

Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Annual Audit Plan 2022/23



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

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Introduction

Summary of planned audit work

1. This document summarises the work plan for our 2022/23 external audit of Highland and Western Isles VJB (the Joint Board). The main elements of our work include:

- Understanding the key systems of internal control, and how weaknesses in these systems could impact on the financial statements.
- An audit of the annual accounts, and provision of an Independent Auditor's Report.
- An audit opinion on statutory other information published within the annual accounts including the Management Commentary, the Annual Governance Statement and the audited part of the Remuneration Report.
- Consideration of arrangements in relation to the wider audit dimensions that frame the wider scope of public sector audit (as amended by supplementary guidance): financial management; financial sustainability; vision, leadership and governance; and use of resources to improve outcomes.

Audit Appointment

2. We are pleased to be appointed as the external auditor of the Joint Board for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27 inclusive. You can find a brief biography of your audit team at [Appendix 1](#).

3. In the first year of the audit appointment, we invest significant time gaining an understanding of your business and identifying and assessing the risks of material misstatement to the financial statements. While we use our initial assessment of risk to inform our planned audit approach, we keep our assessment of risks under review as the audit progresses. We will inform you of any significant changes in assessed risks and any resulting changes in our planned audit work.

4. The audit team will actively engage with you over the course of the audit to ensure our audit work continues to be focused on risk.

Adding value

5. We aim to add value to the Joint Board through our external audit work by being constructive and forward looking, by attending meetings of Board and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In so doing, we will help the Joint

Board promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making and more effective use of resources.

Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the Joint Board

6. The [Code of Audit Practice 2021](#) sets out in detail the respective responsibilities of the auditor and the audited body. Key responsibilities are summarised below.

Auditor responsibilities

7. Our responsibilities as independent auditors are established by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and the [Code of Audit Practice](#) (including [supplementary guidance](#)) and guided by the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard.

8. Auditors in the public sector give an independent opinion on the financial statements and other information within the annual accounts. We also review and report on the wider scope arrangements in place at the Joint Board. In doing this, we aim to support improvement and accountability.

Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board responsibilities

9. The Joint Board is responsible for maintaining accounting records and preparing financial statements that give a true and fair view.

10. The Joint Board has the primary responsibility for ensuring the proper financial stewardship of public funds, compliance with relevant legislation and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety and regularity that enable them to deliver their objectives.

Financial statements audit planning

Introduction

11. The annual accounts are an essential part of demonstrating the Joint Board's stewardship of resources and its performance in the use of those resources.

12. We focus our work on the areas of highest risk. As part of our planning process, we prepare a risk assessment highlighting the audit risks relating to each of the main financial systems relevant to the production of the financial statements.

Materiality

13. The concept of materiality is applied by auditors in planning and performing the audit, and in evaluating the effect of any uncorrected misstatements on the financial statements. We are required to plan our audit to obtain reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement. The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement over both the amount and the nature of the misstatement.

Materiality levels for the 2022/23 audit

14. We assess materiality at different levels. The materiality values for the Joint Board and their descriptions are set out in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1

2022/23 Materiality levels for Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Materiality	Amount
Planning materiality – This is the figure we calculate to assess the overall impact of audit adjustments on the financial statements. Materiality has been set based on our assessment of the needs of the users of the financial statements and the nature of the Joint Board's operations. For the year ended 31 March 2023 we have set our materiality at 2% of gross expenditure based on the audited financial statements for 2021/22.	£78,000
Performance materiality – This acts as a trigger point. If the aggregate of errors identified during the financial statements audit exceeds performance materiality, this could indicate that further audit procedures should be considered. Using our professional judgement, we have assessed performance materiality at 75% of planning materiality.	£59,000

Materiality	Amount
Reporting threshold (i.e. clearly trivial) – We are required to report to those charged with governance on all unadjusted misstatements more than the 'reporting threshold' amount.	£4,000

Source: Audit Scotland

Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

15. Our risk assessment draws on our cumulative knowledge of the Joint Board, its major transaction streams, key systems of internal control and risk management processes. It is informed by our discussions with management, meetings with internal audit, attendance at committees and a review of supporting information.

16. Audit risk assessment is an iterative and dynamic process. Our assessment of risks set out in this plan may change as more information and evidence becomes available during the progress of the audit. Where such changes occur, we will advise management and where relevant, report them to those charged with governance.

17. Based on our risk assessment process, we identified the following significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements. These are risks which have the greatest impact on our planned audit procedures. [Exhibit 2](#) summarises the nature of the risk, the sources of assurance from management arrangements and the further audit procedures we plan to perform to gain assurance over the risk.

Exhibit 2

2022/23 Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

Significant risk of material misstatement	Sources of assurance	Planned audit response
<p>1. Risk of material misstatement due to fraud caused by management override of controls</p> <p>As stated in International Standard on Auditing (UK) 240, management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of management's ability to override controls that</p>	<p>Owing to the nature of this risk, assurances from management are not applicable in this instance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make inquiries of individuals involved in the financial reporting process about inappropriate or unusual activity relating to the processing of journal entries and other adjustments. • Test journals at the year-end and post-closing entries and focus on significant risk areas. • Consider the need to test journal entries and other adjustments during the period.

Significant risk of material misstatement	Sources of assurance	Planned audit response
otherwise appear to be operating effectively.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate significant transactions outside the normal course of business. • Assess the adequacy of controls in place for identifying and disclosing related party relationship and transactions in the financial statements. • Assess the adequacy of controls in place for identifying and disclosing related party relationship and transactions in the financial statements. • We will assess any changes to the methods and underlying assumptions used to prepare accounting estimates compared to the prior year. • Substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions around the year-end to confirm they are accounted for in the correct financial year. • Focussed testing of accounting accruals and prepayments.

Source: Audit Scotland

18. As set out in International Standard on Auditing (UK) 240: The auditor's responsibilities relating to fraud in an audit of financial statement, there is a presumed risk of fraud in the recognition of revenue. There is a risk that revenue may be misstated resulting in a material misstatement in the financial statements.

19. We have considered the risk of fraud over income recognition (ISA 240) and have rebutted this risk for the Joint Board because most of the income received is through requisitions from constituent authorities and is easily verified. These income streams are deemed to represent a low fraud risk and we have concluded there is limited opportunity or incentive to manipulate the recognition of income in the financial statements.

20. In line with Practice Note 10: *Audit of financial statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom*, as most public-sector bodies are net spending bodies, the risk of material misstatement due to fraud related to expenditure recognition may in some cases be greater than the risk relating to revenue recognition.

21. We considered the risk of fraud over expenditure and have rebutted the presumption that a material risk exists for the Joint Board because the nature of expenditure is predominantly on staff costs, property costs and supplies and services. These expenditure streams are in low-risk areas where individual transactions are well controlled (for example salaried staff costs in a well-defined grading system) and individual transactions are relatively small in scale.

22. We have not, therefore, incorporated specific work into our audit plan in these areas over and above our standard audit procedures.

Other areas of audit focus

23. As part of our assessment of audit risks, we have identified one area where we consider there is also a risk of material misstatement to the financial statements.

24. The area of specific audit focus is:

- Valuation of IAS19 pension liability: This is an area of audit focus due to the material value and significant, complex actuarial assumptions and estimates used in the calculation of the pension liability based on life expectancy and CPI growth.

25. We will assess the scope, independence and competence of the professionals engaged in providing estimates for pensions and review appropriateness of actuarial assumptions and results including comparison with other similar organisations. We will establish officers' arrangements for ensuring the reasonableness of professional estimations and the accuracy of information provided to the actuary by Highland Council on behalf of the Joint Board.

26. Based on our assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of the risk, we do not consider this to represent a significant risk. We will keep this area under review as our audit progresses. If our assessment of risk changes and we consider the risk to be significant, we will communicate this to management and those charged with governance and revise our planned audit approach accordingly.

Wider Scope and Best Value

Introduction

27. The [Code of Audit Practice](#) sets out the four areas that frame the wider scope of public sector audit. The Code of Audit Practice requires auditors to consider the adequacy of the arrangements in place for the wider scope areas in audited bodies.

28. In summary, the four wider scope areas cover the following:

- **Financial management** means having sound budgetary processes. We will consider the arrangements to secure sound financial management including the strength of the financial management culture, accountability and arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and other irregularities.
- **Financial sustainability** – as auditors, we consider the appropriateness of the use of the going concern basis of accounting as part of the annual audit. We will also comment on financial sustainability in the longer term. We define this as medium term (two to five years) and longer term (longer than five years).
- **Vision, leadership and governance** – we conclude on the arrangements in place to deliver the vision, strategy and priorities adopted by the Joint Board. We also consider the effectiveness of the governance arrangements to support delivery.
- **Use of resources to improve outcomes** – we will consider how the Joint Board demonstrates economy, efficiency and effectiveness through the use of financial and other resources.

29. The Code of Audit Practice includes provisions relating to the audit of less complex public bodies owing to their size and limited financial activity. We have applied this guidance as part of our planning process and concluded that, in light of the volume and lack of complexity of the financial transactions in the Joint Board, we plan to apply the less complex public body approach for 2022/23. As a result our annual audit work in the Joint Board in relation to wider code risks will focus on:

- the appropriateness of the disclosures in the Annual Governance Statement and,
- the financial sustainability of the Joint Board.

Best Value

30. Auditors have a duty to be satisfied that bodies that fall within section 106 of the 1973 Act have made proper arrangements to secure Best Value. We will consider how the Joint Board demonstrates that it is meeting its Best Value responsibilities and we will report our findings as part of our Annual Audit Report.

Reporting arrangements, timetable, and audit fee

Reporting arrangements

31. Audit reporting is the visible output for the annual audit. All Annual Audit Plans and the outputs, as detailed in [Exhibit 3](#), and any other outputs on matters of public interest will be published on our website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk.

32. Matters arising from our audit will be reported on a timely basis and will include agreed action plans. Draft management reports will be issued to the relevant officers to confirm factual accuracy.

33. We will provide an independent auditor's report to Joint Board and the Accounts Commission setting out our opinions on the annual accounts. We will provide the Joint Board and the Accounts Commission with an annual report on the audit containing observations and recommendations on significant matters which have arisen during the audit.

34. [Exhibit 3](#) outlines the target dates for our audit outputs, and we aim to issue the independent auditor's report by the statutory deadline of 30 September 2023.

Exhibit 3

2022/23 Audit outputs

Audit Output	Target date	Board meeting date
Annual Audit Plan	31 March 2023	21 March 2023
Independent Auditor's Report	30 September 2023	22 September 2023
Annual Audit Report	30 September 2023	22 September 2023

Source: Audit Scotland

Timetable



35. To support an efficient audit, it is critical that the timetable for producing the annual report and accounts for audit is achieved. We have included a proposed timetable for the audit at [Exhibit 4](#) that has been discussed with management.

36. Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on the conduct and timeliness of the audit. We recognise that it is in the best interests of public accountability to get the reporting of audited accounts back to pre-pandemic timelines. We are identifying ways to work more efficiently to expedite the 2022/23 audits whilst at the same time maintaining high standards of quality.

37. We intend to take a hybrid approach to the 2022/23 audit with a blend of onsite and remote working where appropriate. We will continue to work closely with management to identify the most efficient approach as appropriate and will keep timeframes and logistics for the completion of the audit under review. Progress will be discussed with management and finance officers over the course of the audit.

Exhibit 4

Proposed annual report and accounts timetable

 Key stage	 Provisional Date
Consideration of the unaudited annual accounts by those charged with governance	By 30 June 2023
Latest submission date for the receipt of the unaudited annual accounts with complete working papers package.	30 June 2023
Latest date for final clearance meeting with the Treasurer	27 August 2023
Issue of draft Letter of Representation, proposed Independent Auditor's Report and draft Annual Audit Report	4 September 2023
Agreement of audited and unsigned annual accounts	4 September 2023
Issue of proposed Independent Auditor's Report and Annual Audit Report to those charged with governance.	11 September 2023
Board meeting to approve and sign audited annual accounts	22 September 2023
Independent Auditor's Reports certified by appointed auditor	22 September 2023

Source: Audit Scotland

Audit fee

38. In determining the audit fee, we have taken account of the risk exposure of the Joint Board and the planned management assurances in place. The audit fee for 2022/23 is £8,800 (2021/22: £7,820).

39. Our fees have increased in 2022/23 and this reflects the current audit market and the rising costs in delivering high quality audit work. There are increased regulatory expectations and risks placed on audit and its quality, as well as a widening in the scope of work audit must cover.

40. In setting the fee for 2022/23 we have assumed that the Joint Board has effective governance arrangements and will prepare comprehensive and accurate accounts for audit in line with the agreed timetable for the audit. The audit fee assumes there will be no major change in respect of the scope of the audit during the year and where our audit cannot proceed as planned, a supplementary fee may be levied.

Other matters

Internal audit

41. It is the responsibility of the Joint Board to establish adequate internal audit arrangements. We will review the internal audit plan and the results of internal audit's work.

42. While we are not planning to place formal reliance on the work of internal audit in 2022/23, we will review internal audit reports and assess the impact of the findings on our financial statements and wider scope audit responsibilities.

Independence and objectivity

43. Auditors appointed by the Auditor General for Scotland or Accounts Commission must comply with the [Code of Audit Practice](#) and relevant supporting guidance. When auditing the financial statements, auditors must also comply with professional standards issued by the Financial Reporting Council and those of the professional accountancy bodies. These standards impose stringent rules to ensure the independence and objectivity of auditors.

44. Audit Scotland has robust arrangements in place to ensure compliance with these standards including an annual *'fit and proper'* declaration for all members of staff. The arrangements are overseen by the Executive Director of Innovation and Quality, who serves as Audit Scotland's Ethics Partner.

45. The appointed auditor for Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board is Esther Scoburgh, Senior Audit Manager. Auditing and ethical standards require the appointed auditor to communicate any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of audit staff. We are not aware of any such relationships pertaining to the audit of the Joint Board.

Audit Quality

46. Quality is at the core of public audit in Scotland and is the foundation for building consistency and confidence across all audit work. High quality audits provide assurance, add value and can support public bodies to achieve their objectives.

47. Until 2021/22, the applicable audit quality standard was International Standard on Quality Control 1 (ISQC (UK) 1). This set out an audit practice's responsibilities for its system of quality control for audits.

48. ISQC(UK) 1 has been replaced by two new audit quality standards: Internal Standards on Quality Management (ISQM (UK) 1) applicable from 15 December 2022 and (ISQM(UK) 2) effective for the 2023/24 audits. Work is underway at Audit Scotland to meet the requirements of these quality standards.

49. Audit Scotland is committed to delivering high quality audits. The foundation of our quality framework is our Audit Guide, which incorporates the application of professional auditing, quality and ethical standards and the [Code of Audit Practice](#) (and [supplementary guidance](#)) issued by Audit Scotland and approved by the Auditor General for Scotland. To ensure that we achieve the required quality standards, Audit Scotland conducts peer reviews and internal quality reviews. Additionally, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW) have been commissioned to carry out external quality reviews.

50. As part of our commitment to quality and continuous improvement, Audit Scotland will periodically seek your views on the quality of our service provision. We welcome feedback at any time, and this may be directed to the engagement lead.

Appendix 1: Your audit team

51. The audit team involved in the audit of the Joint Board have significant experience in public sector audit.

Esther Scoburgh Senior Audit Manager / Appointed auditor	Esther has over 23 years of public sector audit experience and has delivered external audit services to a range of bodies including local authorities and central government bodies.
Joni McBride Lead Senior Auditor	Joni has considerable experience in planning and delivering audits. Joni will manage the team and work alongside the Senior Audit Manager and Auditor to deliver the audit.
David Fraser Audit Officer	David has considerable experience in planning and delivering audits. David will be the day to day contact for the audit.

52. The local audit team is supported by a specialist technical accounting team, all of whom have significant experience of public bodies and work with accounting regulatory bodies.

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Audit Scotland's published material is available for download on the website in a number of formats. For information on our accessibility principles, please visit:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accessibility

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