status of our reports

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
- any third party.

Copies of this report

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Introduction

- 1 This plan sets out the audit and inspection work that we propose to undertake for the 2008/09 financial year. The plan is based on the Audit Commission's risk-based approach to audit planning and the requirements of moving towards Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). It reflects:
 - audit and inspection work specified by the Audit Commission for 2008/09;
 - current national risks relevant to your local circumstances; and
 - your local risks and improvement priorities.
- 2 During 2008/09, the role of Relationship Manager will be replaced by the post of Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead (CAAL). The CAAL will provide the focal point for the Commission's work in your local area, lead the CAA process, and ensure that the combined inspection programme across all inspectorates is tailored to the level and nature of risk for the area and its constituent public bodies. The Commission has become the statutory gatekeeper of all inspection activity involving local authorities.
- 3 Although local government reorganisation (LGR) in Cheshire does not directly affect the Authority, its impact will be felt particularly in relation to changes to partnership and governance arrangements. We have tailored our plan to enable us to review the impact and address any associated audit risks.
- 4 As we have not yet completed our audit for 2007/08, the audit planning process for 2008/09, including the risk assessment, will continue as the year progresses and the information and fees in this plan will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

Responsibilities

- 5 We comply with the statutory requirements governing our audit and inspection work, in particular:
 - the Audit Commission Act 1998;
 - the Local Government Act 1999;
 - the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004; and
 - the Code of Audit Practice.
- 6 The Code of Audit Practice (the Code) defines auditors' responsibilities in relation to:
 - the financial statements (including the annual governance statement); and
 - the audited body's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- 7 The Audit Commission's Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies sets out the respective responsibilities of the auditor and the Council. Copies of the Code and the associated Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies may be found on the Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.
- 8 We have revised the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies (from April 2008) for 2008/09 audits to reflect changes in our regime and to clarify the responsibilities of audited bodies in certain areas. In particular, we have expanded its scope to clarify audited bodies' responsibilities in relation to:
 - the preparation and review of the financial statements;
 - the electronic publication of the financial statements;
 - data quality and the preparation and review of published performance information; and
 - those charitable funds to which the Audit Commission appoints auditors and those for which the Audit Commission undertakes an audit.
- 9 The Statement summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body begin and end, and our audit work is undertaken in the context of these responsibilities. The Audit Commission has issued a copy of the Statement to every audited body.

Fees

- 10 The details of scale fees are set out in the Audit Commission's work programme and fee scales 2008/09 document. Scale fees are based on a number of variables, including the type, size and location of the audited body.
- 11 The total estimated fee for the audit and inspection work for 2008/09 is £81,978 which compares to the planned fee of £73,657 for 2007/08. The fee is based on our assessment of audit risk and some assumptions which are summarised in appendix 2. Summary information in relation to the fee is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Audit and Inspection fee

| Audit area | Planned fee 2008/09 | Planned fee 2007/08 | Page |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Audit | 65,690 | 58,776 | 9 |
| Inspection | 16,288 | 14,881 | 12 |
| Total audit and inspection fee | 81,978 | 73,657 | |

- 12 The Audit Commission scale fee for the Audit (excluding inspection) is £69,740. The fee proposed for 2008/09 of £65,690 is 6 per cent below the scale fee and is within the normal level of variation specified by the Commission. The increase in fee between 2007/08 and 2008/09 equates to 11 per cent which is in line with the Commission's latest fee guidance. The inspection fee is fully grant funded by DCLG.
- 13 In setting the fee, we have assumed that:
- the level of risk in relation to the audit of the financial statements is not significantly different from that identified for 2007/08;
 - the new internal audit team, RSM Bentley Jennison, meet appropriate professional standards; and
 - good quality working papers and records will continue to be provided to support the financial statements by July 2009.

Further details of our assumptions are outlined in Appendix 2.

- 14 The Audit Commission has the power to determine the fee above or below the scale fee where it considers that substantially more or less work is required than envisaged by the scale fee. The Audit Commission may, therefore, adjust the scale fee to reflect the actual work that needs to be carried out to meet the auditor's statutory responsibilities, on the basis of the auditor's assessment of risk and complexity at a particular body.
- 15 The fee (plus VAT) will be charged in 12 equal instalments from May 2008.

Specific actions the Authority could take to reduce its audit fees

- 16 The Audit Commission requires us to inform the Authority of specific actions it could take to reduce its audit fees. We have identified the following actions that the Authority could take to reduce future fees.
 - Further strengthen the arrangements for enabling the production of good quality financial statements and supporting working papers.
 - Ensure reported and agreed recommendations are implemented promptly.
 - Maintain an effective control environment.

Process for agreeing any changes in audit fees

- 17 As set out in paragraph 3, we expect that the initial risk assessment may change as the year progress. Where this is the case, we will discuss this in the first instance with the Treasurer. Supplements to the plan will be issued to record any revisions to the risk and the impact on the fee.

Auditor's report on the financial statements

- 18 We are required to issue an audit report giving our:
- opinion on whether the financial statements present fairly the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2009; and
 - conclusion on whether the Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Financial statements

- 19 We have not undertaken a risk assessment for our audit of the financial statements as many of the specific risks may only become apparent after we have completed our 2007/08 audit. A separate opinion audit plan for the audit of the financial statements will be issued later in the audit.
- 20 At this stage we are aware of the following risks that are likely to impact on our audit of the financial statements:
- changes to the provider of internal audit services;
 - changes to the provision of the treasury management function; and
 - responding to changes to recommended accounting practices.

Details of the work planned to address these risks is provided at Appendix 3.

VFM conclusion

- 21 In reaching our conclusion as to whether or not the Authority has arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources we review evidence that is relevant to the Authority's performance management and financial management arrangements.
- 22 There is just one key risk areas highlighted from our initial which is in relation to maintaining high levels of performance and governance standards during the re-organisation of local government in Cheshire. Details of the planned work to mitigate the risk is outlined in Appendix 3.

Use of resources

- 23 The work required to complete the use of resources assessment in 2008 is broadly similar to that performed in previous years. However, a small number of changes to the key lines of enquiry have been made following the Audit Commission's consultation process. Some of the changes which have been made should assist with the transition to the new use of resources assessment in 2009 which will form part of the CAA framework.
- 24 The approach to the new use of resources assessment will be focused on three themes with the detailed key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) to be confirmed. More detail in relation to the new approach is provided at Appendix 1. The fee for the first assessment under the new approach will be included in the 2009/10 audit plan.

Mandated work

25 The mandated work included in our audit consists of:

- data quality for 2007/08 and 2008/09; and
- whole of government accounts.

Appendix 1 highlights the work to be undertaken.

Fire and rescue performance assessment framework

- 26 The key elements of the performance assessment framework which is planned for 2008/09 are shown in the table below.

Table 2 Summary of performance assessment activity

| Inspection activity | Reason/impact |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| CAAL role | To act as the Commission's primary point of contact with the Authority and the interface at the local level between the Commission and the other inspectorates, government offices and other key stakeholders. |
| Direction of Travel (DoT) assessment | An assessment of improvement, or deterioration, in performance measured through a scored Direction of Travel assessment. The assessment will be outcome focused and will draw together other assessments on the Authority. The DoT assessment summary will be published on the Commission's website. |
| Service assessment | A scored assessment which has an emphasis on service delivery. It includes a performance information element, and an operational assessment of service delivery provided by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The service assessment will be reported in the performance assessment framework scorecard published in March 2009. |

Advice and assistance

- 27 Under paragraph 9 of schedule 2A of the Audit Commission Act 1998, we have powers to provide 'advice and assistance' to another public body where this is requested.
- 28 We are not proposing to undertake any such work at the Authority during 2008/09. However, if you wish the Commission to provide additional services under these powers, please contact the District Auditor, Judith Tench in the first instance.

The audit and inspection team

- 29 The key members of the audit and inspection team for the 2008/09 audit are shown in the table below.

Table 3 Audit and inspection team

| Name | Contact details | Responsibilities |
|---|---|---|
| Judith Tench District Auditor | j-tench@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 3556 | Responsible for the overall delivery of the audit including the quality of outputs, signing the opinion and conclusion, and liaison with the chief officers and Committees. |
| Peter Forrester CAAL | p-forrester@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 3567 | The primary point of contact with the Authority and the interface at the local level between the Commission, government offices and other key stakeholders. |
| Graham Parry Audit Manager | gs-parry@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 4836 | Manages and coordinates the different elements of the audit work. Key point of contact for the Treasurer. |
| Mike Whiteley Principal Auditor & Team Leader | m-whiteley@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 3597 | Responsible for the detailed planning, controlling, delivery and reporting of the audit. |
| Sarah Davies Performance Specialist | s-davies@audit-commission.gov.uk 0844 798 3561 | Responsible for the delivery elements of the use of resources work including value for money assessments. |

Quality of service

- 30 We are committed to providing you with a high quality service. If you are in any way dissatisfied, or would like to discuss how we can improve our service, please contact Judith Tench, District Auditor in the first instance. Alternatively you may wish to contact the Northern Region Head of Operations, Frank Kerkham.
- 31 If we are unable to satisfy your concerns, you have the right to make a formal complaint to the Audit Commission. The complaints procedure is set out in the leaflet '*Something to Complain About*', which is available from the Commission's website or on request.

Planned outputs

- 32 Reports will be discussed and agreed with the appropriate officers before being issued to the appropriate Committee.

Table 4 **Planned outputs**

| Planned output | Indicative date |
|--|------------------------|
| Opinion Audit Plan | December 2008 |
| Fire and rescue performance assessment framework scorecard | March 2009 |
| Annual governance report | September 2009 |
| Auditor's report giving an opinion on the financial statements | September 2009 |
| Final accounts memorandum | November 2009 |
| Annual Audit and Inspection Letter | To be confirmed |

Appendix 1 – Elements of our work

Financial statements

- 1 We will carry out our audit of the financial statements in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Auditing Practices Board (APB).
- 2 We are required to issue an opinion on whether the financial statements present fairly, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations and the Statement of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2008, the financial position of the FRA as at 31 March 2009 and its income and expenditure for the year.
- 3 We are also required to review whether the Annual Governance Statement has been presented in accordance with relevant requirements, and to report if it does not meet these requirements or if the Annual Governance Statement is misleading or inconsistent with our knowledge of the Authority.

Value for money conclusion

- 4 The Code requires us to issue a conclusion on whether the FRA has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This is known as the value for money conclusion. The Code also requires me to have regard to a standard set of relevant criteria, issued by the Audit Commission, in arriving at my conclusion.
- 5 In meeting this responsibility, we will review evidence that is relevant to the Authority's corporate performance management and financial management arrangements. Where relevant work has been undertaken by other regulators, we will normally place reliance on their reported results to inform our work.
- 6 We will also follow up audit work from previous years to assess progress in implementing agreed recommendations.

Use of resources assessment

- 7 The Commission has now consulted on its proposals for the 2008/09 use of resources assessment. It proposes that the work required to arrive at the 2008/09 use of resources assessment is fully aligned with that required to arrive at the 2008/09 value for money assessment.

- 8 The Commission proposes that the assessment will be based upon the evidence from three main themes:
- Managing money;
 - Managing the business; and
 - Managing other resources.

Data quality

- 9 Auditors will be required to undertake audit work in relation to data quality which will be directly linked to the VFM conclusion and the use of resources assessment.
- 10 From 2008/09, the approach to data quality is being considered as part of the use of resources framework. As part of the approach, the Audit Commission will specify work on fire performance indicators.

Whole of government accounts

- 11 We are required to review and report on your WGA consolidation pack in accordance with the approach agreed with HM Treasury and the National Audit Office.

National Fraud Initiative

- 12 From 2008/09 work relating to the National Fraud Initiative will be carried out directly by the Commission under its new data matching powers under the Serious Crime Act 2007. The Commission will be consulting audited bodies on the work programme and fee scales for the National Fraud Initiative later this year.

Appendix 2 – Basis for fee

- 1 The Audit Commission is committed to targeting its work where it will have the greatest effect, based upon assessments of risk and performance. This means planning work to address areas of risk relevant to our audit responsibilities and reflecting this in the audit fees. It also means making sure that our work is coordinated with the work of other regulators, and that our work helps you to improve.
- 2 The risk assessment process starts with the identification of the significant financial and operational risks applying at the FRA with reference to:
 - our cumulative knowledge of the Authority;
 - planning guidance issued by the Audit Commission;
 - the specific results of previous and ongoing audit work;
 - interviews with Authority officers;
 - liaison with internal audit; and
 - the results of other review agencies' work where relevant.

Assumptions

- 3 In setting the fee, we have assumed that:
 - the level of risk in relation to the audit of the financial statements is not significantly different from that identified for 2007/08;
 - you will inform us of significant developments impacting on our audit;
 - internal audit meets the appropriate professional standards;
 - internal audit undertakes appropriate work on all systems that provide material figures in the financial statements sufficient that we can place reliance for the purposes of our audit;
 - good quality working papers and records will be provided to support the financial statements by early July 2009;
 - requested information will be provided within agreed timescales; and
 - prompt responses will be provided to draft reports.
- 4 Where these assumptions are not met, we will be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee. The fee for the audit of the financial statements will be re-visited when we issue the opinion audit plan.

- 5 Changes to the plan will be agreed with you. These may be required if:
- new residual audit risks emerge;
 - additional work is required by the Audit Commission or other regulators; or
 - additional work is required as a result of changes in legislation, professional standards or as a result of changes in financial reporting.
- 6 Below is a detailed breakdown of the audit and inspection fee for 2008/09.

Table 5 Detailed audit and inspection fee

| Audit area | Planned fee 2008/09 | Planned fee 2007/08 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Financial statements | 33,090 | 32,746 |
| Use of resources | 24,600 | 24,530 |
| Data quality | 6,500 | 1,500 |
| Whole of government accounts | 1,500 | 1,500 |
| Total audit fee | 65,690 | 58,776 |
| Inspection fee (DCLG funded) | 16,288 | 14,881 |
| Total audit and inspection fee | 81,978 | 73,657 |

Appendix 3 – Initial risk assessment

| Significant risks identified | Mitigating action by audited body | Residual audit risk | Action in response to residual audit risk | Link to auditor’s responsibilities |
|---|---|---------------------|---|--|
| Maintaining high levels of performance and governance standards during the re-organisation of local government in Cheshire. | Authority has developed strong partnership and governance arrangements and this will facilitate the Authority's effective engagement with political and structural changes. | Yes | Ongoing liaison with Deputy Chief Officer and Treasurer to identify risks and review of how they are managed. | UoR KLOEs 4 and 5 and VFM conclusion |
| Changes to the provider of internal audit services. | The Treasurer is working closely with new provider to ensure that professional responsibilities are met. | Yes | Review performance against CIPFA code requirements and specific work to enable us to gain appropriate audit assurances. | Use of resources KLOE 4 Opinion on financial statements |
| Changes to the provision of the treasury management function. | The Treasurer is planning to introduce arrangements to monitor performance against expectations. | Yes | Review the monitoring arrangements which the Treasurer plans to implement. | Use of resources KLOE 2 Opinion on financial statements |

| Significant risks identified | Mitigating action by audited body | Residual audit risk | Action in response to residual audit risk | Link to auditor’s responsibilities |
|--|--|----------------------------|---|---|
| Responding to changes to recommended accounting practices. | Treasurer is implementing plans to increase technical expertise within the finance function. | Yes | Regular discussion with Treasurer in relation to financial management capacity issues and financial reporting requirements, particularly changes to requirements. | Use of resources KLOEs 1 and 2 Opinion on the financial statements |

Appendix 4 – Independence and objectivity

- 1 We wish to draw the following matter to your attention. Judith Tench is married to the Director for Local Governance at the Centre for Educational Leadership at the University of Manchester. His primary role is to lead on the strategic development and management of local government development programmes. The centre is contracted to work with the North West Improvement Network.
- 2 We have reviewed this relationship against the ethical standards issued by APB and with the Commission's own requirements set out in its Code of Audit practice. We have concluded that it does not affect her independence and objectivity as your District Auditor. If you have any concerns or questions about this issue you should raise them with Judith Tench in the first instance.
- 3 We are not aware of any other relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the District Auditor and the audit staff, which we are required by auditing and ethical standards to communicate to you.
- 4 We comply with the ethical standards issued by the APB and with the Commission's requirements in respect of independence and objectivity as summarised below.
- 5 Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are required to comply with the Commission's Code of Audit Practice and Standing Guidance for Auditors, which defines the terms of my appointment. When auditing the financial statements auditors are also required to comply with auditing standards and ethical standards issued by the Auditing Practices Board (APB).
- 6 The main requirements of the Code of Audit Practice, Standing Guidance for Auditors and the standards are summarised below.
- 7 International Standard on Auditing (UK and Ireland) 260 (Communication of audit matters with those charged with governance) requires that the appointed auditor:
 - discloses in writing all relationships that may bear on the auditor's objectivity and independence, the related safeguards put in place to protect against these threats and the total amount of fee that the auditor has charged the client; and
 - confirms in writing that the APB's ethical standards are complied with and that, in the auditor's professional judgement, they are independent and their objectivity is not compromised.
- 8 The standard defines 'those charged with governance' as 'those persons entrusted with the supervision, control and direction of an entity'. In your case, the appropriate addressee of communications from the auditor to those charged with governance is the [audit committee]. The auditor reserves the right, however, to communicate directly with the Authority on matters which are considered to be of sufficient importance.

- 9 The Commission’s Code of Audit Practice has an overriding general requirement that appointed auditors carry out their work independently and objectively, and ensure that they do not act in any way that might give rise to, or could reasonably be perceived to give rise to, a conflict of interest. In particular, appointed auditors and their staff should avoid entering into any official, professional or personal relationships which may, or could reasonably be perceived to, cause them inappropriately or unjustifiably to limit the scope, extent or rigour of their work or impair the objectivity of their judgement.
- 10 The Standing Guidance for Auditors includes a number of specific rules. The key rules relevant to this audit appointment are as follows.
 - Appointed auditors should not perform additional work for an audited body (ie work over and above the minimum required to meet their statutory responsibilities) if it would compromise their independence or might give rise to a reasonable perception that their independence could be compromised. Where the audited body invites the auditor to carry out risk-based work in a particular area that cannot otherwise be justified as necessary to support the auditor’s opinion and conclusions, it should be clearly differentiated within the Audit and Inspection Plan as being ‘additional work’ and charged for separately from the normal audit fee.
 - Auditors should not accept engagements that involve commenting on the performance of other auditors appointed by the Commission on Commission work, without first consulting the Commission.
 - The District Auditor responsible for the audit should, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, be changed at least once every five years.
 - The District Auditor and senior members of the audit team are prevented from taking part in political activity on behalf of a political party, or special interest group, whose activities relate directly to the functions of local government or NHS bodies in general, or to a particular local government or NHS body.
 - The District Auditor and members of the audit team must abide by the Commission’s policy on gifts, hospitality and entertainment.

Appendix 5 – Working together

Meetings

- 1 The audit and inspection team will maintain knowledge of your issues to inform audit and inspection through regular liaison with key officers.
- 2 Our proposal for the meetings is as follows.

Table 6 Proposed meetings with officers

| Authority officers | Audit Commission staff | Timing | Purpose |
|------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Chief Officer | CAAL District Auditor (DA) Audit Manager (AM) | Half yearly | General update |
| Deputy Chief Officer | DA/CAAL/AM AM/Team leader | Half yearly Quarterly | General update and more specifically to discuss audit plan and key audit reports |
| Treasurer | AM and TL | Quarterly | As above plus more detailed discussion on opinion and use of resources issues |
| Internal Audit | AM and TL | Quarterly and other as appropriate | Update on audit progress and issues |
| Performance and Overview Committee | DA and AM, with TL as appropriate | Quarterly | Formal reporting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and Inspection Plan; • annual governance report; • Annual Audit and Inspection Letter; and • other issues as appropriate. |

Sustainability

- 3** The Audit Commission is committed to promoting sustainability in our working practices and we will actively consider opportunities to reduce our impact on the environment. This will include:
 - reducing paper flow by encouraging you to submit documentation and working papers electronically;
 - use of video and telephone conferencing for meetings as appropriate; and
 - reducing travel.