

External Audit Plan

Year ending 31 March 2020

Lancashire County Pension Fund

19 February 2020



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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 planning 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 the Pension Fund or all 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.

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1. Introduction & headlines

Purpose

This document provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Lancashire County Pension Fund ('the Pension Fund') for those charged with governance.

Respective responsibilities

The National Audit Office ('the NAO') has issued a document entitled Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'). The Code summarises where the responsibilities of auditors begin and end and what is expected from the audited body. Our respective responsibilities are also set out in the Terms of Appointment and Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), the body responsible for appointing us as auditor of Lancashire County Pension Fund. We draw your attention to both of these documents on the [PSAA website](#). We draw your attention to both of these documents.

Scope of our audit

The scope of our audit is set in accordance with the Code and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the Pension Fund's financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee).

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee of your responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the Pension Fund to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the conduct of its business, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. We have considered how the Pension Fund is fulfilling these responsibilities.

Our audit approach is based on a thorough understanding of the Pension Fund's business and is risk based.

Significant risks

Those risks requiring special audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood of a material financial statement error have been identified as:

- Revenue recognition – the risk of revenue including fraudulent transactions is rebutted for Lancashire County Pension Fund
- Management override of controls
- Valuation of level 3 investments

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings (ISA 260) Report.

Materiality

We have determined materiality at the planning stage of our audit to be £87 million (PY £84.101 million) for the Pension Fund, which equates to 1% of your prior year net assets for the year. We are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. Clearly trivial has been set at £4.35 million (PY £4.205 million).

Audit logistics

Our interim visit will take place in March and our final visit is planned to take place in June and July. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan and our Audit Findings Report.

Our fee for the audit will be £31,310 (PY: £27,810) for the Pension Fund, subject to the Pension Fund meeting our requirements set out on page 10.

Independence

We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

2. Key matters impacting our audit

Factors

The wider picture and political uncertainty

- Local Government funding continues to be stretched with increasing cost pressures.
- The market value of LGPS funds at end of March 2019 was £287.2 billion (an increase of £16.3 billion or 6.0%) but for the first time, the LGPS in England & Wales is now cashflow negative, with benefit payments rising to £10.4bn while contributions fell to £9.3bn. There are now over 18,000 employers. Local authorities represent around 18.3% of these but have 74% of the members.
- In January 2020 the UK government and the EU ratified the Withdrawal Agreement and the UK's membership of the EU formally ceased on 31 January. The existence of a 'transition period' to 31 December 2020 means that there will be little practical change for the Pension Fund until at least 2021. However, the nature of the future relationship between the UK and the EU is still to be determined and considerable uncertainty persists.

Governance

- The Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) has published the *Good Governance – Phase II Report*. Proposals include having a single named officer responsible for the delivery of LGPS related activity for a fund, an enhanced annual governance compliance statement and establishing a set of key performance indicators.
- SAB is also consulting on Responsible Investment guidance to assist and help investment decision makers.
- The Pensions Regulator continues to apply pressure on pension schemes to improve the quality of scheme member data.

Financial reporting and audit-raising the bar

The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge, and to undertake more robust testing as detailed in Appendix 1.

Pooling

For Lancashire County Pension Fund this process began in 2016/17 with the Local Pensions Partnership (LPP) becoming fully operational in April 2017. Lancashire County Council and London Pensions Fund Authority are joint partners in LPP.

During 2019/20 more investments have been pooled with Local Pensions Partnership Investments Ltd (LPPI). The majority of the direct property portfolio transitioned to the LPPI Real Estate fund on 1 October 2019.

Our response

- We will review management's post balance sheet assessment updated to the date of the audit opinion.

- We will consider the Pension Fund's responses to the SAB initiatives and whether they impact upon our risk assessment.
- We will consider the impact of any data issues raised as part of our 2019/20 audit.

- As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and financial reporting. Our proposed work and fee, as set further in our Audit Plan, and is in the process of being agreed with management and is subject to PSAA agreement.

- Whilst we do not consider the transfer of assets to the pool as a significant risk we will tailor our approach to gain assurance in respect of the completeness and accuracy of the transactions.
- We will review the governance processes in place at Lancashire County Pension Fund and Lancashire County Council that gives assurance over the activities of LPP and LPPI.

3. Significant risks identified

Significant risks are defined by ISAs (UK) as risks that, in the judgement of the auditor, require special audit consideration. In identifying risks, audit teams consider the nature of the risk, the potential magnitude of misstatement, and its likelihood. Significant risks are those risks that have a higher risk of material misstatement.

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Revenue recognition – the risk of revenue including fraudulent transactions	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue.</p> <p>This presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue recognition.</p> <p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA240 and the nature of the revenue streams at the Fund, we have determined that the risk of fraud arising from revenue recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is little incentive to manipulate revenue recognition • opportunities to manipulate revenue recognition are very limited • the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Lancashire County Council, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable <p>Therefore we do not consider this to be a significant risk for Lancashire County Pension Fund.</p>	<p>The risk of revenue including fraudulent transactions is rebutted for Lancashire County Pension Fund.</p>
Management over-ride of controls	<p>Under ISA (UK) 240 there is a presumed risk that the risk of management over-ride of controls is present in all entities. The auditing standards do not allow this presumption to be rebutted by the auditor.</p> <p>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular journals, management estimates and transactions outside the course of business as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the design effectiveness of management controls over journals • analyse the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals • test unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration • gain an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence, and • evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.

3. Significant risks identified

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Valuation of Level 3 investments	<p>The Fund revalues its investments on an annual basis to ensure that the carrying value is not materially different from the fair value at the financial statements date.</p> <p>By their nature Level 3 investment valuations lack observable inputs. These valuations therefore represent a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>Under ISA 315 significant risks often relate to significant non-routine transactions and judgemental matters. Level 3 investments by their very nature require a significant degree of judgement to reach an appropriate valuation at year end.</p> <p>Management utilise the services of investment managers and/or custodians as valuation experts to estimate the fair value as at 31 March 2020.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of Level 3 investments as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement and a key audit matter.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate management's processes for valuing Level 3 investments • review the nature and basis of estimated values and consider what assurance management has over the year end valuations provided for these types of investments; to ensure that the requirements of the Code are met • for a sample of investments, test the valuation by obtaining and reviewing the audited accounts, (where available) at the latest date for individual investments and agreeing these to the fund manager reports at that date. Reconcile those values to the values at 31 March 2020 with reference to known movements in the intervening period • where available review investment manager service auditor report on design effectiveness of internal controls, and • in the absence of available audited accounts, we will evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert.

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings Report in July 2020.

5. Other matters

Other work

The Pension Fund is administered by Lancashire County Council (the 'Council'), and the Pension Fund's accounts form part of the Council's financial statements.

Therefore, as well as our general responsibilities under the Code of Practice a number of other audit responsibilities also follow in respect of the Pension Fund, such as:

- We read any other information published alongside the Council's financial statements to check that it is consistent with the Pension Fund financial statements on which we give an opinion and is consistent with our knowledge of the Authority.
- We consider our other duties under legislation and the Code, as and when required, including:
 - Giving electors the opportunity to raise questions about your 2018/19 financial statements, consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the 2018/19 financial statements;
 - Issue of a report in the public interest or written recommendations to the Fund under section 24 of the Act, copied to the Secretary of State;
 - Application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 or for a judicial review under Section 31 of the Act; or
 - Issuing an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Act.
- We carry out work to satisfy ourselves on the consistency of the pension fund financial statements included in the pension fund annual report with the audited Fund accounts.

Other material balances and transactions

Under International Standards on Auditing, "irrespective of the assessed risks of material misstatement, the auditor shall design and perform substantive procedures for each material class of transactions, account balance and disclosure". All other material balances and transaction streams will therefore be audited. However, the procedures will not be as extensive as the procedures adopted for the risks identified in this report.

Going concern

As auditors, we are required to "obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence about the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation and presentation of the financial statements and to conclude whether there is a material uncertainty about the Pension Fund's ability to continue as a going concern" (ISA (UK) 570).

Currently, the accounts of the Pension Fund are expected to be prepared on a going concern basis. We will review management's assessment of the going concern assumption and any material uncertainties, and evaluate the disclosures in the financial statements.

6. Materiality

The concept of materiality

The concept of materiality is fundamental to the preparation of the financial statements and the audit process and applies not only to the monetary misstatements but also to disclosure requirements and adherence to acceptable accounting practice and applicable law. Misstatements, including omissions, are considered to be material if they, individually or in the aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

Materiality for planning purposes

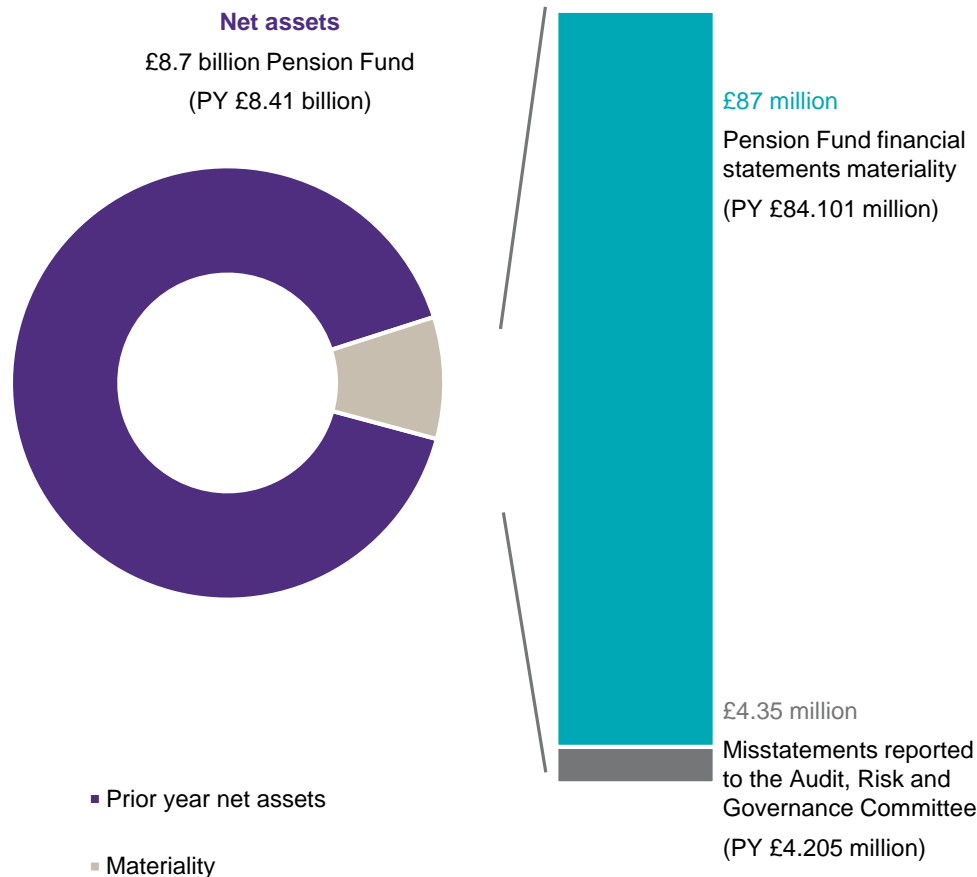
We have determined financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the net assets of the Pension Fund for the financial year. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. Materiality at the planning stage of our audit is £87 million (PY £84.101 million) for the Pension Fund, which equates to 1% of your net assets for the year.

We reconsider planning materiality if, during the course of our audit engagement, we become aware of facts and circumstances that would have caused us to make a different determination of planning materiality.

Matters we will report to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our opinion on the financial statements as a whole, we nevertheless report to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee any unadjusted misstatements of lesser amounts to the extent that these are identified by our audit work. Under ISA 260 (UK) 'Communication with those charged with governance', we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA 260 (UK) defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. In the context of the Pension Fund, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £4.35 million (PY £4.205 million).

If management have corrected material misstatements identified during the course of the audit, we will consider whether those corrections should be communicated to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee to assist it in fulfilling its governance responsibilities.



7. Audit logistics & team



**Robin Baker, Director
Engagement Lead**

Robin leads our relationship with you and takes overall responsibility for the delivery of a high quality audit, meeting the highest professional standards.



**Angela Pieri, Senior Manager
Engagement Manager**

Angela plans, manages and leads the delivery of the audit, is your key point of contact for your Finance team and is your the first point of contact for discussing any issues.

Olalekan Ayilara, Audit Incharge

Olalekan's role is to assist in planning, managing and delivering the audit fieldwork, ensuring the audit is delivered effectively, efficiently and supervises and co-ordinates the on-site audit team.

Client responsibilities

Where clients do not deliver to the timetable agreed, we need to ensure that this does not impact on audit quality or absorb a disproportionate amount of time, thereby disadvantaging other clients. Where the elapsed time to complete an audit exceeds that agreed due to a client not meeting its obligations we will not be able to maintain a team on site. Similarly, where additional resources are needed to complete the audit due to a client not meeting their obligations we are not able to guarantee the delivery of the audit to the agreed timescales. In addition, delayed audits will incur additional audit fees.

Our requirements

To minimise the risk of a delayed audit, you need to ensure that you:

- produce draft financial statements of good quality by the deadline you have agreed with us, including all notes, the narrative report and the Annual Governance Statement
- ensure that good quality working papers are available at the start of the audit, in accordance with the working paper requirements schedule that we have shared with you
- ensure that the agreed data reports are available to us at the start of the audit and are reconciled to the values in the accounts, in order to facilitate our selection of samples
- ensure that all appropriate staff are available on site throughout (or as otherwise agreed) the planned period of the audit, and
- respond promptly and adequately to audit queries.

8. Audit fees

Planned audit fees 2019/20

Across all sectors and firms, the FRC has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge and to undertake additional and more robust testing. Within the public sector, where the FRC has recently assumed responsibility for the inspection of local government audit, the regulator requires that all audits achieve a 2A (few improvements needed) rating.

Our work across the sector in 2018/19 has highlighted areas where local government pension fund financial reporting, in particular, scrutiny of the valuation of hard to value investments needs to be improved. Combined with the FRC requirement that 100% of audits achieve a 2A rating this means that additional audit work is required. We have set out below the expected impact on our audit fee. The table overleaf provides more details about the areas where we will be undertaking further testing.

As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and local government financial reporting. Our proposed work and fee at the planning stage, as set out below and with further analysis overleaf, and is currently being discussed with management and is subject to PSAA agreement.

	Actual Fee 2017/18	Actual Fee 2018/19	Proposed fee 2019/20
Pension Fund Audit	£34,169	£27,810	£31,310
Total audit fees (excluding VAT)	£34,169	£27,810	£31,310

Assumptions:

In setting the above fees, we have assumed that the Pension Fund will:

- prepare a good quality set of accounts, supported by comprehensive and well-presented working papers which are ready at the start of the audit
- provide appropriate analysis, support and evidence to support all critical judgements and significant judgements made during the course of preparing the financial statements
- provide early notice of proposed complex or unusual transactions which could have a material impact on the financial statements.

Relevant professional standards:

In preparing our fee estimate, we have had regard to all relevant professional standards, including paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the FRC's [Ethical Standard](#) which stipulate that the Engagement Lead (Key Audit Partner) must set a fee sufficient to enable the resourcing of the audit with staff of appropriate skills, time and abilities to deliver an audit to the required professional standard.

8. Audit fee variations – Further analysis

Planned audit fees

The table below shows the planned variations to the original scale (contracted) fee for 2019/20 based on our best estimate at the audit planning stage. Further issues identified during the course of the audit may incur additional fees.

Audit area	£	Rationale for fee variation
Scale/ original contract fee	26,310	
Raising the bar	1,500	The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has highlighted that the quality of work by all audit firms needs to improve across local audit. This will require additional supervision and leadership, as well as additional challenge and scepticism in areas such as journals, estimates, financial resilience and information provided by the entity.
Valuation of level 3 investments	1,250	The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has highlighted that the quality of work by all audit firms in respect of valuations of hard to value investments needs to improve across the sector. Accordingly, we plan to enhance the scope and coverage of our work to ensure an adequate level of audit scrutiny and challenge over the assumptions and evidence that underpin the valuations of level 3 investments this year to reflect the expectations of the FRC and ensure we issue a safe audit opinion.
Directly held property	1,250	We have increased the volume and scope of our audit work to ensure an adequate level of audit scrutiny and challenge over the assumptions that underpin directly held property valuations.
New standards/IFRS 16	1,000	We are required to review any new and future accounting standards and in 2019/20 our audit work will require a review of the disclosures within the financial statements regarding the future implementation of new accounting standards.
Revised scale fee (to be approved by PSAA)	31,310	

9. Independence & non-audit services

Auditor independence

Ethical Standards and ISA (UK) 260 require us to give you timely disclosure of all significant facts and matters that may bear upon the integrity, objectivity and independence of the firm or covered persons relating to our independence. We encourage you to contact us to discuss these or any other independence issues with us. We will also discuss with you if we make additional significant judgements surrounding independence matters.

We confirm that there are no significant facts or matters that impact on our independence as auditors that we are required or wish to draw to your attention. We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements. Further, we have complied with the requirements of the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 01 issued in December 2017 (and PSAA's Terms of Appointment) which set out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

Other services provided by Grant Thornton

For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Pension Fund. The following other services were identified.

Service	£	Threats	Safeguards
Audit related:			
Provision of IAS 19 Assurances to Scheme Employer auditors	9,000 Expected to be £500 per letter	Self-Interest (because this is a recurring fee)	The level of this recurring fee taken on its own is not considered a significant threat to independence as the fee for this work is £9,000 in comparison to the total fee for the audit of £31,310 and in particular relative to Grant Thornton UK LLP's turnover overall. Further, it is a fixed fee and there is no contingent element to it. These factors all mitigate the perceived self-interest threat to an acceptable level.

The amounts detailed are fees agreed to-date for audit related and non-audit services to be undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP in the current financial year. All services have been approved by the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee. Any changes and full details of all fees charged for audit related and non-audit related services by Grant Thornton UK LLP and by Grant Thornton International Limited network member Firms will be included in our Audit Findings report at the conclusion of the audit.

None of the services provided are subject to contingent fees. The firm is committed to improving our audit quality – please see our transparency report - <https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/globalassets/1.-member-firms/united-kingdom/pdf/annual-reports/interim-transparency-report-2019.pdf>

9. Independence & non-audit services

Services provided by Grant Thornton UK LLP to Local Pensions Partnership

For transparency, we disclose to you that the commercial arm of our firm undertakes the audit of the Local Pensions Partnership, of which Lancashire County Council is one of the two founding members, each holding 50%. Details of the work performed, and the fees charged, are shown below for transparency purposes. However we are satisfied that this work has no impact on our independence for the audit of Lancashire County Pension Fund for the reasons mentioned below.

Service	£	Threats	Safeguards
Audit related:			
Local Pensions Partnership Authorised Contractual Scheme and investment funds structures audit	TBC	Self Review	This is not considered a significant threat as the audit of Lancashire County Pension Fund and Lancashire County Council is undertaken by a completely separate team from the Public Sector arm of the Firm, as opposed to the audit team that delivers the LPP audits. There are different Engagement Leads in place for the audits, and where we seek to place reliance on the work performed on the LPP audit, this is treated as an auditor's expert for the purposes of our work. The LPP audit is undertaken in accordance relevant auditing standards and guidance.

Appendices

A. Audit Quality – national context

Appendix A: Audit Quality – national context

What has the FRC said about Audit Quality?

The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) publishes an annual Quality Inspection of our firm, alongside our competitors. The Annual Quality Review (AQR) monitors the quality of UK Public Interest Entity audits to promote continuous improvement in audit quality.

All of the major audit firms are subject to an annual review process in which the FRC inspects a small sample of audits performed from each of the firms to see if they fully conform to required standards.

The most recent report, published in July 2019, shows that the results of commercial audits taken across all the firms have worsened this year. The FRC has identified the need for auditors to:

- improve the extent and rigour of challenge of management in areas of judgement
- improve the consistency of audit teams' application of professional scepticism
- strengthen the effectiveness of the audit of revenue
- improve the audit of going concern
- improve the audit of the completeness and evaluation of prior year adjustments.

The FRC has also set all firms the target of achieving a grading of '2a' (limited improvements required) or better on all FTSE 350 audits. We have set ourselves the same target for public sector audits from 2019/20.

Other sector wide reviews

Alongside the FRC, other key stakeholders including the Department for Business, energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have expressed concern about the quality of audit work and the need for improvement. A number of key reviews into the profession have been undertaken or are in progress. These include the review by Sir John Kingman of the Financial Reporting Council (Dec 2018), the review by the Competition and Markets Pension Fund of competition within the audit market, the ongoing review by Sir Donald Brydon of external audit, and specifically for public services, the Review by Sir Tony Redmond of local Pension Fund financial reporting and external audit. As a firm, we are contributing to all these reviews and keen to be at the forefront of developments and improvements in public audit.

What are we doing to address FRC findings?

In response to the FRC's findings, the firm is responding vigorously and with purpose. As part of our Audit Investment Programme (AIP), we are establishing a new Quality Board, commissioning an independent review of our audit function, and strengthening our senior leadership at the highest levels of the firm, for example through the appointment of Fiona Baldwin as Head of Audit. We are confident these investments will make a real difference.

We have also undertaken a root cause analysis and put in place processes to address the issues raised by the FRC. We have already implemented new training material that will reinforce the need for our engagement teams to challenge management and demonstrate how they have applied professional scepticism as part of the audit. **What will be different in this audit?**

We will continue working with you to seek to deliver the audit to the agreed timetable whilst improving our audit quality. In achieving this you may see, for example, an increased expectation for management to develop properly articulated papers for any new accounting standard, or unusual or complex transactions. In addition, you should expect engagement teams to exercise even greater challenge management in areas that are complex, significant or highly judgmental which may be the case for accounting estimates, going concern, related parties and similar areas. As a result you may find the audit process even more challenging than previous audits. These changes will give the audit committee and management greater confidence that we have delivered a high quality audit and that the financial statements are not materially misstated. Even greater challenge of management will also enable us to provide greater insights into the quality of your finance function and internal control environment and provide those charged with governance confidence that a material misstatement due to fraud will have been detected.

We will still plan for a smooth audit and will aim for the work to be completed to the timetable agreed. However, there may be instances where we may require additional time for both the audit work to be completed to the standard required and to ensure management have appropriate time to consider any matters raised. This may require us to agree with you a delay in signing the announcement and financial statements. To minimise this risk, we will keep you informed of progress and risks to the timetable as the audit progresses.

We are absolutely committed to delivering audit of the highest quality and we would be happy to provide further detail about our improvement plans should you require it.



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