

# Forest Heath District Council

Annual Audit Letter for the year ended 31 March 2015

October 2015

Ernst & Young LLP





Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee  
Forest Heath District Council  
College Heath Road  
Mildenhall  
IP28 7EY

14 October 2015

Dear Members

## **Annual Audit Letter 2014/15**

The purpose of this annual audit letter is to communicate the key issues arising from our work to the Members and external stakeholders, including members of the public.

We have already reported the detailed findings from our audit work in our 2014/15 Annual Results Report to the 24 September 2015 Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, representing those charged with governance.

The matters reported here are those we consider most significant for the Council.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank officers for their assistance during the course of our work.

Yours faithfully



Neil Harris  
Executive Director  
For and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP  
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Relevant parts of the Audit Commission Act 1998 are transitionally saved by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (Commencement No. 7, Transitional Provisions and Savings) Order 2015 for 2014/15 audits.

The Audit Commission's 'Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies' (Statement of responsibilities). It is available from the accountable officer of each audited body and via the [Audit Commission's website](#).

The Statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between the Audit Commission's appointed auditors and audited bodies. It summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas.

The Standing Guidance serves as our terms of appointment as auditors appointed by the Audit Commission. The Standing Guidance sets out additional requirements that auditors must comply with, over and above those set out in the Code of Audit Practice 2010 (the Code) and statute, and covers matters of practice and procedure which are of a recurring nature.

This Annual Audit Letter is prepared in the context of the Statement of responsibilities. It is addressed to the Members of the audited body, and is prepared for their sole use. We, as appointed auditor, take no responsibility to any third party.

Our Complaints Procedure – If at any time you would like to discuss with us how our service to you could be improved, or if you are dissatisfied with the service you are receiving, you may take the issue up with your usual partner or director contact. If you prefer an alternative route, please contact Steve Varley, our Managing Partner, 1 More London Place, London SE1 2AF. We undertake to look into any complaint carefully and promptly and to do all we can to explain the position to you. Should you remain dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, you may of course take matters up with our professional institute. We can provide further information on how you may contact our professional institute.

## 1. Executive summary

Our 2014/15 audit work was undertaken in accordance with the Audit Plan issued in March 2015 and was conducted in accordance with the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) and other guidance issued by the Audit Commission.

The Council is responsible for preparing and publishing its Statement of Accounts, accompanied by an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). In the AGS the Council reports publicly each year on how far it complies with its own code of governance, including how it has monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in year, and any changes planned in the coming period.

The Council is also responsible for having proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

As auditors we are responsible for:

- forming an opinion on the financial statements, and on the consistency of other information published with them
- reviewing and reporting by exception on the Council's AGS
- forming a conclusion on the arrangements the Council has to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources
- undertaking any other work specified by the Audit Commission and the Code of Audit Practice.

Summarised below are the results of our work across all these areas:

Area of work	Result
Audit of the financial statement of Forest Heath District Council for the financial year ended 31 March 2015 in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland)	On 28 September 2015 we issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Council's financial statements
Form a conclusion on the arrangements the Council has made for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources	On 28 September 2015 we issued an unqualified value for money conclusion
Report to the National Audit Office on the accuracy of the consolidation pack the Council needs to prepare for the Whole of Government Accounts	We reported our findings to the National Audit Office on 28 September 2015
Consider the completeness of disclosures on the Council's AGS, identify any inconsistencies with other information which we know about from our work and consider whether it complies with CIPFA/ SOLACE guidance	No issues to report
Consider whether we should make a report in the public interest on any matter coming to our notice in the course of the audit	No issues to report
Determine whether we need to take any other action in relation to our responsibilities under the Audit Commission Act	No issues to report

***As a result of the above we have also:***

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Issued a report to those charged with governance of the Council with the significant findings from our audit.

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Our Audit Results Report was issued on 10 September 2015 to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

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Issued a certificate that we have completed the audit in accordance with the requirements of the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the Code of Practice issued by the Audit Commission.

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Issued on 28 September 2015

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In January 2016 we will also issue a report to those charged with governance of the Council summarising the certification (of grant claims and returns) work we have undertaken.

## 2. Key findings

### 2.1 Financial statement audit

The Council's Statement of Accounts is an important tool to show both how the Council has used public money and how it can demonstrate its financial management and financial health.

We audited the Council's Statement of Accounts in line with the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) and other guidance issued by the Audit Commission and issued an unqualified audit report on 28 September 2015.

Our detailed findings were reported to the 24 September 2015 Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

The main issues identified as part of our audit were:

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#### **Significant risk: Risk of management override**

We did not identify any material misstatements, evidence of bias or significant unusual transactions in our testing. We did not identify any expenditure which had been inappropriately capitalised.

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#### **Other financial statement risk: Business rates appeals provision**

The business rates appeals provision accounted for by the Council was deemed to have been calculated on a reasonable basis in line with the requirements of IAS37.

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#### **Other financial statement risk: Group accounting standards**

Our review of the group boundary did not raise any issues for the attention of Members.

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#### **Other audit risks identified from walkthrough testing: Financial statements closing procedures**

Our review of journals and their supporting authorisation and documentation did not raise any issues.

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#### **Other audit risks identified from walkthrough testing: Payroll**

No material issues were identified from our predictive analytical review and analytics procedures.

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#### **Other key findings:**

Management have corrected all the misstatements we identified, except one brought forward from 2013/14 which was not material. None of the adjustments made impacted on the Council's useable reserves.

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## 2.2 Value for money conclusion

As part of our work we must also conclude whether the Council has proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. This is known as our value for money conclusion.

In accordance with guidance issued by the Audit Commission, our 2014/15 value for money conclusion was based on two criteria. We consider whether the Council had proper arrangements in place for:

- ▶ securing financial resilience, and
- ▶ challenging how it secures economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

We issued an unqualified value for money conclusion on 28 September 2015.

Since issuing our Audit Plan on 26 March 2015, we identified a significant risk in respect of the Council's arrangements for securing financial resilience. In its medium term financial strategy (MTFS) approved by Council February 2015, the Council identified a cumulative budget gap of £1.9m over the next three years to 2017/18. The Council has a good track record of delivering savings and meeting its budget. It is acutely aware of the challenges it faces and good progress has already been made on identifying robust savings and efficiency plans to bridge the medium term budget gap. We will continue to review this area during our 2015/16 audit

## 2.3 Whole of Government Accounts

We performed the procedures required by the National Audit Office on the accuracy of the consolidation pack prepared by the Authority for Whole of Government Accounts purposes. We had no issues to report.

## 2.4 Annual Governance Statement

We are required to consider the completeness of disclosures in the Council's Annual Governance Statement, identify any inconsistencies with the other information which we know about from our work, and consider whether it complies with relevant guidance. We completed this work and did not identify any areas of concern.

## 2.5 Objections received

We did not receive any objections to the 2014/15 financial statements from members of the Public.

## 2.6 Other powers and duties

We identified no issues during our audit that required us to use powers under the Audit Commission Act 1998, including reporting in the public interest.

## 2.7 Independence

We communicated our assessment of independence to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee on 24 September 2015. In our professional judgement the firm is independent and the objectivity of the audit engagement Director and audit staff has not been compromised within the meaning of regulatory and professional requirements.

## 2.8 Certification of grant claims and returns

We have not yet completed our work on the certification of grants and claims. We will issue the Annual Certification report for 2014/15 in January 2016.



### **3. Control themes and observations**

As part of our work, we obtained enough understanding of internal control to plan our audit and determine the nature, timing and extent of testing performed. Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control, we must tell the Council about any significant deficiencies in internal control we find during our audit.

We had no such matters to report.

## 4. Looking ahead

Looking ahead there are two issues we would like to bring to your attention:

Description	Impact
<p><b>Highways Network Asset (formerly Transport Infrastructure Assets):</b></p> <p>The Invitation to Comment on the Code of Accounting Practice for 2016/17 (ITC) sets out the requirements to account for Highways Network Asset under Depreciated Replacement Cost from the existing Depreciated Historic Cost. This is to be effective from 1 April 2016.</p> <p>This requirement is not only applicable to highways authorities, but to any local government bodies that have such assets. This may be a material change of accounting policy for the Council. It could also require changes to existing asset management systems and valuation procedures.</p> <p>Nationally, latest estimates are that this will add £1,100 billion to the net worth of authorities.</p>	<p>The Council will need to demonstrate it has assessed the impact of these changes. Even though it is not a highways authority, the requirements may still impact if it is responsible for assets such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Footways</li> <li>• Unadopted roads on industrial estates</li> <li>• Cycleways</li> <li>• Street Furniture</li> </ul>
<p><b>Earlier deadline for production and audit of the financial statements from 2017/18</b></p> <p>The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 were laid before Parliament in February 2015. A key change in the regulations is that from the 2017/18 financial year the timetable for the preparation and approval of accounts will be brought forward.</p> <p>As a result, the Council will need to produce draft accounts by 31 May and these accounts will need to be audited by 31 July.</p>	<p>These changes provide challenges for both the preparers and the auditors of the financial statements.</p> <p>The Council is aware of this challenge and the need to start planning for the impact of these changes. This will necessarily include review of the processes for the production and audit of the accounts, including areas such as the production of estimates, particularly in relation to pensions and the valuation of assets, and the year-end closure processes.</p>

## 5. Fees

Our fee for 2014/15 is in line with the scale fee set by the Audit Commission and reported in our March 2015 Audit Plan and September 2015 Annual Results Report.

	Final fee 2014/15	Planned fee 2014/15	Scale fee 2014/15	Final fee 2013/14
Total Audit Fee – Code work	£62,745	£62,745	£62,745	£64,745
Total Audit Fee – Certification of claims and returns	See note below	£18,270	£18,270	£20,856
Home of Horseracing Trust	-	-	-	£3,345

Work on the certification of claims and returns is not yet complete. We will report our final fee for the certification work in our report to be issued by 31 January 2016.

We confirm that we have not undertaken any non-audit work outside of the Audit Commission's Audit Code requirements.

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