



Report to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee

# ESSEX PENSION FUND

Audit Planning Report: year ending 31 March 2021

IDEAS | PEOPLE | TRUST



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# WELCOME

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We have pleasure in presenting our Audit Planning Report to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee of Essex County Council (the 'Council') in respect of the Essex Pension Fund. This report forms a key part of our communication strategy with you, a strategy which is designed to promote effective two way communication throughout the audit process with those charged with governance.

It summarises the planned audit strategy for the year ending 31 March 2021 in respect of our audit of the financial statements; comprising materiality, key audit risks and the planned approach to these; together with timetable and the BDO team.

The planned audit strategy has been discussed with Management to ensure that it incorporates developments in the business during the year under review, the results for the year to date and other required scope changes.

This report contains matters which should properly be considered by the Council, as administering authority, as a whole. We expect that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee will refer such matters to the Council, together with any recommendations, as it considers appropriate.

We look forward to discussing this plan with you at the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee meeting on 22 March 2021 and to receiving your input on the scope and approach.

In the meantime if you would like to discuss any aspects in advance of the meeting please contact one of the team.

**David Eagles, Partner**  
For and on behalf of **BDO LLP**, Appointed Auditor

10 March 2021



**David Eagles, Engagement Partner**

t: 01473 320728  
m: 07967 203431  
e: david.eagles@bdo.co.uk



**Barry Pryke, Senior Manager**

t: 01473 320793  
m: 07583 032401  
e: barry.pryke@bdo.co.uk



**Deborah Antoine, Assistant Manager**

This report has been prepared solely for the use of the [Audit Committee] and Those Charged with Governance. In preparing this report we do not accept or assume responsibility for any other purpose or to any other person. For more information on our respective responsibilities please see the appendices.

# SCOPE AND MATERIALITY

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This summary provides an overview of the key audit matters that we believe are important to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in reviewing the planned audit strategy for the Pension Fund for the year ending 31 March 2021.

It is also intended to promote effective communication and discussion and to ensure that the audit strategy appropriately incorporates input from those charged with governance.

### Audit scope

The scope of the audit is determined by the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice that sets out what local auditors are required to do to fulfil their statutory responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. This includes auditing the financial statements and, where appropriate, exercising the auditor's wider reporting powers and duties.

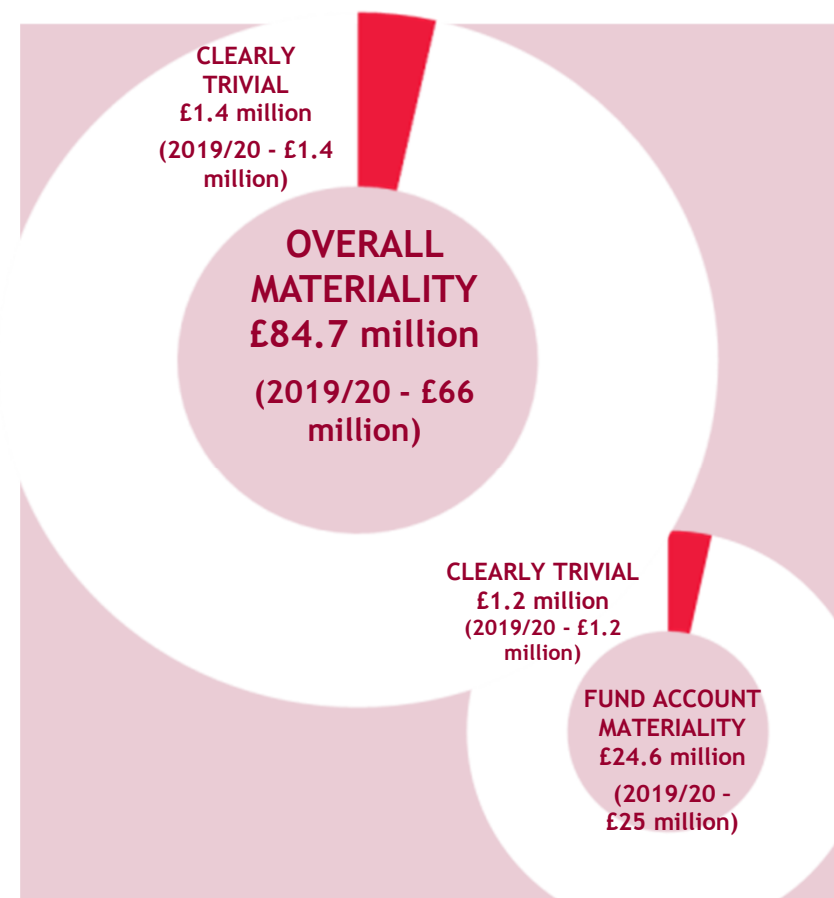
Our approach is designed to ensure we obtain the requisite level of assurance in accordance with applicable laws, appropriate standards and guidance issued by the National Audit Office.

### Materiality

Planning materiality for the Pension Fund financial statements will again be set at 1% of net assets. Specific materiality (at a lower level) may be considered appropriate for certain financial statement areas and we set materiality for the Fund Account at 7.5% of gross expenditure.

At this stage, these figures are based on current estimated net assets (£8.475bn) and Fund expenditure (£328m). This will be revisited when the draft financial statements are received for audit.

Although materiality is the judgement of the engagement lead, the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee is obliged to satisfy themselves that the materiality chosen is appropriate for the scope of the audit.



# AUDIT STRATEGY

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Our audit strategy is predicated on a risk based approach, so that audit work is focused on the areas of the financial statements where the risk of material misstatement is assessed to be higher, or where there is a risk that the organisation has not made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

We have undertaken preliminary planning and risk assessment procedures to derive the risk profile reported in this Audit Planning Report. Further, more detailed discussions on any changes to systems and controls in the year will be held in order to update our understanding of the Pension Fund's activities and to refine our risk assessment relating to the numbers and disclosures in the financial statements. We will continue to update this assessment throughout the audit and report any changes to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

The table on the next page summarises our planned approach to audit risks identified.

There has been no significant change to audit risks identified or their classification as compared to the prior year. All material areas will be subject to a substantive approach.



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Risk identified	Risk rating	Fraud risk present	Testing approach	Impact of significant judgements and estimates
Management override of controls	Significant	Yes	Substantive	Medium
Valuation of investments (unquoted and direct property investments)	Significant	No	Substantive	High
Pension liability valuation	Significant	No	Substantive	High
Valuation of investments (pooled investments)	Normal	No	Substantive	Medium
Contributions receivable	Normal	No	Substantive	Medium



# INDEPENDENCE AND FEES

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### Independence

We confirm that the firm complies with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard for Auditors and, in our professional judgement, is independent

### Fees

	2020/21	2019/20
Code audit fee	<sup>1</sup> £28,000	£28,000
Additional fee for IAS19 assurance requests from scheduled bodies	<sup>2</sup> £6,500	£12,250
Additional audit fee: Covid-19 remote working	<sup>2</sup> £5,000	-
<b>Total audit fees</b>	<b>£39,500</b>	<b>£40,250</b>

### Fee variances

<sup>1</sup>The Code fee remains the PSAA Scale plus the £3,925 added from 2019/20 reflecting the increased expectations relating to the work necessary to audit the judgemental components of the pension fund.

### <sup>2</sup>Assurance fees

The 2019/20 audit included cyclical costs relating to the audit of the 2019 triennial actuarial data cleansing exercise. These should not be necessary again until the 2022/23 audit.

### <sup>3</sup>Covid-related costs

This represents an estimate of the additional resource time and costs necessary when audits are undertaken remotely. The 15% is at the lowest end of the 15-20% range experienced by BDO and the other audit firms. If we are able to undertake some key work on site, the time reflected here should reduce and the fee level decrease accordingly.

### Amendments to the proposed fees

If we need to propose any amendments to the fees during the course of the audit, where our assessment of risk and complexity are significantly different from those reflected in the proposed fee or where we are required to carry out work in exercising our additional powers and duties, we will first discuss this with the Council. Where this requires a variation to the scale fee set by PSAA we will seek approval from Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA). If necessary, we will also prepare a report outlining the reasons why the fee needs to change for discussion with the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.



# OVERVIEW

## Audit scope and objectives

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Key components of our audit objectives and strategy for the Pension Fund are highlighted and explained on the following pages.

Audit planning is a collaborative and continuous process and our audit strategy, as reflected here, will be reviewed and updated as our audit progresses.

We will communicate any significant changes to our audit strategy, should the need for such change arise.

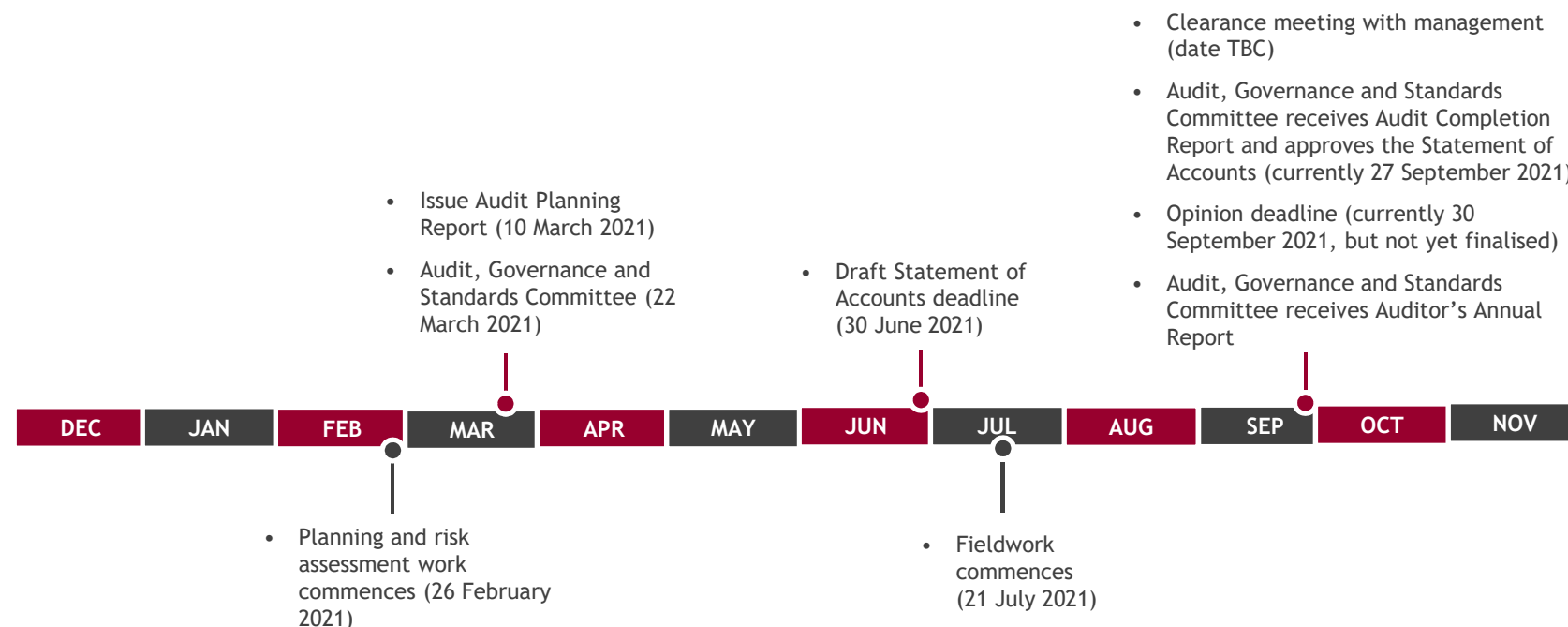
Reporting	Objectives
Auditing standards	We will perform our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing UK (ISAs (UK)) and relevant guidance published by the National Audit Office.
Financial statements	We will express an opinion on the Pension Fund financial statements, prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2020/21 and other directions.
Statement of Accounts	In addition to our objectives regarding the financial statements, we will also read and consider the other information contained in the Statement of Accounts to consider whether there is a material inconsistency between the other information and the financial statements or other information and our knowledge obtained during the audit.
Annual Report	We will review the Pension Fund Annual Report and report on the consistency of the Pension Fund financial statements within the Annual Report with the Pension Fund financial statements in the Statement of Accounts.
Audit Completion Report to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee	Prior to the approval of the financial statements, we will discuss our significant findings with the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. We will highlight key accounting and audit issues as well as internal control findings and any other significant matters arising from the audit.



# AUDIT TIMELINE

## An overview of the key dates

At the time of drafting this Audit Planning Report, the deadlines for preparing and publishing local authority accounts are subject to consultation, as part of the Government's response to Sir Tony Redmond's review. The consultation proposes pushing back the final accounts publication date to 30 September 2021 and requiring draft accounts to be published on or before 1 August 2021, together with a new requirement for local bodies to provide an explanation on their website if they miss the revised draft publication date.



The timeline set out above would be extremely challenging to achieve. This is because of a number of issues, not least of which are the delays and reduced scope of any interim work that can be achieved to pull audit testing out of the final phase, the additional time working remotely takes, a later final audit start date and notable additional work pressures linked to the introduction of the new NAO Code of Audit Practice. Notwithstanding these issues, we consider it is necessary to aim for the currently proposed statutory publication deadline. If this is pushed back, our preference would be to revisit this timeline to agree a less pressured programme that has reduced risk of missing the target dates.

# BDO TEAM

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**David Eagles**  
**Engagement Lead**

t: 01473 320 728  
m: 07967 203431  
e: david.eagles@bdo.co.uk

As audit engagement lead I have primary responsibility to ensure that the appropriate audit opinion is given. In meeting this responsibility I ensure that the audit has resulted in obtaining sufficient and appropriate evidence to provide reasonable, but not absolute, assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to report on the financial statements and communicate as required by the ISAs (UK), in accordance with our findings. I am responsible for the overall quality of the engagement and am supported by the rest of the team as set out here.



**Barry Pryke**  
**Senior Manager**

t: 01473 320793  
e: barry.pryke@bdo.co.uk

I will lead on the audit of the Pension Fund. I work closely with David to develop and execute the audit strategy. I will be a key point of contact on a day to day basis and will ensure that timelines are carefully managed to ensure that deadlines are met and matters to be communicated to Management and the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee are highlighted on a timely basis.



**Deborah Antoine,**  
**Assistant Manager**

I will be responsible for the day to day supervision of the audit team, and will be responsible for the delivery of the key audit work.

# OVERVIEW

## Audit risks

We have assessed the following as audit risks. These are matters assessed as most likely to cause a material misstatement in the financial statements or impact on our use of resources opinion and include those that will have the greatest effect on audit strategy, the allocation of audit resources and the amount of audit focus by the engagement team.

Key: **Significant** / **Normal**

Description of risk	Significant risk	Normal risk	Overview of risk
1. Management override of controls			ISA (UK) 240 presumes that management is 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.
2. Valuation of investments (unquoted and direct property investments)			There is a risk that unquoted and direct property investments are not appropriately valued in the financial statements due to significant level of assumption and estimation involved in the valuation of these assets.
3. Pension liability valuation			There is a risk the valuation is not based on appropriate membership data where there are significant changes or uses inappropriate assumptions to value the liability.
4. Valuation of investments (pooled investments)			There is a risk that pooled investments may not be appropriately valued and correctly recorded in the financial statements.
5. Contributions receivable			There is a risk that employers may not be calculating contributions correctly and paying over the full amount dues (on normal and deficit rates).

# MANAGEMENT OVERRIDE OF CONTROLS

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**Auditing standards presume that management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud by overriding controls.**

Significant risk

Normal risk

Fraud risk

Assess design &  
implementation of controls to  
mitigate

Significant Management  
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Controls testing  
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Substantive testing approach

Risk highlighted by Council

## Risk detail

- Management has the ability to manipulate accounting records and override controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. We are required to consider this as a significant risk of material misstatement due to fraud.

## Planned audit approach

Our audit procedures will include the following:

- Review and verification of journal entries made in the year, agreeing the journals to supporting documentation. We will determine key risk characteristics to filter the population of journals. We will undertake necessary procedures to validate the data extraction undertaken and use our IT team to assist with transferring the journal extraction into BDO Advantage for audit use;
- Review of estimates and judgements applied by management in the financial statements to assess their appropriateness and the existence of any systematic bias; and
- Review the nature and causes of any unadjusted audit differences for indications of bias or deliberate misstatement.

# VALUATION OF INVESTMENTS (UNQUOTED AND DIRECT PROPERTY INVESTMENTS)

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**The valuation of unquoted and direct property investments is a significant risk as it involves a high degree of estimation uncertainty.**

Significant risk

Normal risk

Fraud risk

Assess design & implementation of controls to mitigate

Significant Management estimates & judgements

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Risk highlighted by Council

## Risk detail

- The investment portfolio includes unquoted private equity, debt, infrastructure and timberlands which are valued by the fund managers. The pension fund also makes direct investments in freehold and leasehold properties which are based on valuations received from the fund managers. The valuation of these assets may be subject to a significant level of assumption and estimation, and valuations may not be based on observable market data. Due to significance of these valuations, even a small change in assumptions and estimates could have a material impact on the financial statements.
- In some cases, the valuations are provided at dates that are not coterminous with the pension fund's year end and need to be updated to reflect cash transactions (additional contributions or distributions received) since the latest available valuations. Due to current market volatility the valuation received can quickly become outdated.
- As a result, we consider there to be a significant risk that investments are not appropriately valued in the financial statements.

## Planned audit approach

Our audit procedures will include the following:

- Obtain direct confirmation of investment valuations from the fund managers and request copies of the audited financial statements (and member allocations) from the fund;
- Review the valuation completed by the fund manager and any significant assumptions made in the valuation;
- For property valuations, we will agree input data used by the valuer such as agreeing rental information to the underlying rental agreements, and will review the rental yields against the comparable data and indices for reasonableness;
- Where the financial statement date supporting the valuation is not coterminous with the pension fund's year end, confirm that appropriate adjustments have been made to the valuations in respect of additional contributions and distributions with the funds; and
- Ensure investments have been correctly valued in accordance with the relevant accounting policies.



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**The valuation of the pension liability is a significant risk as it involves a high degree of estimation uncertainty**

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Risk highlighted by Council

## Risk detail

An actuarial estimate of the pension fund liability to pay future pensions is calculated by an independent firm of actuaries with specialist knowledge and experience. The estimate is based on the most up to date membership data held by the Pension Fund and has regard to local factors such as mortality rates and expected pay rises along with other assumptions around inflation when calculating the liability.

The most recent actuarial valuation of the pension fund liability was carried out during the 2019/20 year to calculate the liability as at 31 March 2019. This involved the provision of membership and cash flow data from the pension fund to the actuary, data cleansing by the actuary and re-setting the financial and actuarial assumptions related to the valuation. The estimate of the pension fund liability at 31 March 2021 is based on a roll-forward of data from the 2019 triennial valuation, updated where necessary.

There is a risk the valuation disclosed in the notes to the Pension Fund accounts is not based on appropriate membership data (where there are any significant changes) or uses inappropriate assumptions to value the liability.

## Planned audit approach

Our audit procedures will include the following:

- Reviewing the controls in place to ensure that the data provided from the fund to the actuary is complete and accurate;
- Test a sample of transfers and cash flow data sent to the actuary for existence and accuracy;
- Reviewing the reasonableness of the assumptions used in the calculation against other local government pension fund actuaries and other observable data. We will use the PwC consulting actuary report for the review of the methodology of the actuary and reasonableness of the assumptions;
- Check whether any significant changes in membership data have been communicated to the actuary; and
- Agreeing the disclosure to the information provided by the actuary.

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**There is a risk that pooled investments may not be appropriately valued and correctly recorded in the financial statements.**

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## Risk detail

- The fair value of funds (principally pooled investments) is provided by individual fund managers and reviewed by the Custodian (Northern Trust). These valuation are reported on a monthly/quarterly basis although there may be amendments to the 'flash' valuations initially provided and subsequent final valuations that may be received after the draft accounts have been prepared.
- There is a risk that investments may not be appropriately valued and correctly recorded in the financial statements.

## Planned audit approach

Our audit procedures will include the following:

- Obtain direct confirmation of investment valuations from the fund managers including any subsequent final valuations to 'flash' valuations in the draft accounts;
- Ensure that investments have been correctly valued in accordance with the relevant accounting policies; and
- Obtain independent assurance reports over the controls operated by both the fund managers and custodian for valuations and existence of underlying investments in the funds.

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## Risk detail

- Employers are required to deduct amounts from employee pensionable pay based on tiered pay rates and to make employer normal and deficit contributions in accordance with rates agreed with the actuary.
- Additional contributions are also required against pension strain for unreduced pensions for early retirements and augmentation of pensions.
- There is a risk that employers may not be calculating contributions correctly and paying over the full amount due to the pension fund.

## Planned audit approach

Our audit procedures will include the following:

- Test a sample of normal contributions due (and additional deficit contributions where included in a higher employer rate) for active members including checking to employer payroll records;
- Review contributions receivable and ensure that income is recognised in the correct accounting period where the employer is making payments in the following month; and
- Carry out audit procedures to review contributions income in accordance with the Actuary's Rates and Adjustments Certificate, including specified increased rates to cover the minimum contributions to be paid as set out in the Certificate.

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**Management are required to make an assessment of the Pension Fund's ability to continue as a going concern.**

## Management's responsibilities

It is Management's responsibility to make an assessment of the Pension Fund's ability to continue as a going concern to support the basis of preparation for the financial statements and disclosures in the financial statements. This is a requirement of the accounting standards.

This assessment should be supported by detailed cash flow forecasts with clear details of the key underlying assumptions, consideration of available finance throughout the forecast period, and a consideration of the forecast's sensitivity to reasonably possible variations in those assumptions along with any other relevant factors.

The going concern assessment should cover a minimum of 12 months from the date of the approval of the financial statements. However, consideration should also be given to any major events or circumstances that may fall outside this period.

## Audit responsibilities

Our responsibilities in respect of going concern are:

- (a) To obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence regarding, and conclude on, i) whether a material uncertainty related to going concern exists; and ii) the appropriateness of Management's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements
- (b) To report in accordance with ISA (UK) 570.

We will obtain an understanding of the business model, objectives, strategies and related business risk, the measurement and review of the Pension Fund's financial performance including forecasting and budgeting processes and the risk assessment process. We will evaluate:

- a) The method, including the relevance and reliability of underlying data used to make the assessment, whether assumptions and changes to assumptions from prior years are appropriate and consistent with each other
- b) The plans for future actions in relation to the going concern assessment including whether such plans are feasible in the circumstances
- c) The adequacy and appropriateness of disclosures in the financial statements regarding the going concern assessment and any material uncertainties that may exist.

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## Fraud

Whilst Management have ultimate responsibility for prevention and detection of fraud, we are required to obtain reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, including those arising as a result of fraud. Our audit approach includes the consideration of fraud throughout the audit and includes making enquiries of management and those charged with governance.

We request confirmation from the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on fraud and a discussion on the controls and processes in place to ensure timely identification and action.

Management believe that there is low risk of material misstatement arising from fraud and that controls in operation would prevent or detect material fraud.

## Accounting policies

We will report to you on significant qualitative aspects of your chosen accounting policies. We will consider the consistency and application of the policies and we will report to you where accounting policies are inconsistent with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2020/21 under the circumstances.

## Significant accounting estimates and judgements

We will report to you on significant accounting estimates and judgements. We will seek to understand and perform audit testing procedures on accounting estimates and judgements including consideration of the outcome of historical judgements and estimates. We will report to you our consideration of whether management estimates and judgements are within an acceptable range.

## Internal audit

We will ensure that we maximise the benefit of the overall audit effort carried out by internal audit and ourselves, whilst retaining the necessary independence of view.

We will review the reports issued by the Council's internal audit function to determine whether there are any weaknesses and/or risks that we should reflect in our risk assessment, although we do not plan place reliance on their work in respect of their assessment of control processes

## Laws and regulations

We will consider compliance with laws and regulations. We will make enquiries of management and review correspondence with the relevant authorities.



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### Related parties

Whilst you are responsible for the completeness of the disclosure of related party transactions in the financial statements, we are also required to consider related party transactions in the context of fraud as they may present greater risk for Management override or concealment or fraud. Our audit approach includes the consideration of related party transactions throughout the audit including making enquiries of management.

### Financial statement disclosures

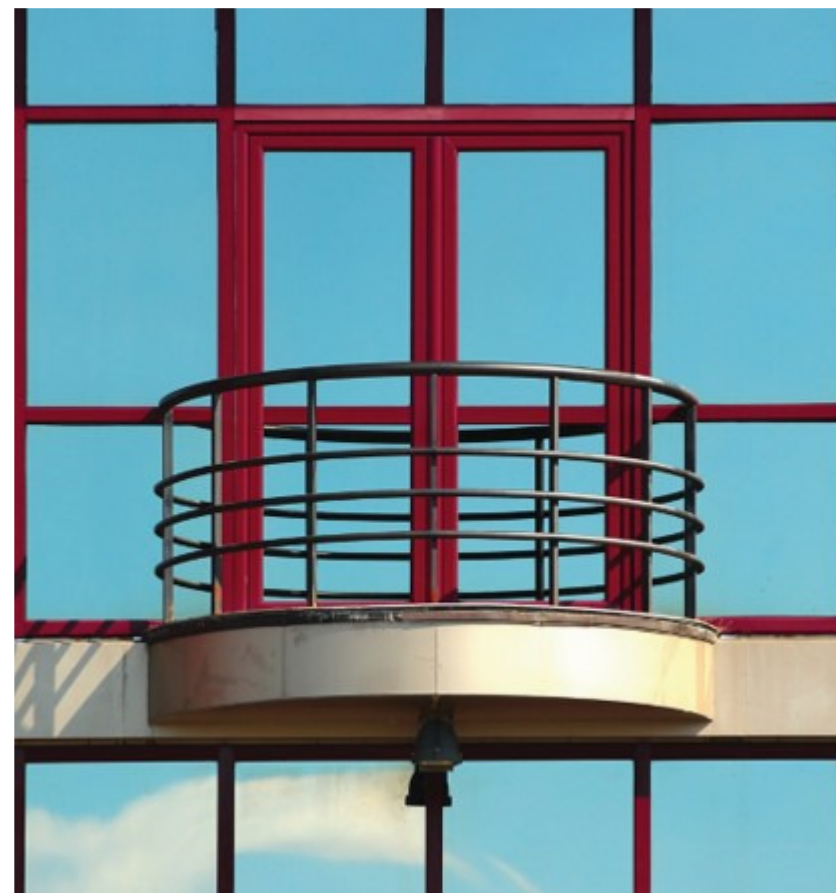
We will report to you on the sufficiency and content of your financial statement disclosures.

### Contingencies

We request primary input from the Council's legal team and confirmation of the completeness and accuracy of disclosed elements from the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on any recent claims.

### Any other matters

We will report to you on any other matters relevant to the overseeing of the financial reporting process. Where applicable this includes why we consider a significant accounting practice that is acceptable under the financial reporting framework not to be the most appropriate.



# IRREGULARITIES (INCLUDING FRAUD)

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We are required to include in our auditor's report an explanation of the extent to which the audit is considered capable of detecting irregularities (non compliance with laws and regulations), including fraud.

Our audit is designed to provide reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as whole a free from material misstatement whether due to fraud or error. We design audit procedures to respond to the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements, recognising that the risk of not detecting a material misstatement due to fraud is higher than the risk of not detecting one resulting from error and that irregularities that result from fraud might be inherently more difficult to detect than irregularities that result from error.

Our audit work will focus on laws and regulations that could give rise to a material misstatement in the Council's financial statements and may include, where appropriate:

- Obtaining an understanding of the control environment in monitoring compliance with laws and regulations
- Enquiries of management, those charged with governance and the Council's legal advisers
- Agreement of the financial statement disclosures to underlying supporting documentation
- Review of minutes of relevant Council and Pension Fund meetings throughout the year and of correspondence with regulatory authorities
- Written representations.

There are inherent limitations in the audit procedures described above and the further removed non-compliance with laws and regulations is from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, the less likely we would become aware of it.



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**Revision to ISA (UK) 540 means that we may need to update our approach the audit of accounting estimates - including confirmation and documentation of our understanding of the Council's estimation process.**

We will need to obtain an understanding of how you control your estimation process including not only the design and implementation of the process, but also the policies and procedures you put in place to satisfy yourself that each step in the process is properly applied, and that the resulting accounting estimates are reasonable.

For significant accounting estimates, particularly those that are complex or where there is a high degree of estimation uncertainty we will also make enquiries about how you:

- Make those responsible for deriving or changing your accounting estimates aware of relevant significant transactions, conditions or events
- Review the outcome(s) of previous accounting estimates and respond to the results of that review
- Identify and comply with the relevant requirements in the applicable financial reporting framework regarding your accounting estimates and related disclosures including how they are affected by complexity and your judgment
- Account for regulatory factors relevant to the Pension Fund's accounting estimates; including, when applicable, regulatory frameworks related to prudential supervision
- Identify the need for, and apply, specialised skills or knowledge related to accounting estimates, including with respect to the use of a management's expert
- Identify and address risks related to accounting estimates through your risk assessment process

- Identify relevant methods (including models), assumptions and data and the need for changes in them and from those identified, and select those to apply
- Address the degree of estimation uncertainty in selecting your final point estimates
- Describe in your financial statements matters related to your process for deriving your accounting estimates, and matters related to the degrees of estimation uncertainty underlying your accounting estimates
- Ensure there is oversight and governance in place over management's financial reporting process relevant to accounting estimates.

Under ISA (UK) 540 (revised) our audit approach will involve a more granular risk assessment relating to each significant estimate and separate consideration of the methods (or models) applied in calculating the estimate, the nature, source and reliability of data used and the significance, consistency and appropriateness of assumptions made.

We will also request written representations from you regarding the reasonableness of the methods, significant assumptions and the data used in determining the monetary amounts of accounting estimates, including the related disclosures, in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2020/21.

# IT GENERAL CONTROLS

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IT General Controls (ITGCs) are the policies and procedures that relate to many IT applications and support the effective functioning of application controls by helping to ensure the continued proper operation of information systems. They commonly include controls over data center and network operations; system software acquisition, change and maintenance; access security; and application system acquisition, development, and maintenance.

ITGCs are an important component in systems of internal control, and sometimes have a direct impact on the reliability of other controls.

IT assurance is embedded in our audit strategy to ensure the IT systems provide a suitable platform for the control environment and is undertaken in conjunction with our IT Assurance team. Our testing strategy includes a tailored range of data analytics, system configuration and IT environment testing.

We will also obtain an understanding of the information system, including the related business processes relevant to financial reporting, to include:

- Oracle (general ledger, accounts receivable, accounts payable and payroll); and
- Capita 360 Pay (income receipting)



# FRC ETHICAL STANDARD (DECEMBER 2019)

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In December 2019 the FRC published the Revised Ethical Standard 2019 ('ES'), which is applicable from 15 March 2020. There are some transitional provisions for services and arrangements that are not currently prohibited under the existing Standard. The ES aims to further strengthen auditor independence and enhance confidence in the profession. The table below provides a high level summary of the key headlines as applicable to our audit of the Council.

Key headlines	Impact
The objective, reasonable & informed third party test	Reinforcement that ethical principles take priority over rules. A need to take care where particular facts and circumstances are either not addressed directly by the rules or might appear to 'work around' the rules, or result in an outcome that is inconsistent with the general principles.
Contingent fees	Non-audit services with contingent or success-based fee arrangements will be prohibited for audited entities.
Secondments	All secondments/loan staff to audited entities are prohibited with the exception of secondments to public sector entities.
Recruitment and remuneration services	Prohibition on providing remuneration services to audited entities such as advising on the quantum of the remuneration package or the measurement criteria for calculation of the package. In addition, the prohibition on providing recruitment services to an audited entity that would involve the firm taking responsibility for, or advising on the appointment of, any director or employee of the entity.



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# INDEPENDENCE

**Under ISAs (UK) and the FRC’s Ethical Standard we are required, as auditors, to confirm our independence.**

We have embedded the requirements of the auditing standards in our methodologies, tools and internal training programmes. Our internal procedures require that audit engagement leads are made aware of any matters which may reasonably be thought to bear on the integrity, objectivity or independence of the firm, the members of the engagement team or others who are in a position to influence the outcome of the engagement.

This document considers such matters in the context of our audit for the year ending 31 March 2021.

We confirm that the firm, the engagement team and other partners, directors, senior managers and managers conducting the audit comply with relevant ethical requirements including the FRC’s Ethical Standard and are independent of the Council and Pension Fund.

We also confirm that we have obtained confirmation that external audit experts involved in the audit comply with relevant ethical requirements including the FRC’s Ethical Standard and are independent of the Council and the Pension Fund.

Should you have any comments or queries regarding any independence matters we would welcome their discussion in more detail.

**Non-audit services**

Details of services, other than audit, provided by us to the Pension Fund during the period and up to the date of this report are set out in the fees table on page 7.

Should you have any comments or queries regarding any independence matters we would welcome their discussion in more detail.



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# COUNCIL'S RESPONSIBILITIES

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### Financial reporting

The Council is expected to have effective governance arrangements to deliver its objectives. To this end, the publication of the financial statements is an essential means by which the Council accounts for its stewardship and use of the public money at its disposal.

The form and content of the Council's and Pension Fund's financial statements, and any additional schedules or returns for consolidation purposes, should reflect the requirements of the relevant accounting and reporting framework in place and any applicable accounting standards or other direction under the circumstances.

The Section 151 Officer is responsible for preparing and filing a Statement of Accounts and financial statements which show a true and fair view in accordance with CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2020/21, applicable accounting standards or other direction under the circumstances.

Our audit of the financial statements does not relieve management nor those charged with governance of their responsibilities for the preparation of materially accurate financial statements.

# OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

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### Our responsibilities and reporting - financial reporting

We are responsible for performing our audit under International Standards on Auditing (UK) to form and express an opinion on your financial statements. We report our opinion on the financial statements to the members of the Council.

We read and consider the ‘other information’ contained in the Annual Report such as the additional narrative reports. We will consider whether there is a material inconsistency between the other information and the financial statements or other information and our knowledge obtained during the audit.

### What we don't report

Our audit is not designed to identify all matters that may be relevant to the Council and the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee and cannot be expected to identify all matters that may be of interest to you and, as a result, the matters reported may not be the only ones which exist.



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## Those charged with governance

References in this report to ‘those charged with governance’ are to the Council as a whole. For the purposes of our communication with those charged with governance you have agreed we will communicate primarily with the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

## Communication, meetings and feedback

We request feedback from you on our planning and completion report to promote two way communication throughout the audit process and to ensure that all risks are identified and considered; and at completion that the results of the audit are appropriately considered. We will meet with management throughout the audit process. We will issue regular updates and drive the audit process with clear and timely communication, bringing in the right resource and experience to ensure efficient and timely resolution of issues.

## Audit Planning Report

The Audit Planning Report sets out all planning matters which we want to draw to your attention including audit scope, our assessment of audit risks and materiality.

## Internal Controls

We will consider internal controls relevant to the preparation of financial statements in order to design our audit procedures and complete our work. This is not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control.

## Audit Completion Report

At the conclusion of the audit, we will issue an Audit Completion Report to communicate to you key audit findings before concluding our audit opinion. We will include any significant deficiencies in internal controls which we identify as a result of performing audit procedures. We will meet with you to discuss the findings and in particular to receive your input on areas of the financial statements involving significant estimates and judgements and critical accounting policies.

Once we have discussed the contents of the Audit Completion Report with you and having resolved all outstanding matters we will issue a final version of the report.



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These tables indicates the latest rotation periods normally permitted under the independence rules of the FRC’s Ethical Standard.

In order to safeguard audit quality we will employ a policy of gradual rotation covering the team members as well as other senior members of the engagement team to ensure a certain level of continuity from year to year.



## Independence - engagement team rotation

Senior team members	Number of years involved	Rotation to take place after
David Eagles Engagement lead	3	5 years
Barry Pryke Senior Manager	1	10 years

## Independence - audit quality control

	Number of years involved	Rotation to take place after
Engagement quality control reviewer	3	7 years

# MATERIALITY: DEFINITION AND APPLICATION

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## Concept and definition

The concept of materiality is fundamental to the preparation of the financial statements and the audit process and applies not only to monetary misstatements but also to disclosure requirements and adherence to appropriate accounting principles and statutory requirements.

We apply the concept of materiality both in planning and performing our audit, and in evaluating the effect of misstatements. For planning, we consider materiality to be the magnitude by which misstatements, including omissions, could influence the economic decisions of reasonable users that are taken on the basis of the financial statements. In order to reduce to an appropriately low level the probability that any misstatements exceed materiality, we use a lower materiality level, performance materiality, to determine the extent of testing needed. Importantly, misstatements below these levels will not necessarily be evaluated as immaterial as we also take account of the nature of identified misstatements, and the particular circumstances of their occurrence, when evaluating their effect on the financial statements as a whole.

Materiality therefore has qualitative as well as quantitative aspects and an item may be considered material, irrespective of its size, if it has an impact on (for example):

- Narrative disclosure e.g. accounting policies, going concern
- Instances when greater precision is required (e.g. disclosure of senior officers’ remuneration and related party transactions).

International Standards on Auditing (UK) also allow the auditor to set a lower level of materiality for particular classes of transactions, account balances or disclosures for which misstatements of lesser amounts than materiality for the financial statements as a whole could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

## Calculation and determination

We have determined materiality based on professional judgement in the context of our knowledge of the Pension Fund, including consideration of factors such as industry developments, financial stability and reporting requirements for the financial statements.

We determine materiality in order to:

- Assist in establishing the scope of our audit engagement and audit tests
- Calculate sample sizes
- Assist in evaluating the effect of known and likely misstatements on the Group financial statements.

## Reassessment of materiality

We will reconsider 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 if we had been aware.

Further, when we have performed all our tests and are ready to evaluate the results of those tests (including any misstatements we detected) we will reconsider whether materiality combined with the nature, timing and extent of our auditing procedures, provided a sufficient audit scope.

Definition of materiality under IFRS

Information is material if omitting, misstating or obscuring it could reasonably be expected to influence decisions that the primary users of general purpose financial statements make on the basis of those financial statements, which provide financial information about a specific reporting entity.

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If we conclude that our audit scope was sufficient, we will use materiality to evaluate whether uncorrected misstatements (individually or in aggregate) are material.

You should be aware that any misstatements that we identify during our audit, both corrected and uncorrected errors, might result in additional audit procedures being necessary.

### Unadjusted errors

We will communicate to you all uncorrected misstatements identified during our audit, other than those which we believe are 'clearly trivial'.

Clearly trivial is defined as matters which will be of a wholly different (smaller) order of magnitude than the materiality thresholds used in the audit, and will be matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate.

We will obtain written representations from the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee confirming that in their opinion these uncorrected misstatements are immaterial, both individually and in aggregate and that, in the context of the financial statements taken as a whole, no adjustments are required.

We will request that you correct all uncorrected misstatements. In particular we would strongly recommend correction of errors whose correction would affect compliance with contractual obligations or governmental regulations. Where you choose not to correct all identified misstatements we will request a written representation from you setting out your reasons for not doing so and confirming that in your view the effects of any uncorrected misstatements are immaterial, individually and in aggregate, to the financial statements as whole.

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# NEW ACCOUNTING STANDARDS, AUDITING STANDARDS AND OTHER FINANCIAL REPORTING DEVELOPMENTS

We would like to draw to your attention the following summary of key changes to standards, regulations and other financing reporting developments, their effective dates and an indication, based on preliminary discussions with management and our sector understanding, of their possible effect on the annual report.

New Accounting Standards, Auditing Standards and Other Financial Reporting Developments	Expected effect				Effective for periods beginning on or after 1 January	
	None	Low	Medium	High	2020	2021
Auditing standard - audit of accounting estimates						
Increased emphasis on understanding management’s processes, systems and controls estimation uncertainty and financial statement disclosures			●		●	
Auditing standard - going concern						
Increased emphasis on evaluation of management's assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern			●		●	
Auditing standard - audit reports						
New audit report format with updated conclusion on going concern and reference to irregularities, including fraud			●		●	

# AQR RESULTS 2019/20

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### Overview

The FRC released their Audit Quality Review results for the 7 largest accountancy firms in July 2020 for the review period 2019/20. A copy of all of the reports can be found on the [FRC Website](#).

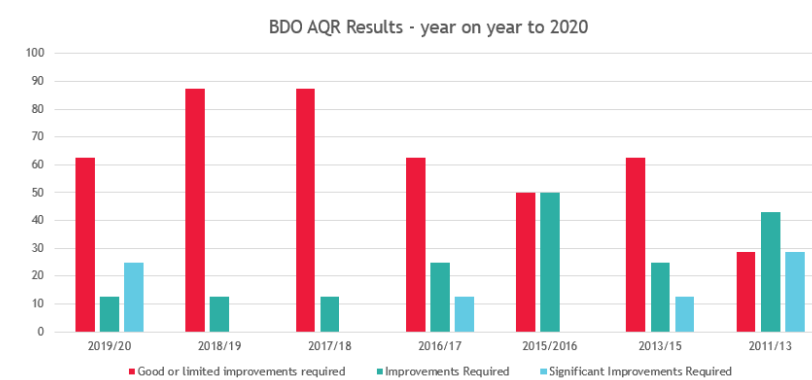
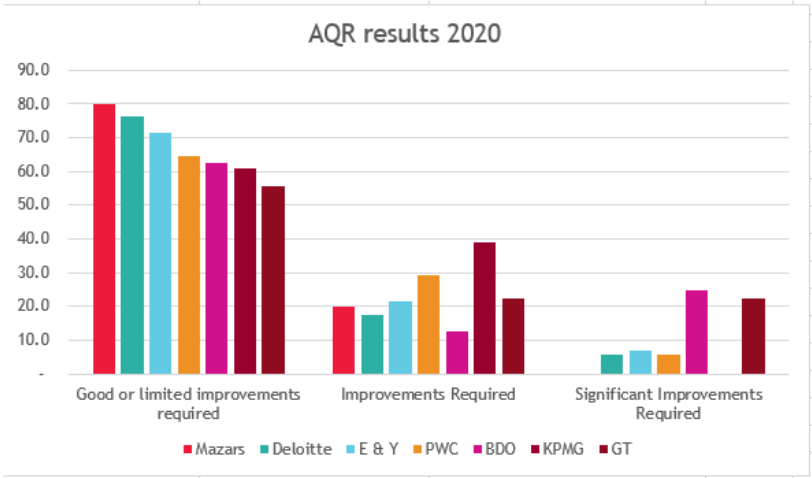
### Firm's Results

The graphs demonstrates our performance in relation to the other 6 largest firms. Having topped the table for audit quality for the last two consecutive years, we are disappointed to see a decline in our results. These scores remind us we must remain committed to continuous improvements and, having carefully considered the root causes of the AQR findings, we are in the process of implementing detailed action plans where required. We have made a number of enhancements to our Audit Quality Plan to address these issues to drive our key focus of a continuous improvement in audit quality including highlighting how we will make changes to our root cause analysis process which plays a key role.

We would encourage you to read our report which includes:

- Details of the root cause analysis we have been undertaking to address issues raised
- The actions we have/are undertaking to address the issues raised by the AQR
- A number of areas of good practice the AQR review team identified whilst undertaking their review.

More details will be included in our Transparency Report which will be available on our [www.bdo.co.uk](http://www.bdo.co.uk)



# AQR RESULTS 2019/20 2

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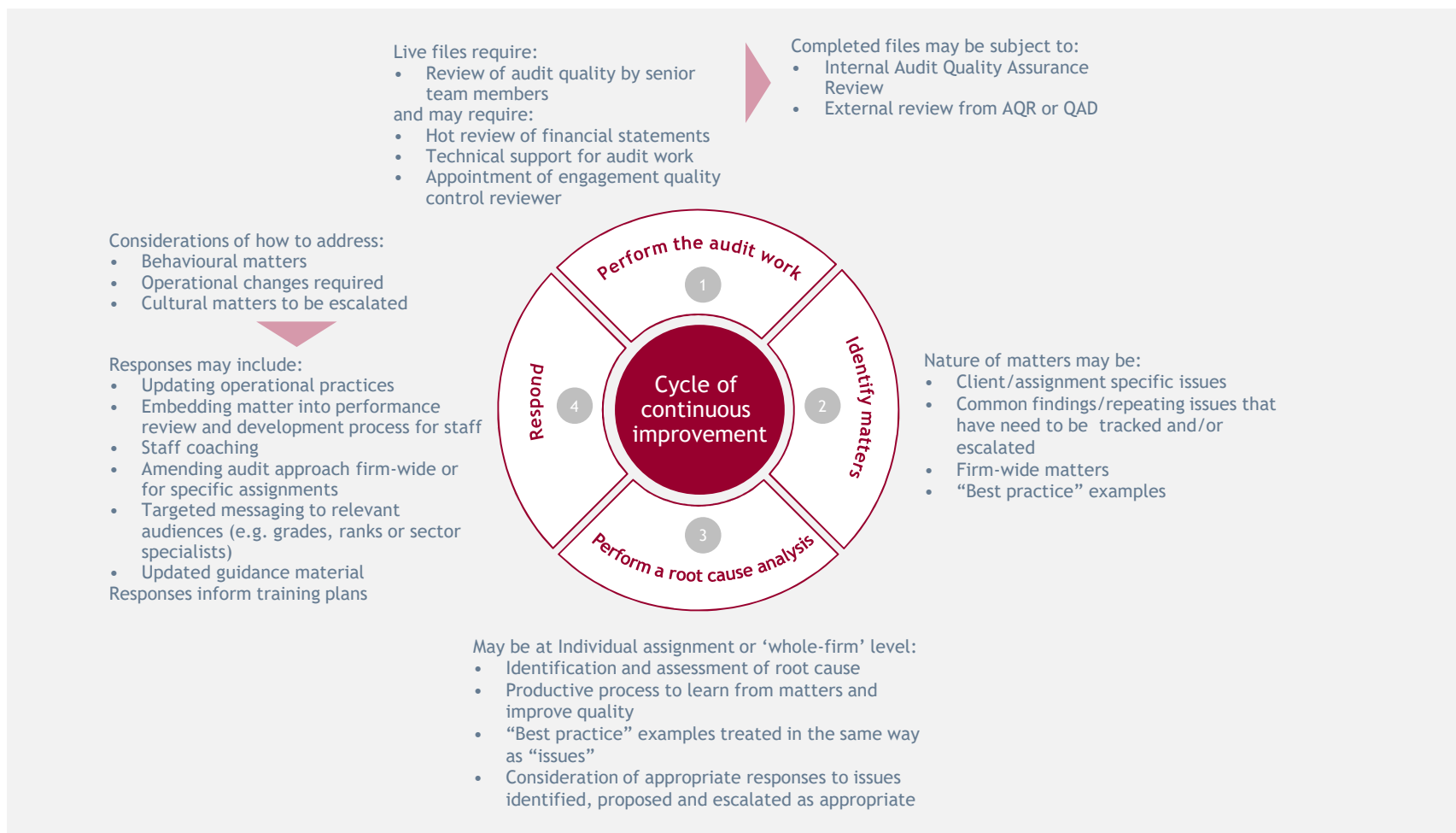
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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

David Eagles  
Partner

t: 01473 320728  
m: 07967 203431  
e: david.eagles@bdo.co.uk

Barry Pryke  
Senior Audit Manager

t: 01473 320793  
m: 07583 032401  
e: barry.pryke@bdo.co.uk

The matters raised in our report prepared in connection with the audit are those we believe should be brought to your attention. They do not purport to be a complete record of all matters arising. This report is prepared solely for the use of the company and may not be quoted nor copied without our prior written consent. No responsibility to any third party is accepted.

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