

2021 Audit Plan – Monmouthshire County Council

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2021 Audit Plan

About this document

- 1 This document sets out the work I plan to undertake during 2021 to discharge my statutory responsibilities as your external auditor and to fulfil my obligations under the Code of Audit Practice.

My duties

- 2 I complete work each year to meet the following duties.

Audit of financial statements

- 3 Each year I audit Monmouthshire County Council (the Council)'s financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.

Value for money

- 4 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.

Continuous improvement

- 5 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure), the Council has to put in place arrangements to make continuous improvements, including related plans and reports, and the Auditor General has to assess whether the Council is likely to (or has) met these requirements. Some requirements of the Measure will cease during 2021-22 due to changes in legislation arising from the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. However, I anticipate that during 2021-22 I will still be required to audit the Council's published assessment of its performance that covers the 2020-21 year.

Sustainable development principle

- 6 Public bodies need to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which they are doing this.

Impact of COVID-19

- 7 The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact across the United Kingdom and on the work of public sector organisations. As in 2020, it is likely to significantly impact on the preparation of the 2020-21 accounts and my financial audit and performance audit work.
- 8 Recent developments in relation to a vaccine programme indicate that the Welsh Government's restrictions on movement and anticipated sickness absence levels are expected to ease through 2021. However, I recognise that there remains significant uncertainty and I understand that many local authorities may not be able to prepare accounts in line with the timetable set out in the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. As well as the delivery of my statutory responsibilities as the Auditor General, my priority is to ensure the health, safety and well-being of Audit Wales staff, their families and those of our partners elsewhere in the public service at this incredibly challenging time.
- 9 Audit Wales staff will continue to work flexibly to deliver the audit work set out in this plan. In response to the government advice and subsequent restrictions, we will continue to work remotely, building on the arrangements made in 2020, until such time that it is safe to resume on-site activities. I remain committed to ensuring that the work of Audit Wales staff will not impede the vital activities that public bodies need to do to respond to ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 10 Consequently, while this audit plan sets out an initial timetable for the completion of my audit work, the ongoing uncertainties around the impact of COVID-19 on the sector mean that some timings may need to be revisited. My audit team will discuss any amendments required to the proposed timetable with the authority as the 2021 position becomes clearer.

Audit of financial statements

- 11 It is my responsibility to issue a certificate and report on the financial statements. This includes:
 - an opinion on the 'truth and fairness' of the Council's financial statements for the financial year ended 31 March 2021; and
 - an assessment as to whether the Council's Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement is prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance and is consistent with the financial statements and with my knowledge of the Council.
- 12 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);
 - the audit of Monmouthshire County Council Welsh Church Act Fund's accounts by 31 January 2022;
 - the independent examination of Monmouthshire Farm School Endowment Trust Fund's accounts by 31 January 2022; and
 - the certification of a number of grant claims and returns as agreed with the funding bodies.
- 13 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 will be reported to the Audit Committee prior to completion of the audit.
- 14 Any misstatements below a trivial level (set at 5% of materiality) I judge as not requiring consideration by those charged with governance and therefore will not report them.
- 15 There have been no limitations imposed on me in planning the scope of this audit.
- 16 I will also report by exception on a number of matters which are set out in more detail in our Statement of Responsibilities, along with further information about my work.

Audit of financial statements risks

- 17 The following table sets out the significant risks I have identified for the audit of the Council.

Exhibit 1: financial statement audit risks

This table summarises the key financial statement audit risks identified at the planning stage of the audit.

Audit risk	Proposed audit response
Significant risks	
Risk of management override The risk of management override of controls is present in all entities. Due to the unpredictable way in which such	My audit team will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments made in preparing the financial statements;

Audit risk	Proposed audit response
<p>override could occur, it is viewed as a significant risk [ISA 240.31-33].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review accounting estimates for biases; and • evaluate the rationale for any significant transactions outside the normal course of business;
<p>COVID-19 - resources</p> <p>The COVID-19 national emergency continues and the pressures on staff resource and of remote working may impact on the preparation, audit and publication of accounts. There is a risk that the quality of the accounts and supporting working papers, eg around estimates and valuations, may be compromised leading to an increased incidence of errors. Quality monitoring arrangements may be compromised due to timing issues and/or resource availability.</p>	<p>My audit team will discuss your closedown process and quality monitoring arrangements with the accounts preparation team, and make arrangements to monitor the accounts preparation process, as well as help to identify areas where there may be gaps in arrangements.</p>
<p>COVID-19 – funding streams</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on the risks of material misstatement and the shape and approach to my audit.</p> <p>The Welsh Government has made available various funding streams to the Council. In some cases, these monies provide financial support to the Council itself. In other cases, the funds have been administered by the Council, making payments to third parties on behalf of the Welsh Government. The amounts involved are material to the accounts.</p>	<p>My audit team will review the funding streams received from the Welsh Government and confirm the appropriate accounting treatment with the Council for each individual case.</p>
<p>COVID-19 – disclosures</p> <p>Last year I included two ‘Emphasis of matter’ paragraphs in my audit report, drawing attention to material valuation</p>	<p>My audit team will review the valuer’s valuation reports and the actuary’s pension report and consider the impact</p>

Audit risk	Proposed audit response
<p>uncertainties in the financial statements in respect of the valuation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land and buildings and investment properties; and • certain pension fund assets. <p>These uncertainties arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, and my audit opinion was not modified in respect of these matters. However, with the pandemic continuing, it is possible that similar disclosures may be required this year.</p>	<p>on my audit of any reported material uncertainties.</p>
Other audit risks	
<p>Cardiff Capital Region City Deal:</p> <p>City deals are arrangements negotiated with government that give greater accountability for actions in return for new powers to help encourage growth and jobs. The Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (the City Deal) involves ten local authorities.</p> <p>The authorities have established a joint committee (the Regional Cabinet) to oversee delivery of a range of programmes designed to increase connectivity and to improve physical and digital infrastructure over the course of 20 years.</p> <p>There will be a number of accounting issues to address including consolidation of the City Deal into the Council's accounts.</p>	<p>Liaising closely with other local authority auditors, my audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor progress with the City Deal project and carry out early work as necessary to assess the existing and proposed financial and governance arrangements; and • consider work undertaken by HM Treasury to scrutinise the effectiveness of the region's governance arrangements.
<p>McCloud judgement</p> <p>In 2015 the Government introduced reforms to public sector pensions, meaning most public sector workers were moved into new pension schemes in 2015.</p>	<p>My audit team will review the provision made in relation to the McCloud judgement and monitor progress on the outcome of the consultation to be applied in the LG pension schemes.</p>

Audit risk	Proposed audit response
<p>In December 2018, the Court of Appeal ruled that the 'transitional protection' arrangements amounted to unlawful discrimination.</p> <p>Consultations on proposed remedies for the Local Government, Police and Fire pensions schemes closed in October 2020. It is government's intention for the legislation to be in place by April 2022 and final details are expected to be published during 2021.</p> <p>The impact of the judgement is likely to have a significant impact on the IAS 19 disclosed liabilities.</p>	

Other matters

- 18 There are two further matters on which my audit team will undertake early work in preparation for the 2021-22 audit.

Exhibit 2: Other matters

This table summarises the key financial statement audit risks identified at the planning stage of the audit.

Other matters	
<p>CIPFA/LASAAC has once again deferred the introduction of IFRS 16 until 1 April 2022. The Council will, however, need to undertake considerable work to identify leases, and the COVID-19 pandemic may pose implementation risks.</p>	<p>My team will undertake some early work to review preparedness for the introduction of IFRS 16 Leases.</p>
<p>The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act has received Royal Assent. Included in its provisions is the establishment of Corporate Joint</p>	<p>My team will liaise with management to determine the impacts of this new legislation on the Council, and any accounts or audit requirements arising.</p>

Other matters

Committees (CJC) to deliver certain types of services.

Performance audit

- 19 In addition to my Audit of Financial Statements I also carry out a programme of performance audit work to discharge my duties as Auditor General as set out on **page 4** in relation to value for money and sustainable development.
- 20 In response to the pandemic, I have adopted a flexible approach to my performance audit work, both in terms of topic coverage and methodology. My work on recovery planning, COVID-19 learning, and my assurance and risk assessment work are examples of this. This has enabled me to respond to the fast-moving external environment and provide more real-time feedback in a range of formats.
- 21 For 2021-22, I intend to build on this approach to help enable my work to be responsive and timely, and where possible to share learning more quickly. As part of this approach, I anticipate that a significant proportion of my local performance audit programme will be delivered through the Assurance and Risk Assessment Project, that will be ongoing throughout the year.
- 22 Given the high degree of commonality in the risks facing councils at this time, I also intend to deliver a number of thematic projects examining risks common to all councils.
- 23 I have consulted public bodies and other stakeholders on how I will approach my duties in respect of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This consultation was extended due to the pandemic.
- 24 In my consultation I have set out and sought views on proposals to:
- continue to undertake specific examinations to assess the setting of well-being objectives and how steps are being taken to meet them, respectively;
 - integrate the examination of steps alongside value for money studies and local audit work, wherever possible; and
 - strengthen and expand the co-ordination of work with the Future Generations Commissioner.
- 25 I will be writing to the 44 public bodies designated under the Act setting out the results of the consultation and how I intend to approach this work over the reporting period 2020-2025.
- 26 In view of the above factors, I intend to retain a high degree of flexibility in my local performance audit programme at the Council and will continue to update the

Council as the audit programme changes. I also intend to conclude any outstanding work from prior years delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

27 For 2021-22 this work is set out below.

Exhibit 3: Performance Audit Programme 2021-22

This table summarises the performance audit programme for 2021-22

Performance audit programme	Brief description
Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations	Further details of the areas of focus will follow.
Improvement Reporting Audit	Audit of discharge of duty to publish an assessment of performance.
Assurance and Risk Assessment	<p>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.</p> <p>The project is likely to focus on the Council's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financial position; • pandemic recovery planning; • self-assessment arrangements; • preparations for the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act; and • carbon reduction plans.
Springing Forward – Examining the building blocks for a sustainable future	As the world moves forward, learning from the global pandemic, this review looks at how effectively councils are strengthening their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
Local audit work	Following discussions with senior officers on 9 March, we will primarily focus on completing outstanding

Performance audit programme	Brief description
	local work from prior-year Audit Plans. Alongside our Assurance and Risk Assessment Work above, we can then consider at a later stage the scale and scope of 2021-22 local audit work.

Certification of grant claims and returns

- 28 I have been requested to undertake certification work on a number of the Council's grant claims and returns for the 2020-21 financial year.
- 29 In respect of the 2019-20 certification of grants and returns, we will produce a separate report which summarises the more significant and/or recurring issues I identified when undertaking grant certification work in 2019-20. This report will be completed following the conclusion of our work on the 2019-20 Housing Benefit Subsidy return.

Statutory audit functions

- 30 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.
- 31 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, audit team and timetable

- 32 My fees and planned timescales for completion of the audit are based on the following assumptions:
- the financial statements are provided in accordance with a timescale to be agreed taking into account the impact of COVID-19, to the quality expected and have been subject to a robust quality assurance review;
 - information provided to support the financial statements is in accordance with the agreed audit deliverables document;
 - when it is safe to resume on-site activities, appropriate accommodation and facilities are provided to enable my audit team to deliver the audit in an efficient manner;

- all appropriate officials will be available during the audit;
- you have all the necessary controls and checks in place to enable the Responsible Financial Officer to provide all the assurances that I require in the Letter of Representation addressed to me; and
- Internal Audit's planned programme of work is complete and management has responded to issues that may have affected the financial statements.

33 If I do receive questions or objections, I will discuss potential audit fees at the time.

Fee

34 Your estimated fee for 2021 is set out in **Exhibit 4**. Please note that this proposed fee currently remains subject to final moderation by the Auditor General.

Exhibit 4: audit fee

This table sets out the proposed audit fee for 2021, by area of audit work, alongside the actual audit fee for last year.

Audit area	Proposed fee (£) ¹	Actual fee last year (£)
Audit of accounts ²	176,068	176,068
Performance audit work ³	103,080	103,080
Welsh Church Act audit ⁴	6,255	6,255
Farm School Endowment Trust Fund independent examination ⁵	1,458	1,458
Total fee	286,681	286,681

35 As noted in paragraph 29, our grant certification work for 2019-20 is ongoing. We will produce a separate report which summarises any significant issues and will update the Council on the proposed fee for 2020-21, as well as the actual fee for 2019-20.

36 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.

¹ The fees shown in this document are exclusive of VAT, which is not charged to you.

² Payable November 2020 to October 2021.

³ Payable April 2021 to March 2022.

⁴ Payable as work is undertaken on the Welsh Church Act audit.

⁵ Payable as work is undertaken on the Farm School Endowment Trust Fund independent examination.

37 Further information on my [fee scales and fee setting](#) can be found on our website.

Audit team

38 The main members of my team, together with their contact details, are summarised in **Exhibit 5**.

Exhibit 5: my audit team

This table lists the members of the local audit team and their contact details.

Name	Role	Contact number	E-mail address
Anthony Veale	Engagement Director & Engagement Lead (Financial Audit)	029 2032 0585	anthony.veale@audit.wales
Huw Rees	Engagement Lead (Performance Audit)	029 2032 0599	huw.rees@audit.wales
Gareth Lucey	Audit Manager (Financial Audit & Performance Audit)	029 2082 9398	gareth.lucey@audit.wales
Rachel Freitag	Audit Lead (Financial Audit)	029 2082 9359	rachel.freitag@audit.wales
Charlotte Owen	Audit Lead (Performance Audit)	029 2082 9331	charlotte.owen@audit.wales

Timetable

39 The key milestones for the work set out in this plan are shown in **Exhibit 6**. As highlighted earlier, there may be a need to revise the timetable in light of developments with COVID-19.

40 The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 provides electors with the right to ask questions and to make objections to the Authority's accounts to the Auditor General. The rights to ask questions and make objections at audit are linked to electors' rights to

inspect the accounts that are also set out in the 2004 Act. The current COVID restrictions may impose restrictions on the Authority's ability to facilitate the inspection of accounts. Therefore, we have not yet set a date for the exercise of electors' rights and will continue to monitor the situation before confirming a date with you. We anticipate that we will be in a position to agree a date with you in late May 2021.

Exhibit 6: Audit timetable

Planned output	Work undertaken	Report finalised
2021 Audit Plan	February to March 2021	March 2021
Audit of Financial Statements	February to September 2021	September 2021
Performance audit work	Timescales for individual projects will be discussed with you and detailed within the specific project briefings for each study.	
Grants certification work	September to November 2021	January 2022
Welsh Church Act audit	October to December 2021	January 2022
Farm School Endowment Trust Fund independent examination	October to December 2021	January 2022
Annual Audit Summary	November to December 2021	January 2022
2022 Audit Plan	February to March 2022	March 2022

- 41 I can confirm that my team members are all independent of the Council and its officers. In addition, I am not aware of any potential conflicts of interest that I need to bring to your attention.



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