



Informing the audit risk assessment for Cannock Chase District Council

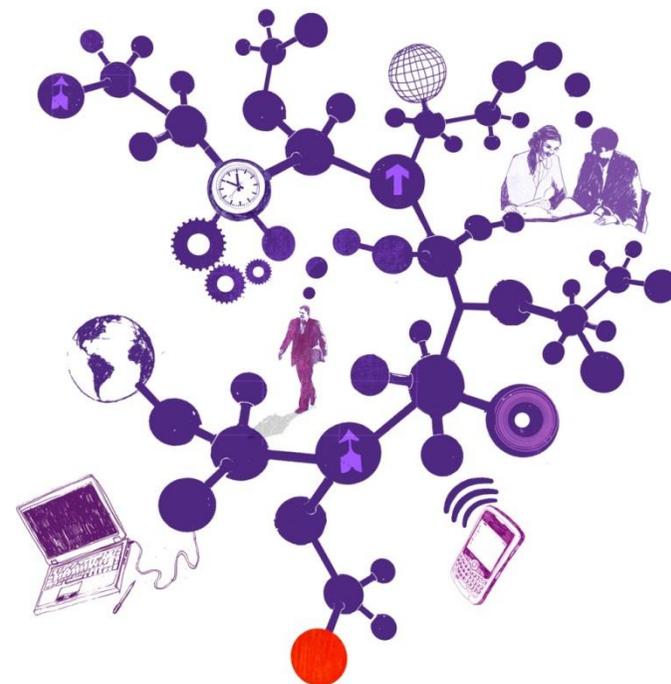
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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect your business or any weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to contribute towards the effective two-way communication between auditors and the Council's Audit and Governance Committee, as 'those charged with governance'. The report covers some important areas of the auditor risk assessment where we are required to make inquiries of the Audit and Governance Committee under auditing standards.

Background

Under International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) (ISA(UK&I)) auditors have specific responsibilities to communicate with the Audit and Governance Committee. ISA(UK&I) emphasise the importance of two-way communication between the auditor and the Audit and Governance Committee and also specify matters that should be communicated.

This two-way communication assists both the auditor and the Audit and Governance Committee in understanding matters relating to the audit and developing a constructive working relationship. It also enables the auditor to obtain information relevant to the audit from the Audit and Governance Committee and supports the Audit and Governance Committee in fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to the financial reporting process.

Communication

As part of our risk assessment procedures we are required to obtain an understanding of management processes and the Audit and Governance Committee's oversight of the following areas:

- fraud
- laws and regulations
- going concern
- accounting estimates
- related party transactions

This report includes a series of questions on each of these areas and the response we have received from the Council's management. The Audit and Governance Committee should consider whether these responses are consistent with its understanding and whether there are any further comments it wishes to make.

Fraud

Issue

Matters in relation to fraud

ISA (UK&I) 240 covers auditors responsibilities relating to fraud in an audit of financial statements.

The primary responsibility to prevent and detect fraud rests with both the Audit and Governance Committee and management. Management, with the oversight of the Audit and Governance Committee, needs to ensure a strong emphasis on fraud prevention and deterrence and encourage a culture of honest and ethical behaviour. As part of its oversight, the Audit and Governance Committee should consider the potential for override of controls and inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process.

As auditor, we are responsible for obtaining reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement due to fraud or error. We are required to maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit, considering the potential for management override of controls. As part of our audit risk assessment procedures we are required to consider risks of fraud. This includes considering the arrangements management has put in place with regard to fraud risks including:

- assessment that the financial statements could be materially misstated due to fraud
- process for identifying and responding to risks of fraud, including any identified specific risks
- communication with the Audit and Governance Committee regarding its processes for identifying and responding to risks of fraud
- communication to employees regarding business practices and ethical behaviour.

We need to understand how the Audit and Governance Committee oversees the above processes. We are also required to make inquiries of both management and the Audit and governance Committee as to their knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud. These areas have been set out in the fraud risk assessment questions below together with responses from the Council's management.

Fraud risk assessment

| Question | Management response |
|--|---|
| <p>Has the Council assessed the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements due to fraud? What are the results of this process?</p> | <p>Although there is an on-going risk of fraud being committed against the Council arrangements are in place to both prevent and detect fraud. The S151 Officer has the overall responsibility for assessing the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements and is supported by management who provide the appropriate evidence for this assessment. In addition, work is carried out by Internal Audit on overall fraud risk areas and specifically on Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Social housing fraud. All work undertaken by Internal Audit has fraud considerations built into it. The risk of material misstatement of the accounts due to undetected fraud is low. Investigation into fraud is the responsibility of the compliance team within Revenues and benefits.</p> |
| <p>What processes does the Council have in place to identify and respond to risks of fraud?</p> | <p>The Council has an Anti-Fraud & Corruption Framework which incorporates the fraud response plan. There is also a Confidential Reporting Framework to allow concerns to be raised from within as well as by external parties.</p> |
| <p>Have any specific fraud risks, or areas with a high risk of fraud, been identified and what has been done to mitigate these risks?</p> | <p>No areas with a high risk of material fraud have been identified. The susceptibility of services to fraud forms part of the Council's Audit Needs assessment process. This is provided to the Audit and Governance Committee. Training and awareness sessions are provided periodically.</p> |
| <p>Are internal controls, including segregation of duties, in place and operating effectively? If not, where are the risk areas and what mitigating actions have been taken?</p> | <p>Internal controls, including whether segregation of duties exist, are reviewed by Internal Audit as part of their routine and investigative work; exceptions are reported to managers and inform the Internal audit opinion.</p> |
| <p>Are there any areas where there is a potential for override of controls or inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process (for example because of undue pressure to achieve financial targets)?</p> | <p>There is always the potential for an override of controls within systems, however our control framework has established secondary compensatory controls in place that would identify any such override taken place. Financial reporting is produced and balanced from the financial system, and the reporting hierarchy allows for checks to be performed throughout the process, for example by the S151 Officer, Senior Management Team and Cabinet.</p> |
| <p>Are there any areas where there is a potential for misreporting override of controls or inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process?</p> | <p>No, as detailed above, there are compensatory controls in place to flag any overrides of controls.</p> |

Fraud risk assessment (continued)

| Question | Management response |
|---|---|
| <p>How does the Audit and Governance Committee exercise oversight over management's processes for identifying and responding to risks of fraud?</p> <p>What arrangements are in place to report fraud issues and risks to the Audit and governance Committee?</p> | <p>The Internal Audit Risk Based Plan is approved by the Audit and Governance Committee before commencement each year. Internal Audit complete a robust review of internal controls on a risk basis and report regularly to Audit and Governance Committee. The Audit and Governance Committee are informed of the audit opinions and seek management reassurance on the improvement of controls where the consequences are considered high risk. At each meeting, Audit and Governance Committee members receive an update on instances of actual, suspected or alleged fraud investigations that have occurred since the last meeting and their outcomes.</p> |
| <p>How does the Council communicate and encourage ethical behaviour of its staff and contractors?</p> | <p>The Council has a staff code of conduct, confidential reporting policy and Financial regulations in place. All staff are regularly reminded of these. In respect of contractors ethical considerations are built into all contracts.</p> |
| <p>How do you encourage staff to report their concerns about fraud?</p> <p>Have any significant issues been reported?</p> | <p>There is an Anti Fraud and corruption framework and a Confidential reporting framework in place which explain the procedures to follow. Staff are expected to report suspicious or fraudulent behaviour. No significant issues have been reported and no issues have been reported under the bribery act.</p> |
| <p>Are you aware of any related party relationships or transactions that could give rise to risks of fraud?</p> | <p>2015/16 financial statement disclosure of related party transactions did not identify any potential fraud risks. Members and officers are required to make full disclosure of any relationships that impact on their roles. Members are required to declare any relevant interests at Council and Committee meetings.</p> |
| <p>Are you aware of any instances of actual, suspected or alleged, Fraud within the Council as a whole since 1 April 2014?</p> | <p>There are no material instances of fraud that have been identified during the year. There are some areas that are inherently at risk from fraud such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Council Tax ■ Benefit fraud ■ Single person discount ■ Social housing fraud <p>There is a compliance team within Revenues and Benefits. The council takes part in the National Fraud Initiative.</p> |

Laws and regulations

Issue

Matters in relation to laws and regulations

ISA (UK&I) 250 requires us to consider the impact of laws and regulations in an audit of the financial statements.

Management, with the oversight of the Audit and Governance Committee, is responsible for ensuring that the Council's operations are conducted in accordance with laws and regulations including those that determine amounts in the financial statements.

As auditor, we are responsible for obtaining reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement due to fraud or error, taking into account the appropriate legal and regulatory framework. As part of our risk assessment procedures we are required to make inquiries of management and the Audit and Governance Committee as to whether the entity is in compliance with laws and regulations. Where we become aware of information of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance we need to gain an understanding of the non-compliance and the possible effect on the financial statements.

Risk assessment questions have been set out below together with responses from management.

Impact of laws and regulations

| Question | Management response |
|---|--|
| <p>What arrangements does the Council have in place to prevent and detect non-compliance with laws and regulations?</p> | <p>The Monitoring Officer, Heads of Service and Management are responsible for ensuring the Council is compliant with laws and regulations. The Constitution notes that the Monitoring Officers responsibilities cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ complying with the law of the land (including any relevant Codes of Conduct); ■ complying with any General Guidance issued, from time to time, by the Standards Committee and / or advice of the Monitoring Officer; ■ making lawful and proportionate decisions; and ■ generally, not taking action that would bring the Council, their offices or professions into disrepute. <p>The Monitoring Officer has access to all Council committee reports and raises awareness on legal requirements at meetings where needed. In addition in terms of any specific legal issues the Monitoring Officer would get involved at an early stage.</p> <p>Further information on how the Monitoring Officer carries out these responsibilities are detailed in the Constitution.</p> <p>The S151 officer is responsible for preparing the accounting statements in accordance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements.</p> <p>Work undertaken by Internal Audit ensures compliance with the relevant laws and regulations.</p> |
| <p>How does management gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with?</p> | <p>The Council has a Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer who provide assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with. Also all Cabinet reports have a standard section detailing any legislative issues.</p> <p>The work of Internal Audit also provides a source of assurance . Any non compliance is reported to management via Internal Audit reports and appropriate plans are put in place to remedy such issues.</p> |

Impact of laws and regulations (continued)

| Question | Management response |
|---|--|
| How is the Audit and Governance Committee provided with assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with? | All committee papers (with the exception of the Audit and Governance Committee) are required to include an assessment of potential legal implications. Assurance is also provided through the Internal Audit Annual Report and opinion and the Annual Governance Statement. |
| Have there been any instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with law and regulation since 1 April 2014, or earlier with an on-going impact on the 2014/15 financial statements? | None. |
| What arrangements does the Council have in place to identify, evaluate and account for litigation or claims? | The Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer identify and evaluate the impact of litigation and claims which are then recorded as expenditure, as a provision or disclosed as a contingent liability in the accounts. This impact is mitigated in some cases by appropriate insurance cover. |
| Is there any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements? | None. |
| Have there been any reports from other regulatory bodies, such as HM Revenues and Customs which indicate non-compliance? | None. |

Going concern

Issue

Matters in relation to going concern

ISA (UK&I) 570 covers auditor responsibilities in the audit of financial statements relating to management's use of the going concern assumption in the financial statements.

The going concern assumption is a fundamental principle in the preparation of financial statements. Under this assumption entities are viewed as continuing in business for the foreseeable future. Assets and liabilities are recorded on the basis that the entity will be able to realise its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business.

The code of practice on local authority accounting requires an authority's financial statements to be prepared on a going concern basis. Although the Council is not subject to the same future trading uncertainties as private sector entities, consideration of the key features of the going concern provides an indication of the Council's financial resilience.

As auditor, we are responsible for considering the appropriateness of use of the going concern assumption in preparing the financial statements and to consider whether there are material uncertainties about the Council's ability to continue as a going concern that need to be disclosed in the financial statements. We discuss the going concern assumption with management and review the Council's financial and operating performance.

Going concern considerations have been set out below and management has provided its response.

Going concern considerations

| Question | Management response |
|---|--|
| Does the Council have procedures in place to assess the Council's ability to continue as a going concern? | The Financial Strategy considers the financial position of the authority over the short, medium and long term and is designed to ensure that the Council continues as a going concern. Internal Audit's work plan provides an on-going review of key elements of the Strategy to ensure its delivery or to highlight at an early stage any unforeseen risks. |
| Is management aware of the existence of other events or conditions that may cast doubt on the Council's ability to continue as a going concern? | The Council has addressed the risk arising from the closure of Rugeley Power Station and the impact on the Council's finances through a comprehensive Financial Recovery Plan which has now been included within the budgets set going forwards. |
| Are arrangements in place to report the going concern assessment to the Audit and Governance Committee? | The Audit and Governance Committee consider a number of reports which provide them with assurance that the Council continues as a going concern. These include the Statement of Accounts, Revenue and Capital outturn reports including analysis of reserves held, and Treasury management Strategies. They also receive reports stating that all controls and risks have been managed appropriately and as Members will have access to all reports produced across the Council. |
| Are the financial assumptions (eg future levels of income and expenditure) consistent with the Council's Business Plan and the financial information provided to the Council throughout the year? | The Financial Plan has been prepared by appropriately qualified and experienced staff in consultation with service managers. The scrutiny committee also reviews financial plans before approval. The financial assumptions are therefore consistent with the Council's service plan. Reports in year are consistent with the budget set. |

Going concern considerations (continued)

| Question | Management response |
|---|---|
| Are the implications of statutory or policy changes appropriately reflected in the Business Plan, financial forecasts and report on going concern? | The financial plan explicitly considered the government changes in terms of grant settlement and the financial settlement. The plan is updated to reflect the financial settlement. |
| Have there been any significant issues raised with the Audit and Governance Committee during the year which could cast doubts on the assumptions made? (Examples include adverse comments raised by internal and external audit regarding financial performance or significant weaknesses in systems of financial control). | Although assumptions are regularly challenged by the Audit and Governance Committee, no such issues have been raised. |
| Does a review of available financial information identify any adverse financial indicators including negative cash flow? If so, what action is being taken to improve financial performance? | Financial monitoring has not identified any such adverse financial indicators. |
| Does the Council have sufficient staff in post, with the appropriate skills and experience, particularly at senior manager level, to ensure the delivery of the Council's objectives? If not, what action is being taken to obtain those skills? | The Council has the relevant expertise to deliver the Council's strategy and objectives. |

Estimates

Issue

Matters in relation to accounting estimates

ISA (UK&I) 540 covers auditor responsibilities relating to estimates in an audit of financial statements.

Local authorities use estimates in the preparation of their financial statements. We need to obtain an understanding of:

- how management identifies the transactions, events and conditions that give rise to the need for an accounting estimate.
- how management actually make the estimates, including the control procedures in place to minimise the risk of misstatement.

We need to be aware of all estimates that the Council use as part of their accounts preparation. These are set out overleaf.

Estimate considerations

| Estimate | Method | Controls used to identify estimates | Use of an expert | Underlying assumptions - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates | Change in accounting method in year? |
|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Property plant & equipment valuations | Valuations are made by the in-house valuer for Council dwellings and an external valuer (Lambert Smith Hampton) for all other assets. Valuations are in line with RICS guidance on the basis of 5 year rolling valuations based on classes of asset with an interim desk top review to compare the carrying values and fair values. | Accounting standards require formal revaluations sufficiently regular to ensure the carrying amount does not differ materially from fair value at the year end. In addition valuations must be carried out simultaneously for each class of asset. | In – house and external Valuer | Valuations are made in line with guidance- reliance on an expert. Valuations now undertaken for each class of asset simultaneously. | No |
| Estimated remaining useful lives of PPE | The following asset categories have general asset lives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dwelling and other buildings 15 to 70 years ■ Equipment/vehicles 5 years ■ Infrastructure 25 years These are based on information from the valuer. | Consistent asset lives applied to each asset category | Use both in-house and external Valuer | The method makes some generalisations. For example, a new building can have a life as short as 15 years or as long as 70 years depending on the construction materials used. This life would be recorded in accordance with the local qualified RICS or CIB Member. The valuer is appropriately qualified. | No |

Estimate considerations (continued)

| Estimate | Method | Controls used to identify estimates | Use of an expert | Underlying assumptions - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates | Change in accounting method in year? |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Depreciation & amortisation | Depreciation is provided for on all fixed assets with a finite useful life on a straight-line basis. Asset lives and values are obtained from the valuer. | Consistent application of depreciation method across all assets | No | The length of the life is determined at the point of acquisition or revaluation according to: ■ Depreciation is not applied in the year of addition ■ Assets that are not fully constructed are not depreciated until they are brought into use. | No |
| Impairments | Assets are assessed at each year-end as to whether there is any indication that an asset may be impaired. Where indications exist and any possible differences are estimated to be material, the recoverable amount of the asset is estimated and, where this is less than the carrying amount of the asset, an impairment loss is recognised for the shortfall. | Assets are assessed at each year-end as to whether there is any indication that an asset may be impaired. | Use the Internal and external Valuer | Valuations are made in-line with RICS guidance - reliance on expert. | No |

Estimate considerations (continued)

| Estimate | Method | Controls used to identify estimates | Use of an expert | Underlying assumptions - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates | Change in accounting method in year? |
|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Pensions – Defined benefit pension amounts and disclosures. | The Council is an admitted body to the Local Government Pension scheme. | Rely on the calculations made by the actuary, based on information provided by the Authority. The Actuary's report is reviewed for reasonableness by senior staff. | Yes - Actuary for the pension schemes | Reliance on the expertise of the actuaries of the pension scheme | No |
| Bad debt provision | A provision is estimated using a proportion basis of an aged debt listing | Members of the Finance team calculate the provision from the aged debt listing based on prior experience. | No | Consistent proportion used across aged debt as per the Code. This is based on type of debt and historic payment pattern. | No |
| Measurement of financial instruments | Council values financial instruments at fair value based on the advice of their internal treasury consultants and other finance professionals. | Take advice from finance professionals | Yes Sector | Take advice from finance professionals, if required. | No |

Estimate considerations (continued)

| Estimate | Method | Controls used to identify estimates | Use of an expert | Underlying assumptions - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates | Change in accounting method in year? |
|-----------------------------|--|---|------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Accruals | Finance team collate accruals of Expenditure and Income from purchase ledger and budget information. Activity is accounted for in the financial year that it takes place, not when money is paid or received | Purchase ledger and management accounts information assessed by Finance team. | No | Accruals for income and expenditure have been principally based on known values. Where accruals have had to be estimated the latest available information has been used. | No |
| Provisions for liabilities. | Provisions are made where an event has taken place that gives the Trust a legal or constructive obligation that probably requires settlement by a transfer of economic benefits or service potential, and a reliable estimate can be made. Provisions are charged as an expense to the appropriate service line in the CIES in the year that the Council becomes aware of the obligation, and are measured at the best estimate at the balance sheet date of the expenditure required to settle the obligation, taking into account relevant risks and uncertainties. | Calculations by Head of Finance based on information from third parties e.g. insurers and solicitors. | No | Estimated settlements are reviewed at the end of each financial year. Where it becomes less than probable that a transfer of economic benefits will now be required (or a lower settlement than anticipated is made), the provision is reversed and credited back to the relevant service. Where some or all of the payment required to settle a provision is expected to be recovered from another party (e.g. from an insurance claim), this is only recognised as income for the service if it is virtually certain that reimbursement will be received by the Council. | No |

Estimate considerations (continued)

| Estimate | Method | Controls used to identify estimates | Use of an expert | Underlying assumptions - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates | Change in accounting method in year? |
|---|--|---|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| Non adjusting events - events after the BS date | S 151 Officer makes the assessment. If the event is indicative of conditions that arose after the balance sheet date then this is an un adjusting event. For these events only a note to the accounts is included, identifying the nature of the event and where possible estimates of the financial effect. | Heads of service notify S151 Officer. | This would be considered on individual circumstances. | This would be considered on individual circumstances | No |
| Finance leases | Fixed assets recognised under finance leases are accounted for using the policies applied generally to Tangible Fixed Assets, subject to depreciation being charged over the lease term if this is shorter than the asset's estimated useful life. | Finance review contracts and payments to ensure the lease is categorised correctly as a finance lease or an operating lease | No | Property, Plant and Equipment recognised under finance leases are accounted for using the policies applied generally to such assets, subject to depreciation being charged over the lease term if this is shorter than the asset's estimated useful life (where ownership of the asset does not transfer to the Council at the end of the lease period). | No |

Related parties

Issue

Matters in relation to related parties

ISA (UK&I) 550 covers auditor responsibilities relating to related party transactions.

Many related party transactions are in the normal course of business and may not carry a higher risk of material misstatement. However in some circumstances the nature of the relationships and transaction may give rise to higher risks.

For local government bodies, the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code) requires compliance with IAS 24: related party disclosures. The Code identifies the following as related parties to local government bodies:

- entities that directly, or indirectly through one or more intermediaries, control, or are controlled by the Council (i.e. subsidiaries)
- associates
- joint ventures in which the Council is a venturer
- an entity that has an interest in the Council that gives it significant influence over the Council
- key officers, and close members of the family of key officers
- post-employment benefit plan (pension fund) for the benefit of employees of the Council, or of any entity that is a related party of the Council.

The Code notes that, in considering materiality, regard should be had to the definition of materiality, which requires materiality to be judged from the viewpoint of both the Council and the related party.

ISA (UK&I) 550 requires us to review your procedures for identifying related party transactions and obtain an understanding of the controls that you have established to identify such transactions. We will also carry out testing to ensure the related party transaction disclosures you make in the financial statements are complete and accurate.

Related party considerations

| Question | Management response |
|--|---|
| Who are the Council's related parties? | <p>The Council has a significant number of related parties in which there is a material impact to the financial statements via virtue of - whether the Council might have the potential either to be controlled or influenced by the party or the potential to exert control or influence over the party (as defined by guidance in the Code). The areas where these are disclosed within the Council's financial statements are:</p> <p>(1) Government - central government grants has control influence over the Council as the Council needs to act in accordance with its statutory responsibilities.</p> <p>(2) Staffordshire County Pension Fund - this party is subject to common control by central government.</p> <p>(3) Precepts & Levies - these parties are subject to common control by central government and thus might be empowered to transact on non-commercial terms. The Council is bound to pay the amount demanded from these parties through precept or levy.</p> <p>(4) Members and Officers - Certain Members and Officers may have controlling influence or related interests with other of the Council's related party organisations; such that they may be in a position to significantly influence the policies of the Council.</p> |
| What are the controls in place to identify, account for, and disclose, related party transactions and relationships? | <p>A number of arrangements are in place for identifying the nature of a related party and reported value including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maintenance of a Register of interests for Members, a register for pecuniary interests in contracts for Officers and Senior Managers requiring disclosure of related party transactions. ■ Annual return from senior managers/officers requiring confirmation that read and understood the declaration requirements and stating details of any known related party interests. ■ Review of in-year income and expenditure transactions with known identified related parties from prior year or known history. ■ Review of the accounts payable system and identification of amounts paid to assisted or voluntary organisations. |



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