

Audit and Inspection Plan

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Audit and Inspection Plan

North Wiltshire District Council

Audit 2006/2007

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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:
 - the Code of Audit Practice;
 - Audit and inspection work specified by the Audit Commission for 2006/07;
 - your local risks and improvement priorities; and
 - current national risks relevant to your local circumstances.
- 2 Your relationship manager will continue to help ensure further integration and co-ordination with the work of other inspectorates.

Our responsibilities

- 3 In carrying out our audit and inspection 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) with regard to audit; and
 - the Local Government Act 1999 with regard to best value inspection and audit.
- 4 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 Council'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.

The fee

- 5 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.
- 6 Inspection fees are based on the actual number of days included in the plan for each programmed activity.
- 7 The total fee estimate for the audit work planned for 2006/07 is £97,225 and the total fee estimate for inspection work planned for 2006/07 is £11,394. This total audit and inspection fee of £108,619 compares with a total of £93,331 in 2005/06.
- 8 The main reasons for the increase in fee from 2005/06 is:
 - The inclusion of a service inspection in the 2006/07 plan,
 - The continuing impact of the new ISA provisions on our opinion audit, and
 - Additional time for the direction of travel work in 2006/07.
- 9 In addition we estimate that we will charge approximately £27,880 for the certification of claims and returns. Further details are provided in paragraph 33 and in Appendix 1.
- 10 The audit and inspection fees include all work identified in this plan unless specifically excluded. Further details are provided in Appendix 1 which includes the assumptions made when determining the audit fee, specific actions North Wiltshire District Council could take to reduce its audit fees and the process for agreeing any additional fees.
- 11 Changes to the plan and the fee may be necessary if our audit risk assessment changes during the course of the audit. This is particularly relevant to work related to:
 - the opinion on the 2006/07 accounts since we have yet to audit the accounts for 2005/06 and detailed financial reporting requirements for 2006/07 are not yet known; and
 - work on selected performance indicators, since we have yet to assess your overall arrangements for securing the quality of this data and then to undertake a formal risk assessment.
- 12 We will formally advise you if any changes to the fee become necessary.

CPA and inspections

- 13 The CPA framework for District Councils from 2006 is currently subject to consultation. It is expected that the proposed methodology will be published by April 2006 and that the opportunity for re-categorisation will be available for some councils during 2006/07.
- 14 If the new methodology identifies the need or opportunity for a revised corporate assessment for North Wiltshire District Council, we will discuss an amendment to this plan and agree an additional fee for completion of the work.
- 15 Following the Council's classification as a fair council in July 2004 we have applied the principles of strategic regulation recognising the key strengths and weaknesses in North Wiltshire's performance. Strengths include:
 - Development Control, where the Council has moved from being one of the worst performing councils for the speed of processing planning applications in England to being commended by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) as one of the most improved;
 - Sustainability, where the Council continues to build upon its strengths in applying the principles of sustainable development in its work; and
 - Housing, where the Council is continuing to work with its partners in delivering affordable housing. The Council has a history of meeting its housing strategy targets in this area.
- 16 Specific weaknesses include:
 - Street Scene, where BVPIs show that the Council's performance on the cleanliness of public land is among the worst 25 per cent of councils;
 - Revenues & Benefits, where the Council's collection of council tax compares with the worst 25 per cent of councils. The introduction of the new housing benefit and council tax system has also diverted management resources away from local taxation income collection and as a result, arrears are increasing and there is a risk that bad debts may increase;
 - Waste and recycling, where the Council's recycling rate has increased from a low base but still remains in the bottom 25 per cent of councils in its comparator group;
 - Healthier lifestyle, where the Council has very few measures and targets to show the progress it is making in providing leisure opportunities for all. The absence of a clear policy framework or strategy for its current leisure provision makes it unclear how the Council will meet the future needs of its community; and
 - Equalities, where the Council has failed in the past to deliver what it promised in relation to its own targets for promoting race equality and implementing the equality standard for local government.

17 As a consequence our inspection activity will focus on the following:

- An environment inspection focusing on the street scene; and
- A follow-up of progress against recommendations arising from our Customer Focus inspection, completed in October 2005.

Table 1 Summary of inspection activity

Inspection activity	Reason/impact
Relationship Manager role	To act as the Commission's primary point with the authority and the interface at the local level between the Commission and the other inspectorates, Government Offices and other key stakeholders.
Direction of Travel review	To provide focus for continuous improvement. Likely to be included in the CPA scorecard.
Environment inspection	The Council's current street scene performance is poor. This inspection aims to provide an independent assessment of the quality of this service identifying areas for further improvement.
Customer Focus inspection follow-up.	To assess the Council's progress in implementing the recommendations arising from our Customer Focus inspection completed in October 2005. As part of this work we will focus in on the equalities issues raised previously.

Summary of key audit risks

- 18 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;
 - provide a scored judgment on the use of resources to feed into the CPA process;
 - undertake audit work in relation to specified performance indicators to support the service assessment element of CPA; and
 - provide a report on the Council's best value performance plan (BVPP).
- 19 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.

Value for money conclusion

- 20 The Code of Audit Practice requires us to issue a conclusion on whether you have proper arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of your resources (the value for money conclusion). 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. In meeting this responsibility, we will review evidence that is relevant to the Council's corporate performance management and financial management arrangements. We will give the first such conclusion by the end of September 2006 as part our audit of the 2005/06 accounts. This may influence our risk assessment for similar work to be carried out as part of the 2006/07 and we will keep you informed of any changes to this plan that may become necessary.

Use of resources judgement

- 21 Over and above the Code requirements described above, the Audit Commission requires auditors to make more qualitative assessments of the effectiveness of those arrangements in the form of a series of use of resources judgements. The key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) issued in June 2005 will be updated in Spring 2006 to reflect the lessons learned from the first year's experiences of applying the KLOEs, following a post implementation review of the assessment. Our fee estimate 2006/07 assumes that the KLOEs will be broadly similar to those used in

2005/06. If this changes we will discuss with you the implications, including any impact on the fee.

- 22 These judgements may also used by the Commission as the basis for its overall use of resources judgement.
- 23 Using our cumulative knowledge and experience, including the results of previous work and other regulators' work, we have identified the following areas of audit risk to be addressed.

Table 2 Summary of use of resources audit risks

Audit risk	Response
<p>Service & Financial Planning workshops</p> <p>The Council's arrangements for ensuring that its service planning and financial planning are fully integrated are not, as yet, fully effective.</p>	<p>We will work with service managers and members to develop arrangements in this area. In particular, we will hold interactive workshops to identify specific areas for improvement and share examples of good practice.</p>

Performance information

- 24 In 2006/07, auditors are required to undertake audit work in relation to specified performance indicators to support the service assessment element of CPA, subject to the basis of the agreed methodology. This work will be risk based and will link at least in part to our review of the Council's overall arrangements to secure data quality (as required for our value for money conclusion). Our fee estimate includes an element for this work on the basis that we will assess North Wiltshire District Council as medium risk in relation to its performance indicators.
- 25 This risk assessment may change depending on our assessment of your overall arrangements. When we have finalised our risk assessment we will update our plan including any impact on the fee.

Best value performance plan

- 26 We are required to 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).

Financial statements

- 27 We will carry out our audit of the 2006/07 financial statements and follow the International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland).
- 28 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.
- 29 On the basis of our preliminary work to date we have identified the following audit risks.

Table 3 Summary of Opinion risks

Opinion risks	Response
<p>Housing Benefits (SX3) system</p> <p>The new housing benefits system may not provide robust information for the statement of accounts or the government grant claim.</p>	<p>We will liaise with internal audit to ensure that key opinion controls are documented and tested. We will target our statements testing at entries derived from this new system.</p>
<p>Disclosure</p> <p>Accounts may not meet required accounting and disclosure standards.</p>	<p>We will continue to meet with finance officers throughout the year to ensure that all requirements and changes are properly considered.</p>
<p>Whole of Government Accounting</p> <p>Early deadlines for publication of the statement of accounts for 2006/07 may not be met.</p>	<p>We will continue to work with officers to assess whether the council is on track to meet the earlier deadlines. We will seek assurances on the effectiveness of your own quality assurance arrangements. We will identify tasks that can be carried out earlier thereby reducing workload pressures during the closedown period.</p>
<p>International Standards on Auditing</p> <p>The new International Standards on Auditing requires that auditors understand the information systems, including the related business processes, relevant to financial reporting.</p>	<p>We will continue to work with officers to identify all material systems and liaise with your internal audit function where possible to document and test the controls in place. As part of this process we will seek to develop a joint working agreement with internal audit.</p>

- 30 Our fee estimate for 2006/07 is based on the assumption that the current standard of working papers will be improved 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 in accordance with the agreed timetable.
- 31 We have yet to undertake the audit of the 2005/06 financial statements and our 2006/07 financial statements 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 information systems;
 - our assessment of the 2006/07 closedown arrangements; and
 - any changes in financial reporting requirements.
- 32 When we have finalised our risk assessment in respect of your financial statements, we will update our plan in advance of the audit detailing our specific approach, including any impact on the fee quoted above.

Whole of government accounts

- 33 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 the NAO and other stakeholders. The fee for this work is not included in this plan and we will discuss this with the Executive when further details are available.

Claims and returns certification

- 34 We will continue to certify the Council's claims and returns.
- Claims for £50,000 or below will not be subject to certification.
 - Claims between £50,001 and £100,000 will be subject to a reduced, light touch, certification audit.
 - Claims over £100,000 have an audit approach relevant to the auditor's assessment of the control environment and management preparation of claims. A robust control environment would lead to a reduced audit approach for these claims.
- 35 Charges for this work are based on skill-related fees scales set out in the Audit Commission's work programme and fee scales 2006/07. Based on this, and on the assumption that the level of grant work will remain unchanged we estimate that the fees for grant certification work will be around £27,880.

Voluntary improvement work

- 36 The Council is considering extending the remit of the final accounts committee to include responsibility for audit and governance issues, including risk management and internal control. A key challenge will be to ensure members of this and other committees including overview and scrutiny and the standards committee provide effective leadership and challenge on audit and governance issues and take appropriate action where necessary. Importantly, clarity of roles and responsibilities are essential to ensure that all governance areas are effectively challenged whilst duplication across committees is avoided.
- 37 We understand that the Council may wish to receive help in preparing members for this change. We can provide support in this area by working with officers and members to assess arrangements in this area. In particular, we could hold interactive workshops to identify specific areas for improvement and share examples of good practice.

Other information

Outputs from the audit and inspection plan

- 38 The expected outputs from our planned audit and inspection work are listed in Appendix 3.

The team

Table 4

Name	Title
Melanie Watson	Relationship Manager
Brian Bethell	Appointed Auditor
Peter Barber	Audit Manager
Bob Baber	Local Performance Lead
Paul Benfield	Audit Team Leader

- 39 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.
- 40 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.

Future audit plans

- 41 As part of our planning process, we have taken the opportunity to look at potential issues for future years' programmes, including the scheduling of your corporate assessment. Key areas identified include:
- the effective implementation of the new revenues and benefits system and ensuring performance is improved. Specifically ensuring that backlogs in processing are reduced and local taxation arrears and collection rates are improved;
 - the introduction of effective asset management arrangements as highlighted in our recent use of resources work. Specifically ensuring that arrangements enable effective management of your assets and that there is transparency over how your assets and capital programme support the achievement of your aims and priorities;
 - ensuring your leisure provision is meeting the needs of your community. Specifically the need for measures and targets to demonstrate progress in providing leisure opportunities for all; and
 - improving your private sector housing provision in line with your priorities.
- 42 We will discuss these in more detail as the audit year progresses.

Appendix 1 - Audit and inspection fee

Table 5

Fee estimate	Plan 2006/07	Plan 2005/06
Accounts	63,177	53,665
Use of resources	34,048	34,739
Total audit fee	97,225	88,404
Inspection	11,394	4,927
Total audit and inspection fee	108,619	93,331
Certification of claims and returns	27,880	24,080
Voluntary improvement work	0	0

- 1 The total audit fee compared to the indicative fee banding equates to 3 per cent above 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:
 - any work required in relation to the Whole of Government Accounts (discussed in paragraph 32);
 - any specific work required for CPA in 2006/07;
 - the National Fraud Initiative work undertaken every 2 years across the public sector; and
 - assurances from the auditor of the Wiltshire Pension Fund in respect of FRS17 disclosures.

Assumptions

- 4 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;
 - officers will provide requested information within agreed timescales;
 - officers will provide prompt responses to draft reports; and
 - your Performance Indicators will be adequately prepared and reviewed.
- 5 The key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) issued in June 2005 will be updated in Spring 2006 to reflect the lessons learned from the first year's experiences of applying the KLOEs, following a post implementation review of the assessment.
- 6 Where these requirements are not met or our assumptions change, 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 requirement, professional auditing standards or legislation which results in additional work.

Specific actions North Wiltshire District Council could take to reduce its audit fees

- 8 The Audit Commission requires its auditors to inform a council of specific actions it could take to reduce its audit fees. We have identified the following action North Wiltshire District Council could take:
- Internal audit could as part of their annual systems based work fully document individual financial information systems to an agree standard thus allowing us to place full reliance on this work.

Process for agreeing any changes in audit fees

- 9 If we need to amend the audit or inspection fees during the course of this plan we will firstly discuss this with the Chief Executive. We will then prepare a report outlining the reasons why the fee needs to change for discussion with the Executive.

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

- 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 & 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 ensuring compliance with the general duty of best value

- 7 The body has put in place arrangements to manage and improve value for money.

Arrangements for managing its financial and other resources, including arrangements to safeguard the financial standing of the audited body

- 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.

Arrangements for ensuring that the audited body’s affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of conduct, and to prevent and detect fraud & 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 Audit Committee.

Table 6

Planned output	Start date	Draft due date	Key contact
Audit and Inspection Plan	February 2006	March 2006	Peter Barber
Interim audit memorandum	November 2006	May 2007	Audit Manager
BVPP opinion and PI audit memorandum	May 2006	September 2006	Peter Barber
Report on financial statements to those charged with governance (ISA 260)	August 2007	September 2007	Audit Manager
Opinion on financial statements	July 2007	September 2007	Brian Bethell
VFM conclusion	April 2007	September 2007	Bob Baber
Final accounts memorandum	July 2007	October 2007	Audit Manager
Customer Focus follow-up	October 2006	January 2007	Performance Lead
Street Scene Inspection	TBA	TBA	Performance Lead
Service and Financial Planning workshops	July 2006	September 2006	Peter Barber
Annual audit and inspection letter (including direction of travel assessment)	October 2007	December 2007	Melanie Watson
Use of Resources Report	September 2006	January 2007	Audit Manager

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 Final Accounts Committee. The auditor reserves the right, however, to communicate directly with the Council 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 Council 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 s 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;

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- 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 and the second in command (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 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 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.