

Stockton-on-Tees Borough
Council

Audit Strategy Memorandum
Year ended 31 March 2013

January 2013

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Our reports are prepared in the context of the Audit Commission's 'Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies'. Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to members or officers are prepared for the sole use of the Authority and we take no responsibility to any member or officer in their individual capacity or to any third party.

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1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out our audit plan in respect of the external audit of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council for the year ending 31 March 2013. This document forms the basis for discussion at the Audit Committee meeting on 25 February 2013.

The Plan sets out our proposed audit approach and is prepared to assist you in fulfilling your governance responsibilities. The responsibilities of those charged with governance are defined as to oversee the strategic direction of the entity and obligations related to the accountability of the entity, including overseeing the financial reporting process.

Our communication with you is important in:

- reaching a mutual understanding of the scope of the audit and the responsibilities of the auditor and those charged with governance;
- sharing information to assist both the auditor and those charged with governance to fulfil their respective responsibilities;
- providing to those charged with governance constructive observations arising from the audit process; and
- ensuring as part of the two-way communication process that we, as external auditors, gain an understanding of the attitude and views of those charged with governance of the internal and external operational, financial, compliance and other risks facing the Council which might affect the audit, including the likelihood of those risks materialising and how they are monitored and managed.

2. Scope of engagement

We are appointed to perform the external audit of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council for the year to 31 March 2013. The scope of our engagement is laid out in the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice.

3. Respective responsibilities

The Audit Commission has issued a copy of its *Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies* to you. The Statement summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body begin and end and we undertake our audit work to meet these responsibilities.

We comply with the statutory requirements governing audit work, in particular the:

- Audit Commission Act 1998; and
- Code of Audit Practice for Local Government bodies.

We, are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements and reaching a conclusion on the arrangements you have put in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of your resources (the Value for Money conclusion).

We are also required to report on the consistency of your Whole Government Accounts L-Pack with the audited financial statements.

Our audit does not relieve management or the Audit Committee, as those charged with governance, of their responsibilities.

4. Independence

We have policies and procedures in place which are designed to ensure that we carry out our work with integrity, objectivity and independence. If at any time you have concerns or questions about our integrity, objectivity or independence please discuss these with the engagement lead.

We are required by the Audit and Assurance Council (previously the Auditing Practices Board – APB), which has issued ethical standards for auditors, to confirm we have complied with relevant ethical standards requirements regarding independence. This is to ensure our objectivity and independence is maintained.

Based on the information provided by you and our own internal procedures to safeguard our independence as auditors, we confirm that in our professional judgement there are no relationships between us and any of our related or subsidiary entities and you and your related entities creating any unacceptable threats to our independence within the regulatory or professional requirements governing us as your auditors.

5. Our audit approach

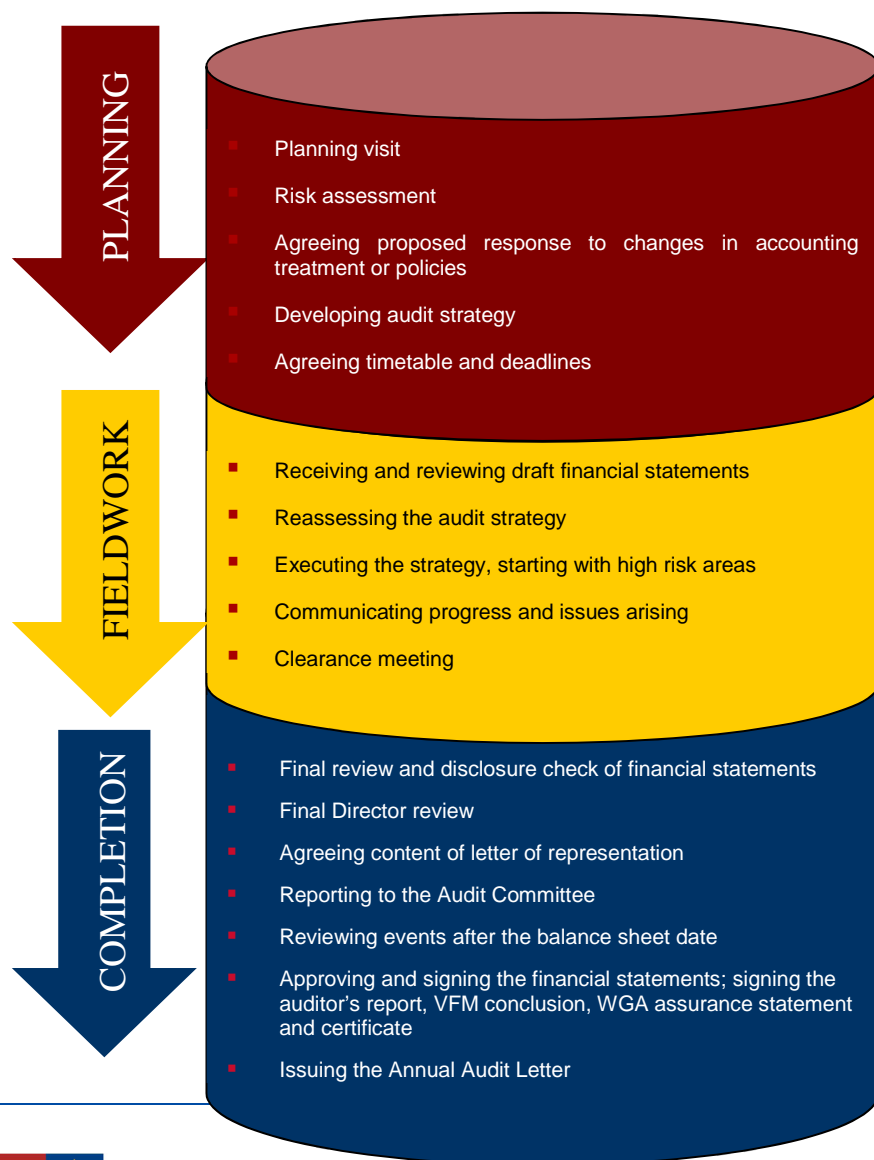
Our audit approach is designed to provide you with an audit that complies with all professional requirements.

Our audit of the financial statements will be conducted in accordance with International Standards of Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Audit and Assurance Council (previously the APB). Our work is focussed on those aspects of your business which we consider to have a higher risk of material misstatement such as judgement and estimation, application of new accounting standards, changes of accounting policy, changes to operations or areas which have been found to contain material errors in the past. We raise and discuss these with you on a regular basis, not just at the time of the audit fieldwork. We shall expect to obtain appropriate evidence as we consider sufficient to enable us to draw reasonable conclusions therefrom and will use a combination of controls and substantive testing procedures as appropriate.

We plan our audit to have a reasonable expectation of detecting fraud where the potential effects would be material to the financial statements. We will consider the control procedures in place to prevent and detect fraud, whether there are any significant risks of fraud that may have a material impact on the financial statements and adapt our procedures accordingly. We also plan our audit to negate the risk of management over-riding controls by testing year-end journal entries and the major judgements and estimates that management make.

Our audit will be planned and performed so as to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free of material misstatement and give a true and fair view.

We outline the key stages of the audit are set out on the following page:



6. Reliance on internal audit

Where possible we will seek to utilise the work performed by internal audit to modify the nature, extent and timing of our audit procedures. We will meet with internal audit to discuss the progress and findings of their work prior to the commencement of our controls evaluation procedures.

Where we intend rely on the work on internal audit, we will evaluate the work performed by your internal audit team and perform our own audit procedures to determine its adequacy for our audit.

7. Reliance on experts

We plan to place reliance on the following work of experts.

Area	Expert engaged by:	
	You	Ourselves
Asset valuation	Internal valuer	At this stage we plan to rely on your internal valuer, but if we are unable to, we will use our own expert, Gerald Eve.
Pension Fund liability and reserve, and associated disclosures	Barnett Waddingham (engaged by Teesside Pension Fund)	Central assurance provided by Audit Commission, supplemented by in-house actuarial specialist

8. Significant risks and key judgement areas

We met with senior management during January 2013 as part of the audit planning process. Set out below are the audit risks and the areas of management judgement to which we will pay particular attention in order to reduce the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements.

Significant audit risks	How we will address this risk
<p>Management override</p> <p>The International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) presume that management at various levels within an organisation are in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of their ability to manipulate accounting records and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, it is a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a mandatory significant risk on all audits.</p> <p>However, we have not identified any specific additional risks of management override at this Council, and therefore only need to perform the audit procedures required by the ISAs.</p>	<p>We will record the financial reporting process and controls over journal entries and other adjustments and perform a walkthrough to evaluate the design of the controls over journals and other adjustments and determine whether these have been implemented.</p> <p>We will make enquiries of finance staff involved in the financial reporting process about inappropriate or unusual activity relating to the processing of journal entries and other adjustments.</p> <p>We will test the appropriateness of a selection of journals recorded in the general ledger throughout the year and other adjustments made in preparation of the financial statements.</p> <p>We will document evidence to support whether the judgements and decisions made by management about accounting estimates appear reasonable, including considering whether prior year estimates are supported by events.</p> <p>If there have been significant transactions outside the normal course of business, we will ensure we have sufficient evidence to support these transactions.</p>

<p>Pension reserve and liability, and related disclosures</p> <p>The Council is required to include information in its financial statements based on information provided by the actuary that are calculated using assumptions and estimates. The valuation of pension fund assets and liabilities may be materially misstated as relatively small changes to the assumptions used can result in material changes to the estimates.</p>	<p>We will review your controls over establishing estimates, including arrangements for liaising with the Pension Fund and controls over information provided to the actuary.</p> <p>We will consider your procedures for reviewing the reasonableness of the assumptions used by the actuary.</p> <p>We will liaise with the Pension Fund auditor as set out in the Audit Commission’s protocol.</p>
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Areas of management judgement	How we will address this judgement
Valuations including impairment and depreciation of non-current assets	<p>We will review the valuer’s report on asset valuations and asset lives, and their work programme.</p> <p>We will substantively test the material entries in the financial statements for existence, valuation and rights and obligations.</p>
Reserves and provisions	We will review and test material reserves and provisions and movements in and out.
Debtor and creditor manual accruals	We will evaluate the design and implementation of controls over year-end accruals and test the appropriateness of your estimation of assets and liabilities.

9. Value for money

We are required to reach a conclusion on your arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of your resources.

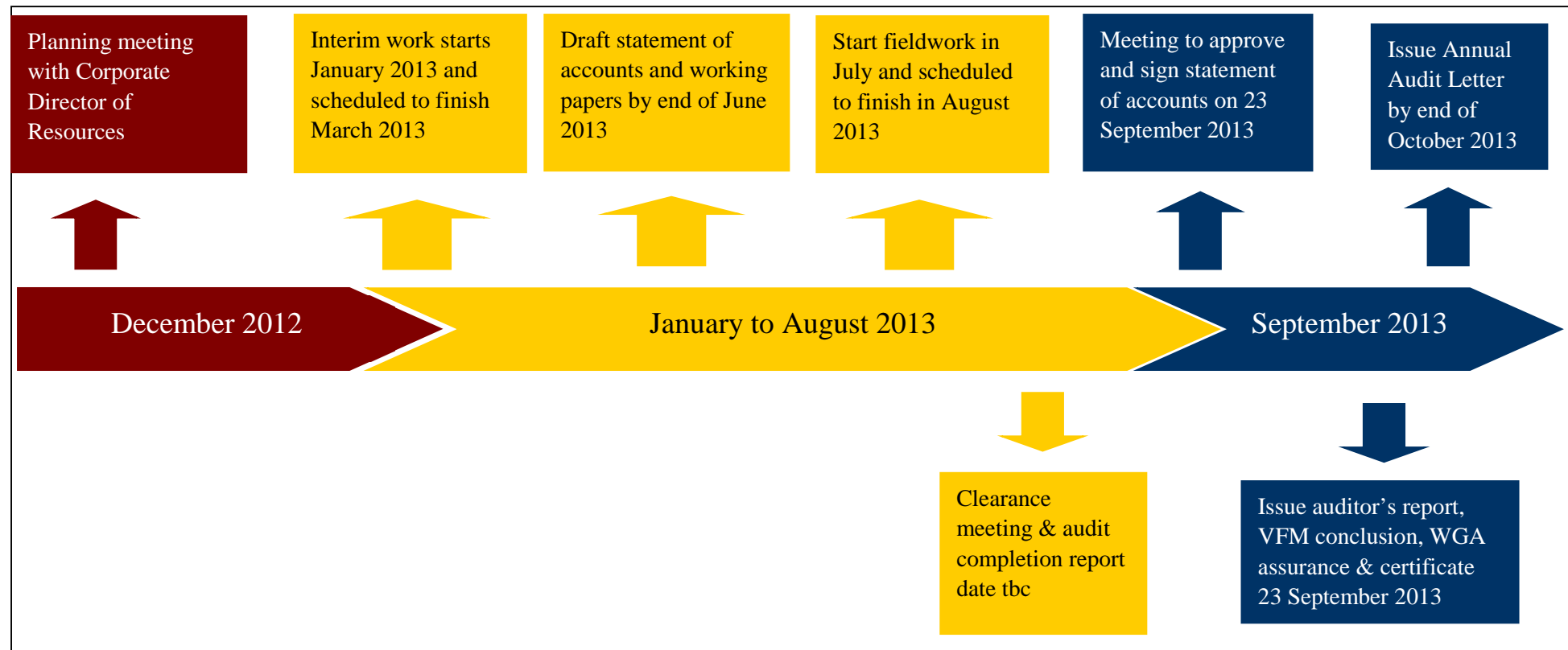
Our conclusion on your arrangements is based on two criteria, specified by the Audit Commission:

- securing financial resilience – focusing on whether you are managing your financial risks to secure a stable financial position for the foreseeable future; and
- challenging how you secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness – focusing on whether you are prioritising your resources within tighter budgets and the need to improve productivity and efficiency.

We have considered the risks that are relevant to our value for money conclusion and have not identified any significant risks that need to be addressed specifically through our work. We will focus our work on reviewing the robustness of the Council's update of its Medium-Term Financial Strategy which will set out how it plans to make the savings required to ensure it has a balanced budget.

10. Audit timeline

The following table sets out the timing of the key phases of our audit work. We will communicate with management throughout the audit process to facilitate a two way process of updates and identifying issues. We will continue to communicate outside of these dates to ensure that all parties understand developments and issues as they arise and to help in providing timely and appropriate solutions.



11. Audit fees

As communicated to you in our letter dated 19 December 2012, we have kept the audit fee in line with the Audit Commission scale fee of £167,940. Our audit fees are outlined below:

Entity	2013 fees	2012 fees
Audit	£167,940	£279,900
Certification work	£32,250	£34,515

12. Proposed team

We know that you value a team who understands the environment you operate in and understands your systems, controls and has a good working relationship with your staff and internal auditors. Your team meets all these criteria.

Name and contact	Role	Experience and responsibilities
Mark Kirkham Tel: Email: mark.kirkham@mazars.co.uk	Engagement Lead	Mark has over twenty years of external auditing experience of local government and has worked with you since 2011. He is responsible for the overall delivery of the audit, including the quality of audit reports. Mark will sign the auditor's report and liaise with the Chief Executive.
Rochelle Tribe Tel: 07974 179283 Email: rochelle.tribe@mazars.co.uk	Engagement Manager	Rochelle has over ten years' experience of local government audit. She will manage and coordinate the different parts of the audit and be the key point of contact for the Director of Finance.
Mandy Stevenson Email: mandy.stevenson@mazars.co.uk	Team Leader	Mandy has over twenty years' post qualification experience and will lead the onsite delivery of the audit of the financial statements. She will be the main point of contact for the Chief Accountant.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Independence

Independence is an ongoing consideration and as such we monitor it throughout the audit process. The principal types of threats to the auditor's objectivity and independence are:

- self-interest threat - exists when the auditor has financial or other interests which might cause the auditor to be reluctant to take actions that would be adverse to the interests of the audit firm or any individual in a position to influence the conduct or outcome of the audit;
- self-review threat - exists when the results of a non-audit service performed by the engagement team or by others within the audit firm are reflected in the amounts included or disclosed in the financial statements;
- management threat - exists when the audit firm undertakes work that involves making judgments and taking decisions that are properly the responsibility of management;
- advocacy threat - exists when the audit firm undertakes work that involves acting as an advocate for an audited entity and supporting a position taken by management in an adversarial context;
- familiarity (or trust) threat – exists when the auditors are predisposed to accept or are insufficiently questioning of the client's point of view (for example, where they develop close personal relationships with client personnel through long association with the client); and
- intimidation threat – exists when the auditor's conduct is influenced by fear or threats (for example, when they encounter an aggressive and dominating individual).

Prior to the provision of any non-audit services the engagement partner will undertake appropriate procedures to consider and fully assess the impact that providing the service may have on our auditor independence.

Appendix 2 – Materiality

'Materiality' is an expression of the relative significance or importance of a particular matter in the context of financial statements as a whole.

Misstatements in financial statements are considered to be material if they, individually or in aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

Judgements on materiality are made in light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by the size and nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both. Judgements about materiality are based on consideration of the common financial information needs of users as a group and not on specific individual users.

The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our perception of the financial information needs of the users of the financial statements. It is reasonable for us to assume that users:

- have a reasonable knowledge of business, economic activities and accounts;
- have a willingness to study the information in the financial statements with reasonable diligence;
- understand that financial statements are prepared, presented and audited to levels of materiality;
- recognise the uncertainties inherent in the measurement of amounts based on the use of estimates, judgement and the consideration of future events; and
- will make reasonable economic decisions on the basis of the information in the financial statements.

We will consider materiality whilst planning and performing our audit.

Whilst planning, we will make judgements about the size of misstatements which we will consider to be material and which will provide a basis for determining the nature, timing and extent of risk assessment procedures, identifying and assessing the risk of material misstatement and determining the nature, timing and extent of further audit procedures.

The materiality determined at the planning stage does not necessarily establish an amount below which uncorrected misstatements, either individually or in aggregate, will be considered as immaterial.

We will revise materiality for the financial statements as our audit progresses should we become aware of information that would have caused us to determine a different amount had we been aware of that information at the planning stage.

We will include in our Audit Completion Report all unadjusted errors we have identified above those which are clearly trivial.

Appendix 3 – Required communication

ISA 260 ‘Communication With Those Charged With Governance’ and ISA 265 ‘Communicating Deficiencies In Internal Control To Those Charged With Governance And Management’ require the auditor to communicate a number of matters with those charged with governance. These matters are set out below along with our proposed approach. You are required to ensure that all points listed below are communicated to those charged with governance.

Required communication	When and how we will communicate
<p>Respective responsibilities of auditor and those charged with governance.</p> <p>Our responsibility for performing the audit in accordance with ISAs (UK and Ireland), which is directed towards forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements.</p> <p>The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities.</p>	<p>Section 3 of this report and the Audit Commission’s Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies.</p>
<p>Communication of the planned scope and timing of the audit.</p> <p>Matters communicated include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant audit risks and how we will address them; ▪ Our approach to internal control relevant to the audit; ▪ The application of the concept of materiality in the context of an audit; ▪ Our use of the work of internal audit; ▪ Your approach to internal control and how you oversee the effectiveness of internal control procedures; 	<p>Included in this document.</p> <p>These matters were discussed at the planning meeting and responses incorporated into this document as appropriate.</p>

Required communication	When and how we will communicate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The attitude, awareness and action of those charged with governance concerning the detection or possibility of fraud; and ▪ Your response to new accounting standards, corporate governance practices and related matters. 	
<p>Our views on significant qualitative aspect of accounting practices including accounting policies, accounting estimates and financial statement disclosures.</p> <p>When applicable, why we consider a significant accounting practice not to be appropriate to the entity.</p>	<p>We will communicate these in our Audit Completion Report, orally as they arise and at the audit committee meeting.</p> <p>Depending on the extent of the issue, either orally at the audit committee, in our Audit Completion Report or immediately we become aware of the issue.</p>
<p>Significant difficulties, if any, encountered during the audit.</p> <p>Significant difficulties encountered during the audit may include such matters as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant delays in management providing required information; ▪ An unnecessarily brief time within which to complete the audit; ▪ Extensive unexpected effort required to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence; ▪ The unavailability of expected information; ▪ Restrictions imposed on the auditor by management; and ▪ Management’s unwillingness to make or extend its assessment of the entity’s ability to continue as a going concern. 	<p>We will communicate these in our Audit Completion Report, orally as they arise and at the audit committee meeting.</p>
<p>Details of significant matters discussed with, or subject to correspondence with management.</p>	<p>We will communicate these in our Audit Completion Report, orally as they arise and at the audit committee meeting.</p>

Required communication	When and how we will communicate
<p>Details of written representations we require for our audit.</p>	<p>We will communicate this in our Audit Completion Report.</p>
<p>Any other matters which we consider to be significant to the oversight of the financial reporting process.</p> <p>Other significant matters arising from the audit that are directly relevant to those charged with governance in overseeing the financial reporting process may include such matters as material misstatements of fact or material inconsistencies in information accompanying the audited financial statements that have been corrected.</p>	<p>As any matters arise which we consider should be communicated to you and within the Audit Completion Report.</p>
<p>Statement that the engagement team and the firm have complied with relevant ethical requirements regarding independence.</p> <p>Written disclosure of relationships which have a bearing on our independence and safeguards we have put in place, details of non audit services provided and written confirmation of our independence.</p>	<p>Section 4 and Appendix 1 of this document and as any new matters arise.</p>
<p>Form, timing and general content of communications.</p>	<p>We will issue our Audit Completion Report which will conclude upon our audit and the issues presented in this document. Should you require us to communicate in a different way please inform us of your preferred method.</p>
<p>Our evaluation of the adequacy of the communication process between ourselves and those charged with governance. This may include observations on appropriateness and timing of action taken by you in response to matters we have raised, the openness of your communication with us, your willingness and capacity to meet with us without management being present, your opportunity to fully</p>	<p>Should we consider it necessary to raise any of these issues, we will consider the most appropriate method and the most appropriate person. The nature of our observation will determine the method and timing of our communication.</p> <p>We may consider that any inadequacy in the communication process is indicative of an unsatisfactory control environment and increase our assessment of audit risk. We will</p>

Required communication	When and how we will communicate
<p>comprehend matters we have raised, the extent to which you probe issues raised and our recommendations, any communications we have had in establishing with you the form, timing and general content of communications, your awareness of how our discussions impact on your governance and management responsibilities and whether your communication with us meets legal and regulatory requirements.</p>	<p>also consider whether we need to reassess our audit strategy. We will discuss with you any additional procedures we consider necessary as a result of these observations.</p> <p>If we consider the communication between you and us to be inadequate and we are unable to agree additional procedures which we consider necessary, we may modify our audit opinion, obtain legal advice, discuss with other third parties as we consider appropriate or may, if permitted under applicable law or regulation, withdraw from the engagement.</p>
<p>Any significant deficiencies in internal control that we have identified during the audit.</p>	<p>We will communicate these to you in our Audit Completion Report. Should it be appropriate, we will discuss significant deficiencies with management as they arise.</p> <p>Our written communication will include a description of the deficiencies with sufficient explanation for you to understand the context of the deficiency and an explanation of the potential effects.</p> <p>We are required to communicate all significant deficiencies to you, irrespective of whether you are already aware of them or have chosen not to take remedial action for cost or other reasons. We will continue to communicate deficiencies previously communicated to you until remedial action has been taken. We will consider whether failure to act, or lack of rational explanation itself represents a significant deficiency.</p>
<p>Other deficiencies in internal control that we have identified during the audit.</p>	<p>We will consider whether other deficiencies should be reported to you, taking into account the likelihood and potential magnitude of misstatements that may arise. We will also determine whether we report these to you orally or in writing.</p>