

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council – Detailed Audit Plan 2023

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Our aims and ambitions

Assure



the people of Wales that public money is well managed

Explain



how public money is being used to meet people's needs

Inspire



and empower the Welsh public sector to improve



Fully exploit our unique perspective, expertise and depth of insight



Strengthen our position as an authoritative, trusted and independent voice



Increase our visibility, influence and relevance



Be a model organisation for the public sector in Wales and beyond

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Introduction

I have now largely completed my planning work.

This Detailed Audit Plan specifies my statutory responsibilities as your external auditor and to fulfil my obligations under the Code of Audit Practice.

It sets out the work my team intends undertaking to address the audit risks identified and other key areas of focus during 2023.

It also sets out my estimated audit fee, details of my audit team and key dates for delivering my audit team's activities and planned outputs.



Adrian Crompton

Auditor General for
Wales

My audit responsibilities

I complete work each year to meet the following duties:

- I audit Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (the Council's) and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Group (the Group's) financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.
- The Council has to put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and I have to be satisfied that it has done this.
- The Council needs to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet its well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which it is doing this.

Audit of financial statements

I am required to issue a certificate and report on your financial statements which includes an opinion on their 'truth and fairness' and an assessment as to whether the Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement is prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance and is consistent with your financial statements and my knowledge of the Council.

In addition to my responsibilities for auditing the Council's financial statements, I also have responsibility for:

- certifying a return to the Welsh Government which provides information about the Council to support preparation of Whole of Government Accounts;
- responding to questions and objections about the accounts from local electors (additional fees will be charged for this work, if necessary); and
- the certification of a number of grant claims and returns as agreed with the funding bodies.

I do not seek to obtain absolute assurance on the truth and fairness of the financial statements and related notes but adopt a concept of materiality. My aim is to identify material misstatements, that is, those that might result in a reader of the accounts being misled. The levels at which I judge such misstatements to be material is set out later in this plan.

I will also report by exception on a number of matters which are set out in more detail in our [Statement of Responsibilities](#).

There have been no limitations imposed on me in planning the scope of this audit.

Performance audit work

I carry out a programme of performance audit work to discharge my duties¹ as Auditor General in relation to value for money and sustainable development.

My local performance audit programme will continue to be delivered through a combination of an Assurance and Risk Assessment Project, bespoke local projects and thematic projects examining risks common to all councils.

The majority of my performance audit work is conducted using INTOSAI auditing standards. The International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions is a global umbrella organisation for the performance audit community. It is a non-governmental organisation with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

¹ When we undertake audit work under our statutory powers and duties we may collect information from public bodies that contains some personal data. Our general audit fair processing notice, explains what we do with personal data, and how you can contact our Data Protection Officer.

Your audit at a glance



My financial statements audit will concentrate on your risks and other areas of focus

My audit planning has identified the following risks:

Significant financial statement risk

- Management override of controls

Other areas of audit focus

- Valuation of land and buildings
- Preparation of the group accounts
- Pension fund accounting (IAS19); and
- Related party disclosures and senior officer remuneration



My performance audit will include:

- Assurance and Risk Assessment
- Thematic reviews: financial sustainability of local government; commissioning arrangements
- Local Report – performance management arrangements



Materiality

Materiality	£3 million
Reporting threshold	£151K



Group

We will also perform an audit of the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Group which consolidates the accounts of Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd.

Financial statements' materiality



Materiality £3 million

My aim is to identify and correct material misstatements, that is, those that might otherwise cause the user of the accounts into being misled.

Materiality for the audit of the Council's financial statements is calculated using:

- 2022-23 gross expenditure of £303 million
- Materiality percentage of 1%

I report to those charged with governance any misstatements above a trivial level (set at 5% of materiality).



Areas of specific interest

There are some areas of the accounts that may be of more importance to the user of the accounts and we have set a lower materiality level for these:

- Senior officer remuneration £1,000
- Related party disclosures: transactions related to officers/elected members £10,000

Significant financial statements' risks

Significant risks are identified risks of material misstatement for which the assessment of inherent risk is close to the upper end of the spectrum of inherent risk or those which are to be treated as a significant risk in accordance with the requirements of other ISAs. The ISAs require us to focus more attention on these significant risks.

Exhibit 1: significant financial statement risks

Significant risk	Our planned response
<p>The risk of management override of controls is present in all entities. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, it is viewed as a significant risk [ISA 240.32-33].</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments made in preparing the financial statements; • review accounting estimates for bias; • evaluate the rationale for any significant transactions outside the normal course of business.
<p>We qualified the 2021-22 accounts as we identified that the useful economic lives of properties had not been subject to regular review, as required by the accounting framework. We were therefore unable to obtain sufficient assurance over the depreciation charged in 2021-22 and in previous years; and consequently, there was doubt regarding the material accuracy of the net book value of the properties.</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess the work undertaken by the valuer in terms of re-assessing the useful economic lives. • review how adjustments have been made to the 2021-22 closing balances for relevant property; and • review the material accuracy of net book value of properties.

Other areas of focus

I set out other identified risks of material misstatement which, whilst not determined to be significant risks as above, I would like to bring to your attention.

Exhibit 2: other areas of focus

Audit risk	Our planned response
<p>Valuation of land and buildings</p> <p>The value of land and buildings reflected in the balance sheet and notes to the accounts represent material estimates. Land and buildings are required to be held on a valuation basis which is dependent on the nature and use of the assets. This estimate is subject to a high degree of subjectivity depending on the specialist and management assumptions adopted and changes in these can result in material changes to valuations.</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• review the information provided to the valuer to assess for completeness;• evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the professional valuer;• test a sample of assets revalued in the year to ensure the valuation basis, key data and assumptions used in the valuation process are reasonable, and the revaluations have been correctly reflected in the financial statements;• evaluate the assumptions made by management as to why it considers that land and buildings not revalued in 2022/23 are not materially misstated; and• test the reconciliation between the financial ledger and the asset register.
<p>Valuation of pension fund net liability</p> <p>The Local Government Pension scheme (LGPS) pension fund liability as reflected in the financial statements represents a material estimate. The nature of this estimate means that it is subject to a high degree of estimation uncertainty as it is sensitive to small adjustments in the assumptions used in its calculation</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluate the instructions issued by management to their management experts (the actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work;• assess the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the valuations;• assess the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Council to the actuary to estimate the liability;

- test the accuracy of the pension fund net liability and disclosures in the financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary; and
- assess the reasonableness of the assumptions made by the actuary by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (auditor's expert) and undertaking any additional procedures required.

Related Parties and Senior Officer Remuneration

I judge some of the disclosures in the financial statements, such as related parties and the remuneration of senior officers and councillors, to be material by nature, with a far lower level of materiality. These disclosures are therefore inherently prone to material misstatement.

I will enhance my examination of all areas that I determine to be material by nature, to ensure that they are complete and accurate

Preparation of the group accounts:

The group accounts are prepared using Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd. accounts. For 2022-23 the Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd. accounts have been prepared for a 15-month period to 30 June 2023, and during the period 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023 the company's activities have transferred to the Council. With this non-coterminous year-end and the transfer of the activities, there is a risk that the group accounts are not materially accurate.

My audit team will review the consolidation exercise to ensure it has been undertaken accurately.

Quality of the draft accounts

During our planning work, we were unable to map the trial balance to the statement of accounts. This is a fundamental procedure which underpins the accounts production.

In addition, we were unable to evidence support for the expenditure analysis in Note 7.2 of the accounts.

Finance officers are currently attempting to reconcile the trial balance to the statement of accounts which we will review once completed. Finance officers are also in the process of providing us with evidence supporting the expenditure analysis in Note 7.2. Again, we will review this once completed.

Financial statements' audit timetable

I set out below key dates for delivery of my accounts audit work and planned outputs.

Exhibit 3: key dates for delivery of planned outputs

Planned output	Work undertaken	Report finalised
2023 Detailed Audit Plan	December 2023 - January 2024	February 2024
Audit of financial statements work: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audit of Financial Statements Report• Opinion on the Financial Statements	December 2023 - March 2024	March / April 2024
Grants certification work	November 2023 – March 2024	March 2024

Planned performance audit work

I set out below details of my performance audit work and key dates for delivery of planned outputs.

Exhibit 4: key dates for delivery of planned outputs

Assurance and risk assessment	Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources and acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle.	August 2023 – March 2024
Thematic review – financial sustainability of local government	A review of councils' financial sustainability including a focus on the actions, plans and arrangements to bridge funding gaps and address financial pressures over the medium term.	March – June 2024
Thematic review – commissioning arrangements	A review focusing on how councils' arrangements for commissioning services apply value for money considerations and the sustainable development principle.	March – December 2024
Local review – performance management	A review of the Council's performance management arrangements.	To be confirmed

We will provide updates on the performance audit programme through our regular updates to the Governance and Audit Committee.

Certification of grant claims and returns, and statutory audit functions

Certification of grant claims and returns

I have also been requested to undertake certification work on Council's grant claims, which I anticipate will include Housing Benefits, Teachers Pension, NDR, money transfers and Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWDP).

Statutory audit functions

In addition to the audit of the accounts, I have statutory responsibilities to receive questions and objections to the accounts from local electors. These responsibilities are set out in the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004:

- Section 30 Inspection of documents and questions at audit; and
- Section 31 Right to make objections at audit.

As this work is reactive, I have made no allowance in the fee table below. If I do receive questions or objections, I will discuss potential audit fees at the time.

Fee and audit team

In January 2023 I published the [fee scheme](#) for the 2023-24 year as approved by the Senedd Finance Committee. My fee rates for 2023-24 have increased by 4.8% for inflationary pressures. In addition, my financial audit fee has a further increase of 10.2% for the impact of the revised auditing standard ISA 315 on my financial audit approach. More details of the revised auditing standard and what it means for the audit I undertake is set out in **Appendix 1**.

I estimate your total audit fee will be £341,422 (excluding grant work).

Exhibit 5: audit fee

This table sets out the proposed audit fee estimate for 2023, by area of audit work, alongside both the estimated and actual audit fee for last year.

Audit area	Proposed fee (£) ²	Actual fee last year (£)	Estimated fee last year (£)
Audit of accounts ³	227,878	245,684	198,184
Performance audit work ⁴	113,544	108,136	108,136
Total (exc grants)	341,422	353,820	306,320
Grant certification work	40-50k	48,835	40-50k

Please note that an additional fee of £47,500 was charged in respect of the 2021-22 audit of accounts due to the additional work undertaken.

Planning will be ongoing, and changes to my programme of audit work, and therefore my fee, may be required if any key new risks emerge. I shall make no changes without first discussing them with the Council.

Our financial audit fee is based on the following assumptions:

- The agreed audit deliverables sets out the expected working paper requirements to support the financial statements and includes timescales and responsibilities.
- No matters of significance, other than as summarised in this plan, are identified during the audit.

² Notes: The fees shown in this document are exclusive of VAT, which is not charged to you.

³ Payable November 2022 to October 2023.

⁴ Payable April 2023 to March 2024.

The main members of my team, together with their contact details, are summarised in **Exhibit 6**.

Exhibit 6: my local audit team

Name	Role	E-mail address
Anthony Veale	Engagement Director	Anthony.veale@audit.wales
Mike Jones	Audit Manager (Financial Audit)	Mike.jones@audit.wales
Colin Davies	Audit Manager (Performance Audit)	Colin.davies@audit.wales
Deborah Woods	Audit Lead (Financial Audit)	Deborah.woods@audit.wales
Charlotte Owen	Audit Lead (Performance Audit)	Charlotte.owen@audit.wales

I can confirm that my team members are all independent of the Council and your officers.

Audit quality

Our commitment to audit quality in Audit Wales is absolute. We believe that audit quality is about getting things right first time.

We use a three lines of assurance model to demonstrate how we achieve this. We have established an Audit Quality Committee to co-ordinate and oversee those arrangements. We subject our work to independent scrutiny by QAD* and our Chair, acts as a link to our

Board on audit quality. For more information see our [Audit Quality Report 2022](#).



Our People

The first line of assurance is formed by our staff and management who are individually and collectively responsible for achieving the standards of audit quality to which we aspire.

- Selection of right team
- Use of specialists
- Supervisions and review

Arrangements for achieving audit quality

The second line of assurance is formed by the policies, tools, learning & development, guidance, and leadership we provide to our staff to support them in achieving those standards of audit quality.

- Audit platform
- Ethics
- Guidance
- Culture
- Learning and development
- Leadership
- Technical support



Independent assurance

The third line of assurance is formed by those activities that provide independent assurance over the effectiveness of the first two lines of assurance.

- EQCRs
- Themed reviews
- Cold reviews
- Root cause analysis
- Peer review
- Audit Quality Committee
- External monitoring



* QAD is the quality monitoring arm of ICAEW.

- External monitoring

Appendix 1

The key changes to ISA315 and the potential impact on your organisation

Key change	Potential impact on your organisation
More detailed and extensive risk identification and assessment procedures	<p>Your finance team and others in your organisation may receive a greater number of enquiries from our audit teams at the planning stage of the audit. Requests for information may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• information on your organisation’s business model and how it integrates the use of information technology (IT);• information about your organisation’s risk assessment process and how your organisation monitors the system of internal control;• more detailed information on how transactions are initiated, recorded, processed, and reported. This may include access to supporting documentation such as policy and procedure manuals; and• more detailed discussions with your organisation to support the audit team’s assessment of inherent risk.
Obtaining an enhanced understanding of your organisation’s environment, particularly in relation to IT	<p>Your organisation may receive more enquiries to assist the audit team in understanding the IT environment. This may include information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IT applications relevant to financial reporting;• the supporting IT infrastructure (e.g. the network, databases);• IT processes (e.g. managing program changes, IT operations); and• the IT personnel involved in the IT processes. <p>Audit teams may need to test the general IT controls and this may require obtaining more detailed audit evidence on the operation of IT controls within your organisation.</p> <p>On some audits, our audit teams may involve IT audit specialists to assist with their work. Our IT auditors may need to engage with members of your IT team who have not previously been involved in the audit process.</p>

Key change	Potential impact on your organisation
<p>Enhanced requirements relating to exercising professional scepticism</p>	<p>Our audit teams may make additional inquiries if they identify information which appears to contradict what they have already learned in the audit.</p>
<p>Risk assessments are scalable depending on the nature and complexity of the audited body</p>	<p>The audit team's expectations regarding the formality of your organisation's policies, procedures, processes, and systems will depend on the complexity of your organisation.</p>
<p>Audit teams may make greater use of technology in the performance of their audit</p>	<p>Our audit teams may make use of automated tools and techniques such as data analytics when performing their audit. Our teams may request different information or information in a different format from previous audits so that they can perform their audit procedures.</p>

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