

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
date	9 June 2006	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2006/7

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the planned work to be undertaken by the External Auditors in respect of the 2006/7 financial accounts and the work that they are required to undertake in other areas of the Authority's activities.

2. EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

- 2.1 The external audit plan is given in full as Appendix A to this report and will be introduced by the External Auditors.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that the Audit Commission provide the external audit service to the Authority and that Dave Brumhead is the District Auditor responsible for this audit.
- 2.3 The plan sets out the range of work to be undertaken by the auditors, the standards that will be employed and key timescales and deliverables from their audit work.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications of this report beyond the audit fees of £52,874. This represents an increase on the fee for 2005/6 of £46,872, however £6,394 of this fee is to be reimbursed by the ODPM for Value for Money work. These fees are already included with the Authority's revenue budgets.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no implications for personnel arising from this report.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An initial assessment has revealed there are no equality issues arising from this report.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

External Audit fulfil a valuable risk management control function in that they provide an independent view as to the validity and accuracy of the Authority's accounts. This not only provides a service to the Authority but also to the general public and other stakeholders.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members approve the External Auditors draft audit plan for 2006/7.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

None.

Alan Sumbly
TREASURER TO THE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

Audit Plan

May 2006



Audit Plan

**Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Combined
Fire Authority**

Audit 2006-2007

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 to the Authority

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

Audit Plan

May 2006



If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566.

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Introduction

- 1 This plan sets out the audit and inspection work that we propose to undertake in 2006/07. The plan has been drawn up from our risk-based approach to audit planning and reflects:
 - our responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice;
 - work specified by the Audit Commission for 2006/07;
 - your local risks and improvement priorities; and
 - current national risks relevant to your local circumstances.

Our responsibilities

- 2 In carrying out our audit duties, we have to comply with the statutory requirements governing them, and in particular:
 - the Audit Commission Act 1998;
 - the Code of Audit Practice (the Code); and
 - the Local Government Act 1999.
- 3 The Code defines auditors' responsibilities in relation to:
 - the financial statements of audited bodies; and
 - audited bodies' arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources. Auditors are now required to draw a positive conclusion regarding the Authority's arrangements for ensuring value for money in its use of resources. We will give the first such conclusion by 30 September 2006 as part of the 2005/06 audit.

Relationship management and CPA

- 4 The Audit Commission has recently appointed David Brumhead as the Relationship Manager (RM) for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue. The RM is the Commission's primary point of contact with the Authority and is also the interface at the local level between the Commission and other inspectorates, Government Office and other stakeholders. The cost of the RM role is being met by a grant paid directly to the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission will consult in 2006 on its future engagement with fire and rescue services, but it is already likely that this will encompass:
 - a **service assessment**, consistent with the Local Services Inspection Forum principles that will form part of the CPA for single tier and county councils from 2006 onwards. The methodology used will be applicable to all types of fire and rescue authority and will have a greater emphasis on service delivery than Fire CPA did, including an element on operational performance delivered by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate. The results of this service

assessment are intended to be published annually starting in December 2006;

- a **use of resources judgement** for all fire and rescue authorities. This will assess the Authority across a broad range of financial issues and provide a scored judgement on whether the Fire and Rescue Authority is providing value for money; and
 - an assessment of improvement, or deterioration, in performance measured through a scored **direction of travel assessment**. The assessment will be outcome focused and be reported in the Fire and Rescue Authority's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter along with the use of resources judgement by March 2007.
- 5 These assessments will provide a clear picture of the progress the fire authority has made since its baseline CPA. They will not result in a change in CPA category. However, they will be important in any future consideration of whether further work is appropriate in order to determine a re categorisation (up or down) at some point in the future.
- 6 We will discuss the detailed arrangements and associated fees for the service assessment, use of resources judgement and direction of travel assessment when further information is available. This work is not included in the fee set out in this plan.

The fee

- 7 For 2006/07, the Audit Commission has changed its fee scale structure and details are set out in the Commission's Work Programme and Fee scales 2006/07. Audit fees are based on a number of variables, including the type, size, location and complexity of the audited body and the national and local risks.
- 8 The total fee estimate for the Authority for 2006/07 is £52,874 (2005/06: £46,872). This fee includes all work identified in this plan unless specifically excluded. Further details are provided in Appendix 1 which includes specific audit risk factors, the assumptions made when determining the audit fee and the process for agreeing any additional fees.
- 9 Changes to the plan and the fee may be necessary if our risk assessment changes during the course of the audit. This is particularly relevant to the work related to the opinion on the 2006/07 accounts since we have yet to audit the accounts for 2005/06. We will formally advise you of any changes if this is the case.

Summary of key audit risks

- 10 This section summarises our assessment and the planned response to the key audit risks which may have an impact on our objectives to:

- provide an opinion on your financial statements;
 - provide a conclusion on your use of resources;
 - carry out audit work as specified by the Audit Commission; and
 - provide a report on the Authority’s best value performance plan.
- 11 Our planned work takes into account information from other regulators, where available. Where risks are identified that are not mitigated by information from other regulators, or your own risk management processes, including Internal Audit, we will perform work as appropriate to enable us to provide a conclusion on your arrangements.
- 12 The expected outputs from this work are outlined in Appendix 3.

Value for money conclusion

- 13 We will focus our work so as to enable us to conclude whether you have put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness with regard to the use of resources (the value for money conclusion).
- 14 The Audit Commission has developed relevant criteria for auditors to apply in reaching our value for money conclusion as required under the Code of Audit Practice. These criteria are listed in Appendix 2. Sources of assurance will include the auditor’s cumulative knowledge and experience including the results of previous work and the work of other regulatory agencies (including Internal Audit).
- 15 From our initial risk based planning assessment we have identified the following areas of audit risk to be addressed.

Table 1 Summary of use of resources audit risks

Audit risk	Response
Governance arrangements need to be strengthened.	We will assess the Authority's changes to governance arrangements following CPA.
Performance management arrangements are key to improvement of the fire service and needs further development.	We will review progress with development of performance management.

Best value performance plan

- 16 We are required to consider and report on whether or not you have complied with legislation and statutory guidance in respect of the preparation and publication of your best value performance plan (BVPP).

- 17 We will review your arrangements for ensuring quality of data including preparation of performance indicator information.

Financial statements

- 18 We will carry out our audit of the 2006/07 financial statements and have regard to the International Standards on Auditing UK and Ireland (ISA UKIs).
- 19 We are also required to review whether the Statement on Internal Control has been presented in accordance with relevant requirements and to report if it does not meet these requirements or if the Statement is misleading or inconsistent with our knowledge of the Authority.
- 20 On the basis of our preliminary work to date we have identified the following audit risks.

Table 2 Summary of opinion risks

Opinion risks	Response
New Firefighters' pensions scheme accounting.	Review and provide guidance.
Accounting for the Fire Safety Training joint venture.	Review and provide guidance.
Whole Government Accounts.	See paragraph 24.

- 21 Our fee estimate for 2006/07 is based on the assumption that the current standard of working papers will be maintained and that Internal Audit will complete their planned work on key information systems to the agreed quality and by the agreed date and that the accounts will be prepared and fully supported by working papers by agreed dates.
- 22 We have yet to undertake the audit of the 2005/06 financial statements and our 2006/07 financial statement audit planning will continue as the year progresses. This will take account of:
- the 2005/06 opinion audit;
 - our documentation and initial testing of material systems;
 - our assessment of the closedown arrangements; and
 - any changes in financial reporting requirements.
- 23 When we have finalised our risk assessment in respect of your financial statements, we will issue a separate plan in advance of the audit detailing our specific approach, including any impact on the fee quoted above.

Whole of government accounts

- 24 The Government is introducing whole of government accounts (WGA) in order to produce consolidated accounts for the whole public sector. WGA will include the accounts of local authorities and WGA data returns will be required to be audited. The Audit Commission is currently discussing the scope of the likely audit work with stakeholders. The fee for this work is not included in this plan and we will discuss this with finance staff when further details are available.

Other information

The team

Table 3 The team

Name	Title
David Brumhead	Relationship Manager/District Auditor
Mike Wood	Audit Manager
Pauline Mack	Area Performance Lead
Gerry Lewis	Audit Team Leader
Martin Ablitt	Performance specialist

- 25 We are not aware of any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the team, and which are required to be disclosed under auditing and ethical standards.
- 26 We comply with the ethical standards promulgated by the Auditing Practices Board and with the Commission’s requirements in respect of independence and objectivity as set out at Appendix 4.

Appendix 1 - Audit fee

Table 4 Audit fee

Fee estimate	Plan 2006/07	Plan 2005/06
Accounts	£32,205	£33,870
Use of resources	£20,669	£13,002
Total audit fee	£52,874	£46,872
Less additional work re VFM conclusion to be reimbursed by ODPM	(£6,394)	-
Net audit fee	£46,480	£46,872
Certification of claims and returns	0	0
Voluntary improvement work	0	0

- 1 The total audit fee compared to the indicative fee banding equates to 3 per cent above the mid-point.
- 2 The fee (plus VAT) will be charged in 12 equal instalments from April 2006 to March 2007.
- 3 The fee above includes all work contained in this plan except:
 - the cost of the role of the Relationship Manager as this is being met by a grant paid directly to the Audit Commission;
 - work required to deliver the service assessment and the direction of travel assessment as discussed in paragraph 4;
 - any work required in relation to the Whole of Government Accounts (discussed in paragraph 24).
- 4 Additional work necessary for auditors to give a formal Use of Resources judgement, as discussed in paragraph 14; is included as an estimate but will be reimbursed by the ODPM.

Assumptions

- 5 In setting the audit fee we have assumed:
 - 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 material information systems that provide figures in the financial statements sufficient that we can place reliance for the purposes of our audit recognising the shift in requirements introduced by the International Standards on Auditing (ISA);
 - officers will provide good quality working papers and records to support the financial statements by agreed dates.
 - officers will provide requested information within agreed timescales; and
 - officers will provide prompt responses to draft reports.
- 6 Where these requirements are not met, we will be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee.
- 7 Changes to the plan will be agreed with you. These may be required if:
 - new risks emerge;
 - additional work is required of us by the Audit Commission or other regulators; and
 - there are any changes to financial reporting requirements, professional auditing standards or legislation which results in additional audit work.
 - Senior managers should take more responsibility for checking the accuracy of performance indicators and internal audit could usefully check that this had been done.

Process for agreeing any changes in audit fees

- 8 If we need to amend the audit (or inspection) fees during the course of this plan, we will firstly discuss this with the Head Finance and Resources. We will then prepare a report outlining the reasons why the fee needs to change for discussion and agreement as necessary.

Appendix 2 - Criteria to inform the auditor's conclusion on proper arrangements for securing economy efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources

Arrangements for establishing strategic and operational objectives and for determining policy and making decisions

- 1 The body has put in place arrangements for setting, reviewing and implementing its strategic and operational objectives.

Arrangements for ensuring that services meet the needs of users and taxpayers, and for engaging with the wider community

- 2 The body has put in place channels of communication with service users and other stakeholders including partners, and there are monitoring arrangements to ensure that key messages about services are taken into account.

Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing performance, including arrangements to ensure data quality

- 3 The body has put in place arrangements for monitoring and scrutiny of performance, to identify potential variances against strategic objectives, standards and targets, for taking action where necessary, and reporting to members.
- 4 The body has put in place arrangements to monitor the quality of its published performance information, and to report the results to members

Arrangements for ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations

- 5 The body has put in place arrangements to maintain a sound system of internal control.

Arrangements for identifying, evaluating and managing operational and financial risks and opportunities, including those arising from involvement in partnerships and joint working

- 6 The body has put in place arrangements to manage its significant business risks.

Arrangements for managing its financial and other resources, including arrangements to safeguard the financial standing of the audited body and for ensuring compliance with the general duty of best value (where applicable)

- 7 The body has put in place arrangements to manage and improve value for money.
- 8 The body has put in place a medium-term financial strategy, budgets and a capital programme that are soundly based and designed to deliver its strategic priorities.
- 9 The body has put in place arrangements to ensure that its spending matches its available resources.
- 10 The body has put in place arrangements for managing performance against budgets.
- 11 The body has put in place arrangements for the management of its asset base. (NB only applies where, in the auditor's judgement, the audited body has a significant fixed asset base)

Arrangements for ensuring that the audited body's affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of conduct, and to prevent and detect fraud and corruption

- 12 The body has put in place arrangements that are designed to promote and ensure probity and propriety in the conduct of its business.

Appendix 3 - Planned outputs

- 1 Our reports will be discussed and agreed with the appropriate officers before being issued to the Finance and Resources Committee.

Table 5

Planned output	Start date	Draft due date	Key contact
Audit Plan*	1 February 2006	31 March 2006	Audit Manager/ Relationship Manager
Interim Audit Memorandum	February 2007	April 2007	Audit Manager
Report on Financial Statements to Those Charged with Governance	TBA	TBA	Audit Manager
Opinion on Financial Statements	TBA	TBA	Audit Manager
VfM conclusion 2005/06	August 2006	September 2006	Audit Manager/ Performance Lead
Final Accounts Memorandum	June 2007	September 2007	Audit Manager
Local performance work	TBA	TBA	Audit Manager/ Performance Lead
Annual Audit Letter	October 2007	November 2007	Relationship Manager
Use of Resources Scores	November 2007	January 2007	Audit Manager/ Performance Lead

**To be revisited during the year to reflect outcome of 2005/06 opinion audit and 2006/07 interim visit.*

Appendix 4 - The Audit Commission's requirements in respect of independence and objectivity

- 1 Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are subject to the Code of Audit Practice (the Code) which includes the requirement to comply with ISA UKIs when auditing the financial statements. Professional standards require auditors to communicate to those charged with governance, at least annually, all relationships that may bear on the firm's independence and the objectivity of the audit engagement partner and audit staff. Standards also place requirements on auditors in relation to integrity, objectivity and independence.
- 2 The standards define '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.
- 3 Auditors are required by the Code to:
 - carry out their work with independence and objectivity;
 - exercise their professional judgement and act independently of both the Commission and the audited body;
 - maintain an objective attitude at all times and not act in any way that might give rise to, or be perceived to give rise to, a conflict of interest; and
 - resist any improper attempt to influence their judgement in the conduct of the audit.
- 4 In addition, the Code specifies that auditors should not carry out work for an audited body that does not relate directly to the discharge of the auditors' functions under the Code. If the Authority invites us to carry out risk-based work in a particular area, which cannot otherwise be justified to support our audit conclusions, it will be clearly differentiated as work carried out under section 35 of the Audit Commission Act 1998.
- 5 The Code also states that the Commission issues guidance under its powers to appoint auditors and to determine their terms of appointment. The Standing Guidance for Auditors includes several references to arrangements designed to support and reinforce the requirements relating to independence, which auditors must comply with. These are as follows:
 - any staff involved on Commission work who wish to engage in political activity should obtain prior approval from the Partner or Regional Director;

- audit staff are expected not to accept appointments as lay school inspectors;

- firms are expected not to risk damaging working relationships by bidding for work within an audited body's area in direct competition with the body's own staff without having discussed and agreed a local protocol with the body concerned;
- auditors are expected to comply with the Commission's statements on firms not providing personal financial or tax advice to certain senior individuals at their audited bodies, auditors' conflicts of interest in relation to PFI procurement at audited bodies, and disposal of consultancy practices and auditors' independence;
- auditors appointed by the Commission should not accept engagements which involve commenting on the performance of other Commission auditors on Commission work without first consulting the Commission;
- auditors are expected to comply with the Commission's policy for both the District Auditor/Partner and the second in command (Senior Manager/Manager) to be changed on each audit at least once every five years with effect from 1 April 2003 (subject to agreed transitional arrangements);
- audit suppliers are required to obtain the Commission's written approval prior to changing any District Auditor or Audit Partner/Director in respect of each audited body; and
- the Commission must be notified of any change of second in command within one month of making the change. Where a new Partner/Director or second in command has not previously undertaken audits under the Audit Commission Act 1998 or has not previously worked for the audit supplier, the audit supplier is required to provide brief details of the individual's relevant qualifications, skills and experience.