

<b>REPORT TO</b>	<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>
Governance Committee	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2015

Report template revised June 2008



<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>ITEM</b>
Compliance with International Auditing Standards	N/A	G Barclay & D Highton	8

## SUMMARY AND LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The purpose of this report is to enable the Governance Committee as ‘those charged with governance’ and the Chief Executive on behalf on ‘management’ to provide a range of assurances being sought by the external auditors – Grant Thornton as part of their audit of the Council’s 2014/15 accounts. The specific assurances being sought by Grant Thornton are set out in the letters appended to this report.

The report links with all of the corporate priorities, in particular to be an ‘efficient, effective and exceptional Council’.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That, subject to consideration by the Committee, the Chairman of the Governance Committee and the Chief Executive be enabled to sign the assurance letters requested by Grant Thornton.

## DETAILS AND REASONING

Recently Grant Thornton wrote to the Chief Executive (Appendix A) and the Chair of the Governance Committee (Appendix B) requesting information to assist with their audit of the Council’s 2014/15 financial statements. Given that the assurances requested would need to rely on very similar evidence to that being gathered by Internal Audit to compile the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), and in the interests of transparency, it was agreed with Grant Thornton that responses to their letters would be provided following consideration at this meeting.

**Similar requests for assurance were made in respect of the 2013/14 financial statements and therefore the information provided in this year’s responses is in effect an update of the information which was supplied last year.**

Having reviewed the specific information being sought, Internal Audit is satisfied that the Council’s arrangements are such that positive assurances can be given in response to Grant Thornton. Principally, this conclusion is arrived at through the:

- comprehensive assurance and evidence gathered in compiling the AGS;
- ongoing work of the Governance Committee and Internal Audit scrutinising and challenging the Council’s arrangements;
- work of the Chief Financial Officer and the financial arrangements and controls including financial regulations, that have been adopted; and
- work of the Monitoring Officer supported by the Legal Services team.

Further detailed information to support Internal Audit’s review and conclusions can be found in the tables at Appendices C and D.

## WIDER IMPLICATIONS

In the preparation of this report, consideration has been given to the impact of its proposals in all the areas listed below and the table shows any implications in respect of each of these. The risk assessment which has been carried out forms part of the background papers to the report.

<b>FINANCIAL</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising directly from this report.		
<b>LEGAL</b>	The report demonstrates compliance with International Standards on Auditing (ISA (UK & I)).		
<b>RISK</b>	This report provides assurances that the Council has in place appropriate measures to mitigate the risk areas highlighted by Grant Thornton.		
<b>OTHER (see below)</b>			
<i>Asset Management</i>	<i>Corporate Plans and Policies</i>	<i>Crime and Disorder</i>	<i>Efficiency Savings/Value for Money</i>
<i>Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion</i>	<i>Freedom of Information/ Data Protection</i>	<i>Health and Safety</i>	<i>Health Inequalities</i>
<i>Human Rights Act 1998</i>	<i>Implementing Electronic Government</i>	<i>Staffing, Training and Development</i>	<i>Sustainability</i>

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Annual Governance Statement  
 Service Assurance Statements  
 Evidence collated by Internal Audit to support responses

Mr Mike Nuttall  
Chief Executive  
South Ribble Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
West Paddock  
Leyland  
PR25 1DH

Date 30th January 2015

Dear Mike

**South Ribble Borough Council Financial Statements for the year end 31 March 2015**

As you will be aware each year as your external auditor we contact you to comply with International Auditing Standards to gain an understanding of the Council's management processes in place to prevent and detect fraud and to ensure compliance with law and regulations. International Auditing Standards also place certain obligations on auditors to document Management's view on some key areas affecting the financial statements.

To assist us in meeting these requirements, I would be grateful if you would consider and formally respond to the matters set out in the attached schedule. In completing this task, you may wish to take into account the views of other directors where you think appropriate. The schedule relates to operational issues as well as the financial statements.

In addition to our request to management, we also need to gain an understanding of how the Governance Committee maintains oversight of the above processes. I have also attached a copy of the letter that I intend to send to the Chair of the Governance Committee, for your information:

In preparing your responses, it would assist me greatly if you could include a summary of evidence that you have relied on to inform your responses. We suggested that it may be useful to co-ordinate your response with the response from the Chair of the Governance Committee.

If you are in agreement I would be grateful for your formal response by 31st May 2015, thus ensuring it covers the full twelve month period for 2014/15. Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss anything in relation to this request.

Yours sincerely

Gareth Winstanley

Manager For Grant Thornton UK LLP

Cllr Warren Bennett  
Governance Committee Chair  
South Ribble Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
West Paddock  
Leyland  
PR25 1DH

Date: 30th January 2015

Dear Cllr Bennett

**South Ribble Borough Council Financial Statements for the year end 31 March 2015 -  
Understanding how the Governance Committee gains assurance from management**

As you will be aware each year as your external auditor we contact you to comply with International Auditing Standards to establish an understanding of how the Governance Committee gains assurance over management processes and arrangements.

I would be grateful, therefore, if you could write to me in your role as the Governance Committee Chairman with your responses to the following questions.

1 How does the Governance Committee oversee management's processes in relation to:

- carrying out an assessment of the risk the financial statements may be materially misstated due to fraud or error?
- identifying and responding to the risk of breaches of internal control?
- identifying and responding to risks of fraud at the Council ( including any specific risks of fraud which management have identified or that have been brought to its attention, or classes of transactions, account balances, or disclosure for which a risk of fraud is likely to exist)?
- communicating to employees its views on appropriate business practice and ethical behavior (for example by updating, communicating and monitoring against the codes of conduct)?
- how will the Governance Committee satisfy itself that it is appropriate to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements?

2 Do you have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged frauds? If so, please provide details.

3 How does the Governance Committee gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with by the Council?

4 Are you aware of any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements?

I have attached a separate schedule which explores these areas in more detail. Could you please complete this schedule and return it to me.

For information, we are also required to make enquiries of management and recently sent a letter and schedule of questions to the Chief Executive, (the schedule of questions is also attached ).

We suggested that it may be useful to co-ordinate your response with that of management.

If you are in agreement I would be grateful for your formal response by 31st May 2015, thus ensuring it covers the full twelve month period for 2014/15.

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss anything in relation to this request.

Yours sincerely

Gareth J Winstanley  
Manager For Grant Thornton UK LLP

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24<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Gareth Winstanley  
Grant Thornton UK LLP  
4 Spinningfields  
Manchester  
M3 3EB

Dear Gareth

**Audit of South Ribble Borough Council Financial Statements - Compliance with International Auditing Standards**

With reference to your letter of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in respect of the above, I have now commissioned a review of the management processes that are in place within the Council which address the specific questions you raised.

These are contained in the attached table which was formally reported to and discussed by the Governance Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015. I trust that this provides you with the necessary assurances that the Council's arrangements are effective and that there are no specific concerns or issues to report.

Yours sincerely

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Mike Nuttall  
Chief Executive  
South Ribble Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
West Paddock  
Leyland  
PR25 1DH

## Responses from Management:

Auditor question	Response
What do you regard as the key events or issues that will have a significant impact on the financial statements for 2014/15 and which we should consider as part of our audit approach?	The Business Rates Retention Regime; and the Payment of the Pensions Contribution – fixed sum.
Have you considered the appropriateness of the accounting policies adopted by the Authority? Have there been any events or transactions that may cause you to change or adopt new accounting policies?	Production of Medium Term Financial Strategy sets framework for policy and spending decisions.
Are you aware of any changes to the regulatory environment that may have a significant impact on the Authority's financial statements?	Role of Monitoring Officer and team of qualified lawyers to advise officers. System of internal audit, Governance Group, Governance Committee, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. CIPFA Code of Conduct for finance officers.
How would you assess the quality of the Authority's internal control processes?	The Council has the following robust measures in place: Annual assessment against the Local Code of Governance. Annually completed service assurance statements. Independent sources of assurance obtained from Services. Internal Audit compliant with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
How would you assess the process for reviewing the effectiveness of internal control?	Highlighted areas for improvement included within the Annual Governance Statement.  Annual and interim Internal Audit reports to the Governance Committee.
How do the Authority's risk management processes link to financial reporting?	Key financial systems reviewed annually by Internal Audit. No significant control weaknesses identified.
How would you assess the Authority's arrangements for identifying and responding to the risk of fraud?	Internal Audit Risk Assessment updated over the course of the year Internal Audit annual plan agreed by Senior Management Team and Governance Committee. Monitoring of management actions by Internal Audit and reporting to Governance Committee
What has been the outcome of these arrangements so far this year?	Internal Audit annual plan agreed by Senior Management Team and Governance Committee. Audit Plan completed, no significant control weaknesses identified.
What have you determined to be the classes of accounts, transactions and disclosures most at risk to fraud?	Key financial systems reviewed annually by Internal Audit. No significant control weaknesses identified.
Are you aware of any whistle blowing potential or complaints by potential whistle blowers? If so, what has been your response?	None for 2014-15
Have any reports been made under the Bribery Act?	None for 2014-15

As a management team, how do you communicate risk issues (including fraud) to those charged with governance?	Annual and interim reports Internal Audit reports to Governance Committee. External Audit assurance On-going monitoring and reporting of the Strategic Risk Register to Governance Committee.
As a management team, how do you communicate to employees your views on business practices and ethical behaviour?	Internal Audit has time dedicated to fraud awareness / anti-fraud and corruption in the annual plan. Local Code of Corporate Governance On-going promotion of core values Register of interests / gifts and hospitality Adherence to Codes of Conduct Ethical guidance / policies on the intranet Zero tolerance of fraud Compliance with corporate policies relating to Whistle Blowing, Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Money Laundering.
What are your policies and procedures for identifying, assessing and accounting for litigation and claims?	The Council has a number of qualified legal staff who are trained and experienced to identify any possible legal liability. In situations where potential legal liability is identified then the Council's Legal team will refer the matter to the Assurance team for liaison with our insurers as appropriate.
Is there any use of financial instruments, including derivatives?	The Council discloses movements in financial instruments in note 16 to the Statement of Accounts. The financial instruments include borrowing, investments, debtors and creditors, all relating to the normal course of business.
Are you aware of any significant transaction outside the normal course of business?	No
Are you aware of any changes in circumstances that would lead to impairment of non-current assets?	No
Are you aware of any guarantee contracts?	None for 2014-15
Are you aware of allegations of fraud, errors, or other irregularities during the period?	An Estates Officer raised concerns about potential money laundering concerning one of our tenants. The Deputy Money Laundering officer looked into the matter and concluded that no action was required.
Are you aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws or regulations or is the Authority on notice of any such possible instances of non-compliance?	We are not aware of any instances of failure to comply with legislation.
Have there been any examinations, investigations or inquiries by any licensing or authorising bodies or the tax and customs authorities?	None for 2014-15
Are you aware of any transactions, events and conditions (or changes in these) that may give rise to recognition or disclosure of significant accounting estimates that require significant judgement?	Yes – Business Rate Relief
Where the financial statements include amounts based on significant estimates, how have the accounting estimates been made, what is the nature of the data used, and the degree of estimate uncertainty inherent in the estimate?	Judgements have been made with regard to successful appeals made against RV. Outstanding Appeal data from VOA and forecasting outcomes on past trend data. Outcome are uncertain.
What is the status of contingent assets and liabilities reported in prior years?	Contingent Liabilities (SRBC): The litigation in respect of the claim for a refund of property search fees is at the settlement stage and as at 3/6/15 we

	<p>are waiting for confirmation of the amount of the final settlement. The figure is expected to be close to the £0.200m reported in the Contingent Liability note in the 2013/14 SOA.</p> <p>Contingent Assets (SRBC): The claim to HMRC in respect of VAT on Trade Waste income was in two parts: the four-year cap period and the open period (periods outside the 4 year limitation). The Council has received a repayment from HMRC in respect of part of the four-year cap period during 2014/15.</p>
Are you aware of the existence of loss contingencies and/or un-asserted claims that may affect the financial statements?	No
Has the management team carried out an assessment of the going concern basis for preparing the financial statements? What was the outcome of that assessment?	Preparation of a 3 year budget projection included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to identify any financial risks facing the council.
Can you provide details of those solicitors utilised by the Authority during the year. Please indicate where they are working on open litigation or contingencies from prior years?	<p>We have instructed external solicitors to assist us on a number of issues throughout the year including property and contractual matters.</p> <p>Solicitors have included Weightmans and Addleshaw Goddard. We instruct solicitors via the North West Consortium – this is something that local authorities in the north west of England have set up. It ensures that we can access high quality legal advice at preferential rates.</p>
Can you provide details of other advisors consulted during the year and the issue on which they were consulted?	We have also instructed Counsel on a number of issues. The main areas where we have sought such support is planning and noise nuisance. The Chambers we most frequently use is Kings Chambers, Manchester.
Have any of the Authority service providers reported any items of fraud, non-compliance with laws and regulations or uncorrected misstatements which would affect the financial statements?	No
How have any key issues identified in the prior year as internal control deficiencies been addressed?	None identified

24<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Gareth Winstanley  
Grant Thornton UK LLP  
4 Hardman Square  
Spinningfields  
Manchester  
M3 3EB

Dear Gareth

**Audit of South Ribble Borough Council Financial Statements -  
Compliance with International Auditing Standards**

Further to your letter of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in respect of the above, please find attached a table providing you with the necessary information that you seek in relation to the specific issues you raised to assist with planning for the 2014/15 financial statements audit.

The Governance Committee's role is to work with and challenge officers and to provide independent scrutiny of the adequacy of the control environment, the Council's financial and non-financial performance and to oversee the financial reporting process.

The attachment was formally reported to and discussed by the Governance Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and I trust that this provides you with the necessary assurances that the Council's arrangements are effective and that there are no specific concerns or issues to report.

Yours sincerely

Councillor A Ogilvie  
Chair of the Governance Committee  
South Ribble Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
West Paddock  
Leyland

## Response from Governance Committee Chair

Issues	How the Governance Committee demonstrates that it secures the relevant assurances
<p>How does the Governance Committee oversee management's processes in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrying out an assessment of the risk the financial statements may be materially misstated due to fraud or error</li> <li>• Identifying and responding to the risk of breaches of internal control</li> <li>• identifying and responding to risks of fraud in the organisation ( including any specific risks of fraud which management have identified or that have been brought to its attention, or classes of transactions, account balances, or disclosure for which a risk of fraud is likely to exist)</li> <li>• Communicating to employees its views on appropriate business practice and ethical behavior (for example by updating, communicating and monitoring against the codes of conduct)?</li> <li>• How will the Governance Committee satisfy itself that it is appropriate to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements?</li> </ul>	<p>Receipt of Internal Audit's Annual Report including audit opinion from the Head of Shared Assurance</p> <p>Receipt of assurance from Internal Audit following the review of key financial systems on an annual basis</p> <p>Receipt of Annual Governance Statement</p> <p>Promotion of core values</p> <p>Publicity of Codes of Conduct</p> <p>Approval of the Whistle-Blowing, Anti-Fraud &amp; Corruption, Fraud Response and Anti-Money Laundering policies.</p>
<p>Do you have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged frauds? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>No - receipt of quarterly Internal Audit reports.</p> <p>NFI results</p> <p>Publicity of successful prosecutions by BEU</p>
<p>How does the Governance Committee gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with by the Council?</p>	<p>The Monitoring Officer has attended Governance Committee on a regular basis.</p> <p>Any issues would be brought to the attention of Committee.</p>
<p>Are you aware of any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements?</p>	<p>The only litigation that the Governance committee is aware of that could affect the financial statements is the litigation against all local authorities by property search companies in relation to personal search fees..</p>

## Response from Governance Committee Chair

### Fraud risk assessment

Auditor Question	Response
Has the Authority assessed the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements due to fraud?	Fraud risks are considered as part of the Council's risk management arrangements and high risk areas are considered in the Internal Audit risk assessment and Internal Audit plan.
What are the results of this process?	No significant weaknesses identified
What processes does the Authority have in place to identify and respond to risks of fraud?	<p>Promotion of core values</p> <p>Publicity of Codes of Conduct</p> <p>Whistle-Blowing, Anti-Fraud &amp; Corruption, Fraud Response , Anti-Money Laundering and Anti Bribery Policies.</p>
Have any specific fraud risks, or areas with a high risk of fraud, been identified and what has been done to mitigate these risks?	<p>No - we do not currently have any concerns and / or suspect fraud.</p> <p>Fraud risks are considered as part of the Council's risk management arrangements and high risk areas are considered in the Internal Audit risk assessment and Internal Audit plan.</p>
Are internal controls, including segregation of duties, in place and operating effectively?	The opinion of the Head of Shared Assurance in the 2014/2015 Internal Audit Annual Report is that the Council continues to operate within a strong internal control environment
If not, where are the risk areas and what mitigating actions have been taken?	All areas considered within the Internal Audit Risk Assessment
Are there any areas where there is a potential for override of controls or inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process (for example because of undue pressure to achieve financial targets)?	No – All finance department services and records are available for audit inspection.
Are there any areas where there is a potential for misreporting?	No – Reporting is balanced back to the ledger.
How does the Authority exercise oversight over management's processes for identifying and responding to risks of fraud?	<p>Internal Audit risk assessment</p> <p>Internal Audit annual plan agreed by Senior Management Team and Governance Committee.</p> <p>Monitoring of management actions by Internal Audit and reporting to Governance Committee.</p>
What arrangements are in place to report fraud issues and risks to the Authority?	<p>Annual and interim reports Internal Audit reports to Governance Committee.</p> <p>External Audit assurance</p> <p>On-going monitoring and reporting of the Strategic Risk Register to Governance Committee.</p>
How does the Authority communicate and encourage ethical behaviour of its staff and contractors?	<p>Internal Audit has time dedicated to fraud awareness / anti-fraud and corruption in the annual plan.</p> <p>Local Code of Corporate Governance</p> <p>On-going promotion of core values</p> <p>Register of interests / gifts and hospitality</p>

	Adherence to Codes of Conduct Ethical guidance / policies on the need to know section of the intranet Zero tolerance of fraud Compliance with corporate policies relating to Whistle Blowing, Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Anti money laundering.
How do you encourage staff to report their concerns about fraud? Have any significant issues been reported?	Governance documents including the Whistleblowing Policy, Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Fraud Response Plan are all available on the intranet.
Are you aware of any related party relationships or transactions that could give rise to risks of fraud?	We do checks every year as part of closure of accounts process and run extracts from CRs to test
Are you aware of any instances of actual, suspected or alleged, fraud, either within the Trust as a whole or within specific departments since 1 April 2014?	None for 2014-15

### Law and regulation

Auditor Question	Response
What arrangements does the Authority have in place to prevent and detect non-compliance with laws and regulations?	Role of Monitoring Officer and team of qualified lawyers to advise officers.  System of internal audit, Governance Group, Governance Committee, Standing Orders and Financial Rules
How does management gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with?	Annual and interim reports Internal Audit reports to Governance Committee.  External Audit assurance  On-going monitoring and reporting of the Strategic Risk Register to Governance Committee.
How is the Authority provided with assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with?	System of internal audit, Governance Group, Governance Committee, Standing Orders and Financial Rules
Have there been any instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with law and regulation since 1 April 2014?	None for 2014-15
What arrangements does the Authority have in place to identify, evaluate and account for litigation or claims?	Very little litigation against this Council for uninsured risks. Any major issues would be reported to CEO / Section 151 Officer
Is there any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements?	The litigation in respect of the claim for a refund of property search fees is at settlement stage and is as reported in the Contingent Liability note in the 2013-14 SOA.
Have there been any reports from other regulatory bodies, such as HM Revenues and Customs, which indicate non-compliance?	None for 2014-15