

Resources
Director of Resources

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Private & Confidential

Date: 23rd March 2016

Dear Ms Irwin

Audit of the Hertfordshire Local Government Pension Fund Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2016 - Understanding how the Audit Committee gains assurance from management

Thank you for your letter dated 16 February 2015 to me as Chairman of the Audit Committee, concerning your current work on the Hertfordshire Pension Fund accounts for 2015/16.

In response to your request, I can provide you with the following assurances.

1 Oversight of management's processes

1.1 Assessment that the financial statements may be materially misstated due to fraud or error

This risk is considered by the Audit Committee as part of its annual scrutiny of the Pension Fund accounts. Internal Audit audits and reports to the Committee on its work, assessing the controls designed to ensure the accuracy and propriety of the financial statements. As a result of this work during 2015/16, I anticipate that the Head of Assurance will report to the Committee that he does not consider that there is a significant risk of material mis-statement in the financial statements due to fraud.

1.2 Identifying and responding to risks of fraud and reporting fraud concerns

The Chief Financial Officer takes reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud. The Pension Fund's assets are held in custody by an independent custodian; and investment managers appointed by the Pension Committee manage these assets on behalf of the Fund. Reasonable controls have been certified by an appropriate auditor.

In addition, Internal Audit reports to the Audit Committee on its annual planning process, in which they undertake a risk assessment of the Council's systems and arrangements, including an evaluation of the risk of fraud or other irregularity. Administration of the Pension Fund is operated through the Council's core financial systems, and Internal Audit's reviews of each of these are aimed in part at testing for fraud, and evaluating the effectiveness of controls aimed at minimising such activity. At the stage of individual audit planning the risk of fraud/irregularity occurring is always considered and appropriate controls testing included within the test schedule. The overall assessment of assurance, including internal controls and segregation of duties, is provided by the Head of Assurance.

The Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy has been agreed by the Audit Committee; the Strategy sets out how the Council responds to suspected or detected fraud or corruption, and include the requirement on all Council employees and Members that such suspicions be reported promptly to the Head of Assurance for investigation. The Council's Whistleblowing procedure, endorsed by the Audit Committee, sets out how this reporting can be done in confidence, and is issued to all employees and members.

The Council's website, HertsDirect, provides confidential means for members of the public to report suspected fraud direct to the Head of Assurance.

The Hertfordshire Shared Anti-Fraud Service which began operation in April 2015 is resourced to undertake investigations into suspected fraud, and has undertaken a number of these in 2015/16. The service maintains a record of all fraud referrals and actions taken in response. Anti-fraud work covering the Pension Fund includes participation in the National Fraud Initiative and the investigation of potential data matches which may indicate overpayment or, occasionally, fraud. A number of suspected frauds are being investigated.

In addition to the increased professional expertise around fraud that the Service brings, it's new initiatives will further strengthen the anti-fraud arrangements in place, for example in creating a data sharing hub which will help to generate fraud investigation targets by comparing sets of information and looking for anomalies.

1.3 Communication to employees on business practice and ethics

The Pension Fund has published a Communication Policy Statement which explains how it communicates with employers and representatives of employers, scheme members and prospective scheme members. This is set out within the Pension Fund's 2015/16 Annual Statement of Accounts, and may be found at the following website <http://www.yourpension.org.uk/Hertfordshire/Fund-information/Policy-statements.aspx>

The Council's Code of Conduct, available on the Council's intranet, sets out clearly the standards expected of its employees including the high standards required in respect working with public funds and complying with Anti-Bribery laws. The Code of Conduct is referenced in all employment related policies.

1.4 **Encouraging employees to report their concerns about fraud**

The Council's Whistleblowing policy is set out on the Council's intranet. During the year a poster campaign took place to highlight the routes available for reporting concerns.

All concerns notified have been investigated. There were no incidences of whistle blowing with regards to Pensions in 2015/16.

1.5 **Communication to those charged with governance on processes for identifying and responding to fraud**

The Head of Assurance presents the annual Internal Audit Plan to the Audit Committee, and provides the Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise those elements of the Plan aimed at identifying and responding to the risks of fraud within the Council, including those within the Pension Fund. The Committee has also agreed the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and the Anti-Bribery policy.

In his Annual Report, the Head of Assurance provides an account to the Committee of work done to test anti-fraud controls and of investigations into suspected fraud. The Head of Assurance will also report if internal audit work identifies that there is any undue organisational or management pressure to meet financial or operating targets.

2. **Risk of fraud and breaches of internal control**

The Head of Assurance provides an account to the Audit Committee of work done to test for breaches of internal control, and reports on management responses to these. In addition internal Audit reports to the Audit Committee on its annual planning process, in which internal audit undertakes a risk assessment of the Council's systems and arrangements, including an evaluation of the risk of fraud or other irregularity.

3. **Breaches of internal control and actual, suspected or alleged frauds during 2015/16**

3.1 **Breaches of internal control**

The Pension Committee receives quarterly reports from the Chief Financial Officer on the performance of the Pension Fund, against both the investment and administration strategies. These reports also include, if applicable, any breaches in control.

From 2014/15, the Chief Financial Officer has also provided a quarterly Risk Monitor reporting on control mechanisms to manage the key risks set out in the Pension Fund's Risk Register. As part of this risk monitoring the Pensions Committee is also provided with a quarterly update on risks associated with scheme employers not meeting their obligations to the Pension Fund.

In his Internal Audit Annual Report, the Head of Assurance provides an account to the Audit Committee of work done to test for breaches of internal control, and reports on management responses to these.

3.2 Awareness of actual, suspected or alleged fraud or breaches in internal control

The Chief Financial Officer takes reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud. The Pension Fund's assets are held in custody by an independent custodian, where reasonable controls have been certified by an appropriate auditor.

In addition, Internal Audit reports to the Audit Committee on its annual planning process, in which internal audit undertakes a risk assessment of the Council's systems and arrangements, including an evaluation of the risk of fraud or other irregularity.

Administration of the Pension Fund is operated through the Council's core financial systems, and Internal Audit's reviews of each of these are aimed in part at testing for fraud, and evaluating the effectiveness of controls aimed at minimising such activity.

In addition, Internal Audit's anti-fraud work covering the Pension Fund includes participation in the National Fraud Initiatives and investigation of potential data matches. Work has continued to examine the results of the 2014/15 National Fraud Initiative and outcomes duly reported to the Audit Commission; the next data download is scheduled for the 2016/17. The Head of Assurance via the Shared Anti-Fraud Service maintains a fraud register, which provides for the recording of the nature and extent of each suspected fraud, the way in which each case is resolved, and any wider corrective measures.

4. Organisational or management pressure to meet financial or operating targets.

I am not aware of any inappropriate organisational or management pressure being applied or incentives offered to meet financial or operating targets.

5. Compliance with relevant laws and regulations

The County Council approves the Council's Constitution and any changes to it (most recently July 2015), in which the functions of Monitoring Officer are set out. The Audit Committee members are members of the County Council. It is the role of the Monitoring Officer to ensure that decisions are lawful and fair and, after consultation with the Head of Paid Service and Director of Resources, to report to the Council (or Executive) if any proposals or decision would give rise to unlawfulness or maladministration.

Formal reports from Monitoring Officers to Council Meeting, at Hertfordshire County Council as elsewhere, are extremely rare. The Monitoring Officer discharges her responsibility by ensuring that Members, including the Audit Committee, are advised as soon as possible about potential unlawfulness or maladministration. There have

been no significant issues of non-compliance in 2015/16 reported to the Audit Committee.

6. **Awareness of any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements**

The Chief Financial Officer is required, as part of the ongoing performance management and monitoring arrangements, to consider any material risks or issues which could impact on the financial statements and recommend that the authority makes appropriate provision against such risks. This would include any potential litigation or claims. There are no actual, potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements for HCC.

7. **Financial Statements are prepared on a going concern basis**

The Governance arrangements of the authority include specific requirements for the financial management arrangements to conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer (2010). The ongoing review of internal control by the Audit Committee includes arrangements in place for the financial management of the authority, which includes management of the Pension Accounts. This includes assessing risks and liabilities and ensuring that these are reflected in the Pension accounts.

I trust that this answers your requests, if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Williams

Chairman, Hertfordshire County Council Audit Committee