

## **Scotland Excel**

**To: Executive Sub-Committee**

**On: 15 March 2024**

**Report by:  
The Treasurer**

### **Report on the Annual Audit Plan 2023/24**

#### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Annual Audit Plan 2023/24 for Scotland Excel is submitted for Members' information, prepared by the appointed external auditor, Azets. It outlines their planned activities during the audit of the 2023/24 annual accounts.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive Sub-Committee:
- a) Notes the Annual Audit Plan 2023/24 by Azets, as attached; and
  - b) Approves the proposed audit fee of £9,790.

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Based on its analysis of the risks facing Scotland Excel, Azets has submitted an Audit Plan that outlines its approach to the audit of the 2023/24 annual accounts. This will assess whether the accounts provide a true and fair view of the organisation's financial position, and also whether they have been prepared in accordance with proper accounting practice, i.e. the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2023/24.
- 3.2 The Audit Plan outlines the responsibilities of Scotland Excel and of Azets; its assessment of key challenges and risks, and the approach and timetable for completion of the audit.
- 3.3 On pages 16-18 the Audit Plan outlines the work that will be undertaken in relation to financial sustainability and notes that for the three-year period 2024/25 to 2026/27 the proposed figures would result in an operating surplus totalling £0.992m for the three-year period, increasing the uncommitted reserves to £1.147m at the end of 2026/27 (or 18.8% of the operating income). The Joint Committee agreed in December for Scotland Excel to propose projects to utilise some of those reserves, while maintaining a minimum 5% reserves balance. Two such projects have already been proposed and approved by the Exec Sub-Committee.

- 3.4 The statutory deadline for the approval of the audited accounts for 2023/24 is 30 September 2024 and the annual audit report is planned to be reported to the Executive Sub-Committee on 20 September 2024.
- 3.5 On pages 21-22 of the Audit Plan, the proposed audit fee is detailed. This is indicated at £9,790 for the current financial year (£10,510 for 2022/23).
- 3.6 From Azets, Senior Manager, Adrian Kolodziej will be in attendance at the meeting to present the Audit Plan, attached here as an appendix.

# Scotland Excel

**External Audit Annual Plan**

**Year ended 31 March 2024**

March 2024



# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Audit scope and general approach	4
Financial statements - significant audit risks	11
The wider scope of public audit	16
Audit team and timetable	19
Audit fee	21
Audit independence and objectivity	23
Appendices	24

# Introduction

## Purpose

This audit plan highlights the key elements of our proposed audit strategy and provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory external audit of Scotland Excel for the year ended 31 March 2024 for those charged with governance.

Our audit work will cover:

- the financial statements within the 2023/24 annual accounts
- the wider scope of public audit
- any other work requested by Audit Scotland.

## Adding value through the audit

All of our clients demand of us a positive contribution to meeting their ever-changing business needs. Our aim is to add value to Scotland Excel through our external audit work by being constructive and forward looking, by identifying areas of improvement and by recommending and encouraging good practice. In this way, we aim to help Scotland Excel promote improved standards of governance, better management and decision making and more effective use of resources.

## Feedback

If there are any elements of this audit plan to which you do not agree or you would like to discuss, please let us know as soon as possible.

Any comments you may have on the service we provide, the quality of our work, and our reports would be greatly appreciated at any time. Comments can be reported directly to any member of your audit team.

This plan has been prepared for the sole use of those charged with governance and management and should not be relied upon by third parties. No responsibility is assumed by Azets Audit Services to third parties.

## Openness and transparency

This report will be published on Audit Scotland's website <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/>

# Audit scope and general approach

## Responsibilities of the auditor and Scotland Excel

The [Code of Audit Practice](#) outlines the responsibilities of external auditors appointed by the Accounts Commission for Scotland and it is a condition of our appointment that we follow it.

Auditor responsibilities are derived from statute, International Standards on Auditing (UK) and the Ethical Standard for auditors, other professional requirements and best practice, the Code of Audit Practice and guidance from Audit Scotland.

Scotland Excel has primary responsibility for ensuring the proper financial stewardship of its public funds. This includes preparing a set of annual accounts that are in accordance with proper accounting practices. Scotland Excel is also responsible for complying with legislation and putting arrangements in place for governance and propriety that enable it to successfully deliver its objectives.

[Appendix 2](#) provides further details of our respective responsibilities.

## Risk-based audit approach

We follow a risk-based approach to the audit that reflects our overall assessment of the relevant risks that apply to Scotland Excel. This ensures that our audit focuses on the areas of highest risk. Our audit planning is based on:

<b>Discussions with senior officers</b>	<b>Our understanding of the sector, its key priorities and risks</b>	<b>Attending &amp; observing the Joint Committee</b>
<b>Guidance from Audit Scotland</b>	<b>Discussions with Audit Scotland and public sector auditors</b>	<b>Discussions with internal audit and review of plans and reports</b>
<b>Review of Scotland Excel's corporate strategies and plans</b>	<b>Review of Scotland Excel's corporate risk register</b>	<b>Consideration of the work of other inspection bodies</b>

Planning is a continuous process and our audit plans are updated during the course of our audit to take account of developments as they arise.

## Communication with those charged with governance

Auditing standards require us to make certain communications throughout the audit to those charged with governance. These communications will be made through Scotland Excel.

## Partnership working

We coordinate our work with Audit Scotland, internal audit, other external auditors and relevant scrutiny bodies, recognising the increasing integration of service delivery and partnership working within the public sector.

### Audit Scotland

Although we are independent of Audit Scotland and are responsible for forming our own views and opinions, we do work closely with Audit Scotland throughout the audit. This helps identify common priorities and risks, treat issues consistently across the sector, and improve audit quality and efficiency. We share information about identified risks, good practices and barriers to improvement so that lessons to be learnt and knowledge of what works can be disseminated to all relevant bodies.

Audit Scotland undertakes national performance audits on issues affecting the public sector. We may review Scotland Excel's arrangements for taking action on any issues reported in the national performance reports which have a local impact. We also consider the extent to which Scotland Excel use the national performance reports as a means to help improve performance at the local level.

During the year we may also be required to provide information to Audit Scotland to support the national performance audits.

### Internal Audit

As part of our audit, we consider the scope and nature of internal audit work and look to minimise duplication of effort, to ensure the total audit resource to Scotland Excel is used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

### Service organisations

Renfrewshire Council ("the Council") is the lead administrative authority for Scotland Excel, providing Treasurer and committee Clerk roles, as well as other service support, such as payroll, ICT, legal and HR. Where those services (and associated systems) have a material impact on the annual accounts we will work with the Council to understand the controls in place over the systems used in delivering these services.

## Delivering the audit

### Hybrid audit approach

We adopt a hybrid approach to our audit which combines on-site visits with remote working; learning from the better practices developed during the pandemic.

All of our people have the equipment, technology and systems to allow them to work remotely or on-site, including secure access to all necessary data and information.

All of our staff are fully contactable by email, phone call and video-conferencing.

Meetings can be held over Microsoft Teams or by telephone.

We employ greater use of technology to examine evidence, but only where we have assessed both the sufficiency and appropriateness of the audit evidence produced.

### Secure sharing of information

We use a cloud-based file sharing service that enables users to easily and securely exchange documents and provides a single repository for audit evidence.

### Regular contact

During the 'fieldwork' phases of our audit, we will arrange regular catch-ups with key personnel to discuss the progress of the audit. The frequency of these meetings will be discussed and agreed with management.

### Signing annual accounts

Audit Scotland recommends the electronic signing of annual accounts and uses a system called DocuSign.

Electronic signatures simplify the process of signing the accounts and can be signed using any device from any location. There is no longer a need for duplicate copies to be signed, thus reducing the risk of missing a signature and all signatories have immediate access to a high-quality PDF version of the accounts.

## Approach to audit of the financial statements

Our objective when performing an audit is to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement and to issue an independent auditor's report that includes our auditor's opinion.

As part of our risk-based audit approach, we will:

- perform risk assessment procedures including updating our understanding of Scotland Excel, including its environment, the financial reporting framework and its system of internal control;
- review the design and implementation of key internal controls;



- identify and assess the risks of material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, at the financial statement level and the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures;
- design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, to obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion; and
- exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit recognising that circumstances may exist that cause the financial statements to be materially misstated.

## Materiality

“Reasonable assurance” is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. We include an explanation in the auditor’s report of the extent to which the audit was capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, and respective responsibilities for prevention and detection of fraud.

We apply the concept of materiality in planning and performing the audit, and in evaluating the effect of misstatements within the financial statements identified during the audit.

Judgments about materiality are made in the light of surrounding circumstances and are affected by our perception of the financial information needs of users of the financial statements, and by the size or nature of a misstatement, or a combination of both. The basis for our assessment of materiality for the year is set out in [Appendix 1](#).

Any identified errors greater than £8,200 will be recorded and discussed with those charged with governance and, if not adjusted, confirmed as immaterial as part of Scotland Excel’s letter of representation to us.

## Accounting systems and internal controls

We will follow a substantive testing approach to gain audit assurance rather than relying on tests of controls. As part of our work, we consider certain internal controls relevant to the preparation of the financial statements such that we are able to design appropriate audit procedures. However, this work will not cover all internal controls and is not designed for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal controls. If we identify significant deficiencies in controls, we will report these to Scotland Excel.

## Specialised skill or knowledge required to complete the audit

Our audit team will consult internally with our Technology Risk team in assessing the information technology general controls (ITGC).

## Going concern

In most public sector entities (including Scotland Excel), the financial reporting framework envisages that the going concern basis for accounting will apply where the entity's services will continue to be delivered by the public sector. In such cases, a material uncertainty related to going concern is unlikely to exist.

For many public sector entities, the financial sustainability of the entity is more likely to be of significant public interest than the application of the going concern basis. Our wider scope audit work considers the financial sustainability of Scotland Excel.

## Prevention and detection of fraud or error

In order to discharge our responsibilities regarding fraud and irregularity we require any fraud or irregularity issues to be reported to us as they arise. In particular we require to be notified of all frauds which:

- involve the misappropriation of theft of assets or cash which are facilitated by weaknesses in internal control
- are over £5,000.

We also require a historic record of instances of fraud or irregularity to be maintained and a summary to be made available to us after each year end.

## Anti-money laundering

We require Scotland Excel to notify us on a timely basis of any suspected instances of money laundering so that we can inform Audit Scotland who will determine the necessary course of action.

## Wider audit scope work

The special accountabilities that attach to the conduct of public business, and the use of public money, mean that public sector audits must be planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector. This means providing assurance, not only on the financial statements, but providing audit judgements and conclusions on the appropriateness, effectiveness and impact of corporate governance and performance management arrangements and financial sustainability. [Appendix 1](#) provides detail of the wider scope areas of public sector audit work.

The Code of Audit Practice addresses a more limited audit of wider-scope areas for any public bodies that are less complex owing to their size and limited financial activity (referred to as Less Complex Bodies).

We have concluded, based on an assessment of the nature and circumstances of Scotland Excel, that a limited wider scope audit is appropriate. As such our audit of wider scope areas is restricted to an evaluation of financial sustainability.

## National risk assessment

Where particular areas of national or sectoral risk have been identified by the Auditor General, they will request auditors to consider and report on those risks as they apply at a local level. For 2023/24 no such risks have been specified.

## Best Value

Appointed auditors have a duty to be satisfied that local government bodies have made proper arrangements to secure best value. We undertake this duty in a way that is proportionate to the size and type of body. We give due regard to:

- How Scotland Excel demonstrates that it is meeting its Best Value responsibilities
- How our work on financial sustainability meets the Best Value responsibilities.

We will report on Scotland Excel's arrangements for meeting its Best Value responsibilities in our Annual Audit Report.

## Reporting our findings

At the conclusion of the audit we will issue:

- an independent auditor's report setting out our formal audit opinions within the annual accounts
- an annual audit report describing our audit findings, conclusions on key audit risks, judgements on the pace and depth of improvement on our audit of wider scope areas and any recommendations.

## Definitions

We will use the following gradings to provide an overall assessment of the arrangements in place as they relate to the wider scope areas. The text provides a guide to the key criteria we use in the assessment, although not all of the criteria may exist in every case.



# Financial statements - significant audit risks

Significant risks are risks that require special audit consideration and include identified risks of material misstatement that:

- our risk assessment procedures have identified as being close to the upper range of the spectrum of inherent risk due to their nature and a combination of the likelihood and potential magnitude of misstatement; or
- are required to be treated as significant risks due to requirements of ISAs (UK), for example in relation to management override of internal controls.

## Significant risks at the financial statement level

The table below summarises significant risks of material misstatement identified at the financial statement level. These risks are considered to have a pervasive impact on the financial statements as a whole and potentially affect many assertions for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures.

Management override of controls	Audit approach
<p>Auditing Standards require auditors to treat management override of controls as a significant risk on all audits. This is because management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud by manipulating accounting records and overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.</p> <p>Although the level of risk of management override of controls will vary from entity to entity, the risk is nevertheless present in all entities. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, it is a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk.</p> <p>Specific areas of potential risk include manual journals, management estimates and judgements and one-off</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documenting our understanding of the journals posting process and evaluating the design effectiveness of management controls over journals.</li> <li>• Analysing the journals listing and determining the criteria for selecting high risk and/or unusual journals.</li> <li>• Testing high risk and/or unusual journals posted during the year and after the draft accounts stage back to supporting documentation for appropriateness, corroboration and to ensure approval has been undertaken in line with Scotland Excel' journals policy.</li> </ul>

Management override of controls	Audit approach
<p>transactions outside the ordinary course of the business.</p> <p><b>Risk of material misstatement: Very High</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining an understanding of the key accounting estimates and critical judgements made by management. We will challenge assumptions and consider for reasonableness and indicators of bias which could result in material misstatement due to fraud.</li> <li>• Evaluating the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.</li> </ul>

## Significant risks at the assertion level for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures

Fraud in revenue recognition	Audit approach
<p>Material misstatement due to fraudulent financial reporting relating to revenue recognition is a presumed risk in ISA 240 (The Auditor's Responsibilities Relating to Fraud in an Audit of Financial Statements).</p> <p>The presumption is that Scotland Excel could adopt accounting policies or recognise income in such a way as to lead to a material misstatement in the reported financial position.</p> <p>Given the financial pressures facing the public sector as a whole, there is an inherent fraud risk associated with the recording of income around the year end.</p> <p>However, we do not deem this risk to be present in requisitions received from the constituent local authorities due to a lack of incentive and opportunity to manipulate transactions. We also rebut this risk in relation to other income as it is not material to the accounts.</p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the significant income streams and review the controls in place over accounting for revenue.</li> <li>• Consideration of Scotland Excel's key areas of income and obtaining evidence that income is recorded in line with appropriate accounting policies and the policies have been applied consistently across the year.</li> </ul>

Fraud in non-pay expenditure	Audit approach
<p>As most public sector bodies are net expenditure bodies, the risk of fraud is more likely to occur in expenditure. There is a risk that expenditure may be misstated resulting in a material misstatement in the financial statements.</p> <p>Given the financial pressures facing the public sector as a whole, there is an inherent fraud risk associated with the recording of expenditure around the year end.</p> <p><b>Inherent risk of material misstatement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Non-pay expenditure (occurrence/completeness): High</b></li> <li>• <b>Accruals (existence/completeness): High</b></li> </ul>	<p>We will perform the procedures outlined below based on their value within the financial statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating the significant non-pay expenditure streams and reviewing the controls in place over accounting for expenditure.</li> <li>• Consideration of Scotland Excel's key areas of expenditure and obtaining evidence that expenditure is recorded in line with appropriate accounting policies and the policies have been applied consistently across the year.</li> <li>• Reviewing accruals around the year end to consider if there is any indication of understatement of balances held through consideration of accounting estimates.</li> </ul>



Pension asset / liability (key accounting estimate)	Audit approach
<p>An actuarial estimate of the pension fund asset/liability is calculated on an annual basis under IAS 19 and on a triennial funding basis by an independent firm of actuaries with specialist knowledge and experience. The estimates are based on the most up to date membership data held by Scotland Excel and have regard to local factors such as mortality rates and expected pay rises with other assumptions around inflation when calculating the liabilities.</p> <p>A significant level of estimation is required in order to determine the valuation of pension assets/liabilities. Small changes in the key assumptions (including discount rates, inflation, and mortality rates) can have a material impact on the pension asset/liability.</p> <p>There is a risk that the assumptions used are not appropriate.</p> <p><b>Inherent risk of material misstatement:</b></p> <p><b>Pension (valuation): High</b></p>	<p>Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing the controls in place to ensure that the data provided to the actuary is complete and accurate.</li> <li>• Considering the reasonableness of the assumptions used in the calculation against other local government pension fund actuaries and other observable data.</li> <li>• Agreeing the disclosures in the financial statements to information provided by the actuary.</li> </ul>

# The wider scope of public audit

## Introduction

As described previously, the Code of Audit Practice frames a significant part of our audit responsibilities. Following consideration of the size, nature and risks of Scotland Excel, the application of the full wider scope audit is judged by us not to be appropriate. Our annual audit work will therefore be restricted to an evaluation of financial sustainability.

Our planned audit work is risk based and proportionate. Our initial assessment builds upon our understanding of Scotland Excel's key priorities and risks along with discussions with management and review of committee minutes and key strategy documents.

We have identified one significant risk in relation to financial sustainability as set out in the table below.

Audit planning is a continuous process and we will report all identified significant risks, as they relate to our wider scope audit, in our annual audit report.

## Wider scope significant risks

### Financial sustainability

In December 2023, Scotland Excel considered its revenue budget for 2024/25 and indicative budget estimates for the subsequent two years (to 2026/27).

Scotland Excel is estimating an operating deficit of £89k for core activities at the end of 2023/24 and uncommitted reserves level of £155k. This level of reserves represents 3% of estimated operating income and is treated as a minimum level required for unforeseen cost.

The main cost driver is staff expenditure which is expected to increase over the period of the estimate by 3% each year and represents c.83% of total core activity cost. This cost is more variable for Projects, where staffing levels scale according to the level of project activity each year.

The local authorities' requisitions for 2024/25 have been maintained at current levels with no increase proposed. Whilst indicative budget figures show no increase for 2025/26 but an increase from 2026/27, this is yet to be considered and agreed. These proposed figures would result in an operating surplus totalling £992k for the three-year period, increasing the uncommitted reserves to £1,147k at the end of 2026/27 (or 18.8% of the operating income).

There is a level of uncertainty in the above estimates due to:

- Indirect dependence on the Scottish Government annual allocation of funding to local authorities who in turn fund Scotland Excel activities through their requisitions. The funding levels from the Scottish Government beyond 2024/25 are uncertain and impacted by wider economic factors in Scotland.
- Unpredictability of the projects and rebates income; although Scotland Excel assumes that non-requisition income will represent over 30% of the total income in each of the three years of the financial forecast;
- Scotland Excel faces cost pressures, particularly in its staff cost which make up 83% of its core activities expenditure. Although it is noted that based on advice from Strathclyde Pension Fund, employer contributions are to fall to 6.5% in the next two years and 17.5% in 2026/27.

Scotland Excel's medium to longer term financial planning is therefore challenging due to the wider economic environment and local government funding uncertainties. With the current estimates in place the reserves position at the end of 2026/27 will allow greater flexibility when responding to any unforeseen cost.

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**Our audit response:**

We will review Scotland Excel's arrangements for managing its financial position. Our work will include an assessment of progress made in developing financially sustainable plans which support the delivery of Scotland Excel's statutory functions and strategic objectives.

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# Audit team and timetable

## Audit Team

Our audit team will be as follows:

Role	Name	Email
Engagement Lead	Gary Devlin	Gary.Devlin@azets.co.uk
Engagement Manager	Adrian Kolodziej	Adrian.Kolodziej@azets.co.uk

## Timetable

Please find below confirmation of our proposed timetable for the audit as previously discussed with management:

Audit work/output	Target month/s
Audit planning meeting	18 January 2024
Executive Sub-Committee to consider audit plan	15 March 2024
Receipt of draft accounts and commencement audit fieldwork	July 2024
Independent auditor's report	September 2024
Annual Report to Scotland Excel and the Controller of Audit	20 September 2024

## Our requirements

The audit process is underpinned by effective project management to co-ordinate and apply our resources efficiently to meet your deadlines. It is essential that the audit team and Scotland Excel's finance team work closely together to achieve the above timetable.

In order for us to be able to complete our work in line with the agreed fee and timetable, we require the following:

- Draft financial statements of a good quality by the deadlines agreed with management.

- Good quality working papers at the same time as the draft financial statements. These will be discussed with you in advance to ensure clarity over our expectations
- Ensuring staff are available and on site (as agreed) during the period of the audit
- Prompt and adequate responses to audit queries.

# Audit fee

The quality of audit work is an essential requirement in successfully delivering a fully compliant ISA and Code of Audit Practice audit. Audit Scotland sets an expected audit fee that assumes the body has sound governance arrangements in place, has been operating effectively throughout the year, prepares comprehensive and accurate unaudited accounts and meets the agreed timetable for audit.

The expected fee is reviewed by Audit Scotland each year, based on Audit Scotland's overall budget proposals. The budget proposal and fee levels (for the 2023/24 audits) have been developed in the context of a challenging economic environment, increased expectations on the audit profession and the ongoing process of recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 2023/24 expected audit fee is based on applying a 6% increase to the 2022/23 expected audit fee. This increase is applied on a sector basis and reflects the conditions of the public sector market.

As auditors we negotiate a fee with Scotland Excel during the planning process. The fee may be varied above the expected fee level to reflect the circumstances and local risks within the body.

We propose setting the 2023/24 audit fee at £9,790, which equates to a 7% decrease on the 2022/23 fee. We have increased the auditor remuneration element of the audit fee by 10% to reflect the level of work we consider is required in response to the key audit matters identified in this plan.

<b>Fee element</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Auditor remuneration	24,750	24,630
Pooled costs	820	0
Audit support costs	0	800
Sectoral cap adjustment	(15,780)	(14,920)
<b>Total fee</b>	<b>9,790</b>	<b>10,510</b>

We will take account of the risk exposure of Scotland Excel and the management assurances in place. We assume receipt of the draft working papers at the outset of our on-site final audit visit. If the draft accounts and papers are late, or agreed management assurances are unavailable, we reserve the right to charge an additional fee for additional audit work. An additional fee will be required in relation to any other significant exercises not within our planned audit activity.



# Audit independence and objectivity

## Auditor independence

We are required to communicate on a timely basis all facts and matters that may have a bearing on our independence.

In particular, FRC's Ethical Standard stipulates that where an auditor undertakes non audit work, appropriate safeguards must be applied to reduce or eliminate any threats to independence.

Azets has not been appointed to provide any non-audit services during the year. We confirm that we comply with FRC's Ethical Standard. In our professional judgement, the audit process is independent and our objectivity has not been compromised in any way. In particular there are and have been no relationships between Azets and Scotland Excel, its committee members and senior management that may reasonably be thought to bear on our objectivity and independence.

# Appendices



Appendix 1: Materiality	25
Appendix 2: Responsibilities of the Auditor and Scotland Excel	27

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## Appendix 1: Materiality

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our audit opinion, we also report to those charged with governance and management any uncorrected misstatements of lower value errors to the extent that our audit identifies these.

Under ISA (UK) 260 we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA (UK) 260 defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria.

An omission or misstatement is regarded as material if it would reasonably influence the users of the financial statements. The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our assessment of the risk profile of Scotland Excel and the needs of the users.

When planning, we make judgements about the size of misstatements which we consider to be material, and which provide a basis for determining the nature and extent of our audit procedures. Materiality is revised as our audit progresses, should we become aware of any information that would have caused us to determine a different amount had we known about it during our planning.

Our assessment, at the planning stage, of materiality for the year ended 31 March 2024 was calculated as follows.

### Materiality

	£
<b>Overall materiality for the financial statements</b>	164,000
<b>Performance materiality (75% of materiality)</b>	123,000
<b>Trivial threshold (5% of materiality)</b>	8,200

<b>Materiality</b>	Our initial assessment is based on approximately 2% of Scotland Excel's gross expenditure as disclosed in the 2022/23 audited annual accounts. We consider this benchmark to be the principal consideration for the users of the annual accounts when assessing financial performance of Scotland Excel.
<b>Performance materiality</b>	<p>Performance materiality is the working level of materiality used throughout the audit. We use performance materiality to determine the nature, timing and extent of audit procedures carried out. We perform audit procedures on all transactions, or groups of transactions, and balances that exceed our performance materiality. This means that we perform a greater level of testing on the areas deemed to be at significant risk of material misstatement.</p> <p>Performance materiality is set at a value less than overall materiality for the financial statements as a whole to reduce to an appropriately low level the probability that the aggregate of the uncorrected and undetected misstatements exceed overall materiality.</p>
<b>Trivial misstatements</b>	<p>Trivial misstatements are matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria.</p> <p>Individual errors above this threshold are communicated to those charged with governance.</p>

The Remuneration Report and Related Parties disclosures are material by nature.

In performing our audit, we will consider any errors which cause result in a movement between the relevant bandings on the disclosure table to be material.

For related party transactions, in line with the standards we will consider the significance of the transaction with regard to both Scotland Excel and the counter party, the smaller of which will drive materiality considerations on a transaction by transaction basis.

## Appendix 2: Responsibilities of the Auditor and Scotland Excel

### The Accounts Commission, Controller of Audit and Audit Scotland

The Accounts Commission is an independent public body. Its members are appointed by Scottish Ministers and are responsible for holding local government to account.

Under statute, the Accounts Commission appoints a Controller of Audit to consider the results of the audit of accounts, including the wider-scope responsibilities and Best Value auditing. The Controller of Audit makes reports to the Accounts Commission on matters arising from the accounts and on Best Value and acts independently of the Accounts Commission when reporting to it.

Audit Scotland is an independent statutory body that co-ordinates and supports the delivery of high-quality public sector audit in Scotland. Audit Scotland oversees the appointment and performance of auditors, provides technical support, delivers performance audit and Best Value work programmes and undertakes financial audits of public bodies.

### Auditor responsibilities

#### Code of Audit Practice

The Code of Audit Practice (the [2021 Code](#)) describes the high-level, principles-based purpose and scope of public audit in Scotland.

The Code of Audit Practice outlines the responsibilities of external auditors appointed by the Accounts Commission and it is a condition of our appointment that we follow it.

#### Our responsibilities

Auditor responsibilities are derived from the Code, statute, International Standards on Auditing (UK) and the Ethical Standard for auditors, other professional requirements and best practice, and guidance from Audit Scotland.

We are responsible for the audit of the accounts and the wider-scope responsibilities explained below. We act independently in carrying out our role and in exercising professional judgement. We report to Scotland Excel and others, including Audit Scotland, on the results of our audit work.

Weaknesses or risks, including fraud and other irregularities, identified by auditors, are only those which come to our attention during our normal audit work in accordance with the Code and may not be all that exist.

## Wider scope audit work

Reflecting the fact that public money is involved, public audit is planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector.

The wider scope audit specified by the Code broadens the audit of the accounts to include additional aspects or risks in areas of financial management; financial sustainability; vision, leadership and governance; and use of resources to improve outcomes.

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### Financial management

Financial management means having sound budgetary processes. Audited bodies require to understand the financial environment and whether their internal controls are operating effectively.

#### Auditor considerations

Auditors consider whether the body has effective arrangements to secure sound financial management. This includes the strength of the financial management culture, accountability, and arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and other irregularities.

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### Financial sustainability

Financial sustainability means being able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

#### Auditor considerations

Auditors consider the extent to which audited bodies show regard to financial sustainability. They look ahead to the medium term (two to five years) and longer term (over five years) to consider whether the body is planning effectively so it can continue to deliver services.

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## Vision, leadership and governance

Audited bodies must have a clear vision and strategy and set priorities for improvement within this vision and strategy. They work together with partners and communities to improve outcomes and foster a culture of innovation.



### Auditor considerations

Auditors consider the clarity of plans to implement the vision, strategy and priorities adopted by the leaders of the audited body. Auditors also consider the effectiveness of governance arrangements for delivery, including openness and transparency of decision-making; robustness of scrutiny and shared working arrangements; and reporting of decisions and outcomes, and financial and performance information.

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## Use of resources to improve outcomes

Audited bodies need to make best use of their resources to meet stated outcomes and improvement objectives, through effective planning and working with strategic partners and communities. This includes demonstrating economy, efficiency and effectiveness through the use of financial and other resources, and reporting performance against outcomes.



### Auditor considerations

Auditors consider the clarity of arrangements in place to ensure that resources are deployed to improve strategic outcomes, meet the needs of service users taking account of inequalities, and deliver continuous improvement in priority services.

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## Limited wider scope audit work

The Code of Audit Practice provides for the Accounts Commission to specify an alternative audit approach where an audited body might be considered less complex due to its size and its limited financial activity.

We have concluded, based on an assessment of the nature and circumstances of Scotland Excel, that a limited wider scope audit is appropriate. As such our audit of wider scope areas is restricted to an evaluation of financial sustainability.

## Best value

Appointed auditors have a duty to be satisfied that local government bodies have made proper arrangements to secure best value. We undertake this duty in a way that is proportionate to the size and type of body. We give due regard to:

- How Scotland Excel demonstrates that it is meeting its Best Value responsibilities
- How our work on financial sustainability meets the Best Value responsibilities.

## Audit quality

The Auditor General and the Accounts Commission require assurance on the quality of public audit in Scotland through comprehensive audit quality arrangements that apply to all audit work and providers. These arrangements recognise the importance of audit quality to the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission and provide regular reporting on audit quality and performance.

Audit Scotland maintains and delivers an [Audit Quality Framework](#)

The most recent audit quality report can be found at [Quality of public audit in Scotland: Annual report 2022/23 | Audit Scotland \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)



## Scotland Excel responsibilities

Scotland Excel has primary responsibility for ensuring the proper financial stewardship of its public funds, compliance with relevant legislation and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety and regularity that enables it to successfully deliver its objectives. The features of proper financial stewardship include the following:

Area	Scotland Excel responsibilities
<b>Corporate governance</b>	<p>Scotland Excel is responsible for establishing arrangements to ensure the proper conduct of its affairs including the legality of activities and transactions, and for monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements. Those charged with governance should be involved in monitoring these arrangements.</p>
<b>Financial statements and related reports</b>	<p>Scotland Excel has responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view of the financial position and its expenditure and income, in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework and relevant legislation;</li> <li>• maintaining accounting records and working papers that have been prepared to an acceptable professional standard and support the balances and transactions in its financial statements and related disclosures;</li> <li>• ensuring the regularity of transactions, by putting in place systems of internal control to ensure that they are in accordance with the appropriate authority; and</li> <li>• preparing and publishing, along with the financial statements, an annual governance statement, management commentary (or equivalent) and a remuneration report in accordance with prescribed requirements.</li> </ul> <p>Management commentaries should be fair, balanced and understandable. Management is responsible, with the oversight of those charged with governance, for communicating relevant information to users about the entity and its financial performance, including providing adequate disclosures in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework. The relevant information should be communicated clearly and concisely.</p> <p>Scotland Excel is responsible for developing and implementing effective systems of internal control as well as financial, operational</p>

Area	Scotland Excel responsibilities
	<p>and compliance controls. These systems should support the achievement of its objectives and safeguard and secure value for money from the public funds at its disposal. Scotland Excel is also responsible for establishing effective and appropriate internal audit and risk-management functions.</p>
<b>Standards of conduct for prevention and detection of fraud and error</b>	<p>Scotland Excel is responsible for establishing arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and irregularities, bribery and corruption and also to ensure that its affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of conduct by putting proper arrangements in place.</p>
<b>Financial position</b>	<p>Scotland Excel is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to ensure the financial position is soundly based having regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• such financial monitoring and reporting arrangements as may be specified;</li> <li>• compliance with statutory financial requirements and achievement of financial targets;</li> <li>• balances and reserves, including strategies about levels and their future use;</li> <li>• plans to deal with uncertainty in the medium and long term; and</li> <li>• the impact of planned future policies and foreseeable developments on the financial position.</li> </ul>
<b>Best value</b>	<p>Scotland Excel has a specific responsibility to make arrangements to secure Best Value. Best Value is defined as continuous improvement in the performance of the body's functions. In securing Best Value, Scotland Excel is required to maintain an appropriate balance among:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of its performance of its functions.</li> <li>• The cost to Scotland Excel of that performance.</li> </ul>

Area	Scotland Excel responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cost to persons of any service provided by it for them on a wholly or partly rechargeable basis.</li> </ul> <p>In maintaining that balance, Scotland Excel shall have regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Effectiveness</li> <li>• Economy</li> <li>• The need to meet the equal opportunity requirements.</li> </ul> <p>Scotland Excel should discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.</p>

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