YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY **ITEM 10**

Committee **AUDIT AND REVIEW**
Date: **12 July 2022**

Report: **EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT**

Purpose of the report

1. To present the External Auditor's Annual Report, summarising the significant findings arising from the 2020/21 audit.

Recommendation

2. Members are requested to note this report.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- **Corporate Plan**, Objective 36: Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance Report.

Background

4. Completion of the external audit of the Authority's annual accounts for 2020/21 was delayed significantly, due to pressures experienced by our external auditor, Ernst & Young LLP (EY). Such pressures are a national problem, being the outcome of a number of well-publicised causes, including changes to audit requirements, the availability of suitably qualified staff and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Our 2020/21 accounts were finally signed off on 27 April 2022, the external auditor arriving at an unqualified opinion, and with no going concern or value for money issues identified; the audited accounts are available at https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2022/04/Statement-of-Final-Accounts-2020-21-Apr-22.pdf . This late sign-off (in April) needs to be seen in context: Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DHLUC) figures showed that, nationally, over 45% of local government audits for 2020/21 were still outstanding as at the end of May 2022.

6. The remaining outcome required from the external audit 'cycle' was the issuing of the Auditor's Annual Report: this is now attached to this report. As explained in the 'Executive Summary' section of the Report, no problems were identified in relation to the 2020/21 audit, and an unqualified audit opinion was given. This provides a level of assurance over the adequacy of the systems used in preparing the annual accounts.

7. The process of issuing this Report enables the external auditor to bring directly to Members attention any issues that they might identify during their audit work. This ‘direct line’ for reporting helps to strengthen the Authority’s approach to corporate governance.

Richard Burnett
Director of Corporate Services
30 June 2022

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

Auditor's Annual Report

Year ended 31 March 2021

12 July 2022

Building a better working world

Contents

Section	Page
01 - Executive Summary	03
02 - Purpose and responsibilities	06
03 - Financial statements audit	08
04 - Value for Money	11
05 – Other reporting issues	20
Appendix 1 – Fees	22

Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) issued the "Statement of responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies". It is available from the PSAA website (https://www.psaa.co.uk/audit-quality/statement-of-responsibilities/)).The Statement of responsibilities serves as the formal terms of engagement between appointed auditors and audited bodies. It summarises where the different responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas.

The "Terms of Appointment and further guidance (updated April 2018)" issued by the PSAA sets out additional requirements that auditors must comply with, over and above those set out in the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice (the Code) and in legislation, and covers matters of practice and procedure which are of a recurring nature.

This report is made solely to the Audit & Review Committee and management of Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority in accordance with the statement of responsibilities. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Audit & Review Committee and management of Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority those matters we are required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Audit & Review Committee and management of Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority for this report or for the opinions we have formed. It should not be provided to any third-party without our prior written consent.

Our Complaints Procedure – If at any time you would like to discuss with us how our service to you could be improved, or if you are dissatisfied with the service you are receiving, you may take the issue up with your usual partner or director contact. If you prefer an alternative route, please contact Hywel Ball, our Managing Partner, 1 More London Place, London SE1 2AF. We undertake to look into any complaint carefully and promptly and to do all we can to explain the position to you. Should you remain dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, you may of course take matters up with our professional institute. We can provide further information on how you may contact our professional institute.

Section 1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary: Key conclusions from our 2020/21 audit

Area of work	Conclusion
Opinion on the Authority's:	
Financial statements	Unqualified – the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2021 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended. The financial statements have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2020/21. We issued our auditor's report on 27 April 2022.
Going concern	We have concluded that the Section 151 Treasurer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.
Consistency of the other information published with the financial statements	Financial information published with the financial statements was consistent with the audited accounts.

Area of work	Conclusion
Reports by exception:	
Value for money (VFM)	We had no matters to report by exception on the Authority's VFM arrangements. We have included our VFM commentary in Section 04.
Consistency of the annual governance statement	We were satisfied that the annual governance statement was consistent with our understanding of the Authority.
Public interest report and other auditor powers	We had no reason to use our auditor powers.

Executive Summary: Key conclusions from our 2020/21 audit

As a result of the work we carried out we have also:

Outcomes	Conclusion
Issued a report to those charged with governance of the Authority communicating significant findings resulting from our audit.	We issued an Audit Results Report in April 2022.
Issued a certificate that we have completed the audit in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the National Audit Office's 2020 Code of Audit Practice.	We have not yet issued our certificate for 2020/21 as we have not yet performed the procedures required by the National Audit Office on the Whole of Government Accounts submission. The guidance for 2020/21 is delayed and has not yet been issued.

Fees

We carried out our audit of the Authority's financial statements in line with PSAA Ltd's "Statement of Responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies" and "Terms of Appointment and further guidance (updated April 2018)". As outlined in the Audit Results Report we were required to carry out additional audit procedures to address additional audit work required as a result of the revised ISAs that are in scope for this year end in relation to estimates and going concern, along with the additional work required for the revised VfM arrangements. As a result, we will discuss an associated additional fee with the Director of Corporate Services. We include details of the final audit fees in Appendix 1.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Authority staff for their assistance during the course of our work.

Hassan Rohimun

Associate Partner
For and on behalf of Ernst & Young LLP

Section 2

Purpose and responsibilities

Purpose and responsibilities

This report summarises our audit work on the 2020/21 financial statements.

Purpose

The purpose of the auditor's annual report is to bring together all of the auditor's work over the year. A core element of the report is the commentary on VFM arrangements, which aims to draw to the attention of the Authority or the wider public relevant issues, recommendations arising from the audit and follow-up of recommendations issued previously, along with the auditor's view as to whether they have been implemented satisfactorily.

Responsibilities of the appointed auditor

We have undertaken our 2020/21 audit work in accordance with the Audit Plan that we issued on 28 September 2021. We have complied with the NAO's 2020 Code of Audit Practice, International Standards on Auditing (UK), and other guidance issued by the NAO.

As auditors we are responsible for:

Expressing an opinion on:

- The 2020/21 financial statements;
- Conclusions relating to going concern; and
- The consistency of other information published with the financial statements, including the annual report.

Reporting by exception:

- If the governance statement does not comply with relevant guidance or is not consistent with our understanding of the Authority;
- If we identify a significant weakness in the Authority's arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
- Any significant matters that are in the public interest.

Responsibilities of the Authority

The Authority is responsible for preparing and publishing its financial statements, annual report and governance statement. It is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Section 3

Financial Statement Audit

Financial Statement Audit

We have issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's 2020/21 financial statements.

Key issues

The Annual Report and Accounts is an important tool for the Authority to show how it has used public money and how it can demonstrate its financial management and financial health.

On 27 April 2022, we issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements. We reported our detailed findings in our Audit Results Report in April 2022. We outline below the key issues identified as part of our audit, reported against the significant risks and other areas of audit focus we included in our Audit Plan.

Significant risk	Conclusion
Misstatements due to fraud or error - management override of controls An ever present risk that management is in a unique position to commit fraud because of its ability to manipulate accounting records directly or indirectly, and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.	We did not identify any: • material weaknesses in controls or evidence of material management override; or • instances of inappropriate judgements being applied.
Misclassification of revenue and expenditure Under ISA 240 there is a presumed risk that revenue may be misstated due to improper revenue recognition. In the public sector, this requirement is modified by Practice Note 10 issued by the Financial Reporting Authority, which states that auditors should also consider the risk that material misstatements may occur by the manipulation of expenditure recognition. We have identified an opportunity and incentive to capitalise expenditure under the accounting framework, to remove it from the general fund.	We did not identify any: • instances of incorrect capitalisation of revenue expenditure; • instances of expenditure being posted into the incorrect period; or • instances of revenue being posted into the incorrect period.

Continued over.

Financial Statement Audit (continued)

In addition to the significant risks, we also concluded on the following areas of audit focus.

Other area of audit focus	Conclusion
Going concern disclosures The Authority is required to carry out an assessment of its ability to continue as a going concern for the foreseeable future, being at least 12 months after the date of the approval of the financial statements. There is a risk that the financial statements do not adequately disclose the assessment made, the assumptions used and the relevant risks and challenges that have impacted the going concern period.	We agreed with management's assessment that the Authority remains a going concern, and the disclosures appropriately present that assessment and the risks and assumptions management have considered. The Authority's provided cash flow projections and revised budgets which demonstrate that the Authority forecasts continued liquidity beyond the period of our assessment. We concluded that there was no impact on our audit report.
Pension Fund Liability Valuation The Pension Fund liability is a material balance in the Balance Sheet. Accounting for this scheme involves significant estimation and judgement and therefore management engages an actuary to undertake the calculations on their behalf. ISAs (UK and Ireland) 500 and 540 require us to undertake procedures on the use of management experts and the assumptions underlying fair value estimates.	• We completed our review of the actuary, accounting entries and disclosures and carried out procedures to assess the assurance provided by the North Yorkshire Pension Fund auditor over the information supplied to the actuary in relation to the Authority. • We engaged our EY Pensions Specialist to recalculate the pension liability based on the assumptions and data in the IAS 19 report to confirm accuracy. Having implemented these checks we did not identify any misstatements.
Valuation of land and buildings The Authority has a large and complex asset base that makes up a significant proportion of its balance sheet. Valuation of assets is an area subject to professional estimation and therefore a higher inherent risk of misstatement. A small movement in these assumptions can have a material impact on the financial statements.	We did not identify any material issues in the assumptions and judgements applied in the valuation of land and buildings of the Authority.

Audit differences

We agreed with management a small number of minor disclosure adjustments made to improve the presentation and readability of the financial statements.

Our application of materiality

When establishing our overall audit strategy, we determined a magnitude of uncorrected misstatements that we judged would be material for the financial statements as a whole.

Item	Thresholds applied
Planning materiality	We determined planning materiality to be £174k as 2% of gross revenue expenditure reported in the accounts. We consider gross revenue expenditure to be one of the principal considerations for stakeholders in assessing the financial performance of the Authority.
Reporting threshold	In our Audit Planning Report to the Audit & Review Committee we outlined that we would report to the Committee all audit differences in excess of £9k.

Section 4

Value for Money

Value for Money (VFM)

We did not identify any risks of significant weaknesses in the Authority's VFM arrangements for 2020/21.

We had no matters to report by exception in the audit report.

Our VFM commentary highlights relevant issues for the Authority and the wider public.

Scope and risks

We have complied with the NAO's 2020 Code and the NAO's Auditor Guidance Note in respect of VFM. We presented our VFM risk assessment to the 28 September 2021 Audit & Review Committee meeting which was based on a combination of our cumulative audit knowledge and experience, our review of Authority and committee reports, meetings with the Head of Finance and evaluation of associated documentation through our regular engagement with the finance team. We reported that we had not identified any risks of significant weaknesses in the Authority's VFM arrangements for 2020/21.

Reporting

We completed our planned VFM arrangements work in September 2021 and did not identify any significant weaknesses in the Authority's VFM arrangements. As a result, we had no matters to report by exception in the audit report on the financial statements.

VFM Commentary

In accordance with the NAO's 2020 Code, we are required to report a commentary against three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability
  How the Authority plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance
  How the Authority ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness:
  How the Authority uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

Introduction and context

The 2020 Code confirms that the focus of our work should be on the arrangements that the audited body is expected to have in place, based on the relevant governance framework for the type of public sector body being audited, together with any other relevant guidance or requirements. Audited bodies are required to maintain a system of internal control that secures value for money from the funds available to them whilst supporting the achievement of their policies, aims and objectives. They are required to comment on the operation of their governance framework during the reporting period, including arrangements for securing value for money from their use of resources, in a governance statement.

We have previously reported the VFM work we have undertaken during the year including our risk assessment. The commentary below aims to provide a clear narrative that explains our judgements in relation to our findings and any associated local context.

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable it to plan and manage its resources to ensure that it can continue to deliver its services.

Financial sustainability

Based on our review of Authority minutes, documents and reports presented at relevant Committee meetings, the Authority has appropriate arrangements in place to enable it to carry out its plan and manage its resources effectively. This ensures that the Authority can continue to deliver its services.

How the body ensures that it identifies all the significant financial pressures that are relevant to its short and medium-term plans and builds these into them

The Authority Produces a medium term budget each year which has a detailed budget for the coming year and two indicative years' budgets for the following two years. For the budget set for 2021/22, virements were added to the starting position if new projects are identified in year or if decisions are taken meaning a budget is no longer required the financial position is considered with updates made to the original budget.

Financial sustainability (continued)

How the body plans to bridge its funding gaps and identifies achievable savings

The Authority looks for opportunities outside its core grant to bring in external funding, providing the required outputs meet with National Park purposes and objectives. The Authority have been successful to date with the level of external funding being almost at the same level as the Core Grant.

Currently the level of Core Grant has been frozen for the next two financial periods with an option being retained by DEFRA to freeze it for a third year. This, although not at a desired position, has provided the certainty for the following budgets to be set. The Authority has a record of reviewing service delivery to ensure it is financially sustainable and given the challenging funding position continued focus will be required by the Authority to ensure there are plans in place to address any identified shortfalls.

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable it to plan and manage its resources to ensure that it can continue to deliver its services.

How the body plans finances to support the sustainable delivery of services in accordance with strategic and statutory priorities

The Authority publishes a 5 year Management Plan which is compiled with stakeholders and other bodies within the National Park, which sets out the priority areas of focus. The Authority produces a Corporate Plan which breaks this down into actions and objectives for the coming year, with annual targets towards reaching the goals of the National Park Plan. Priorities are set by Members and finances are allocated broadly in line with the identified status of programmes with “priority” programmes receiving the most financial support to meet objectives. Overheads are allocated funding on the basis of need, all statutory officer posts are in place, and audit, insurance and other statutory functions are properly financed.

How the body ensures that its financial plan is consistent with other plans such as workforce, capital, investment, and other operational planning which may include working with other local public bodies as part of a wider system

The Authority has 5 year capital plans covering IT infrastructure, Estates Infrastructure, and Ranger Equipment, this is earmarked in reserves, and adjusted each year to ensure they reflect the identified longer term.

Financial sustainability (continued)

How the body identifies and manages risks to financial resilience, e.g. unplanned changes in demand, including challenge of the assumptions underlying its plans.

The Authority has a risk management process, covering operational and strategic risks. The core identified financial risk is the continuity of government funding. On an annual basis the Authority updates financial plans following the confirmation of funding levels to assess service delivery requirements against the overall finding position. The key 'paid for' services, are Planning and Car Parking. Car Parking income is monitored very closely, representing, as it does, the largest source of non-Defra income (excluding short term ring-fenced grants), past history is used to project future income budgets, which are deliberately set conservatively.

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable it to plan and manage its resources to ensure that it can continue to deliver its services.

Governance

How the body monitors and assesses risk and how the body gains assurance over the effective operation of internal controls, including arrangements to prevent and detect fraud

The Authority has an established Risk Management process which includes periodically full reviews of the entire risk register. The Authority has an established internal control framework, with financial controls being overseen by the Authority's finance team and internal controls are subject to review on an annual basis via the Authority's internal audit programme. The Authority's Monitoring officer provides advice on the legal implications of any decisions as part of the governance arrangements of the Authority.

How the body approaches and carries out its annual budget setting process

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable to make informed decisions and properly manage its risks.

As part of the annual budget setting process individual posts are used to set the salary budget, each Director along with budget managers completes a budget bid for every programme, and corporate managers use the prior year allocation amended for known changes in circumstances as the basis for the proposed budget allocation. This information feeds into a central budget sheet which is discussed at a Senior Managers Meeting with Directors and the Monitoring Officer. Any new posts are discussed along with any proposed new expenditure before being agreed. Income streams are only included at this point if confirmed or substantially certain to go ahead. If there is a shortfall the Senior Management Team will assess if the gap can be addressed through the use of general reserves or whether budget proposals need to be amended. The draft budget is presented to Members (Authority) meeting by the end of March to review, and, if agreed it is set as the budget for the following year.

How the body ensures effective processes and systems are in place to ensure budgetary control; to communicate relevant, accurate and timely management information (including non-financial information where appropriate); supports its statutory financial reporting requirements; and ensures corrective action is taken where needed.

The Head of Finance produces monthly financial management reports for Senior Management Team (SMT) who discuss the figures at SMT meetings, this is also copied to Heads of Sections and Budget Managers, who are asked to feedback any issues impacting on their budgets. Quarterly reports are produced for Members and they considered at meetings of the Finance & Resource Committee, these quarterly reports are all publicly available. Members also receive updated objectives reporting so they can assess how the Authority is performing against the annual non-financial targets.

Governance (continued)

How the body ensures it makes properly informed decisions, supported by appropriate evidence and allowing for challenge and transparency. This includes arrangements for effective challenge from those charged with governance/Audit & Review Committee.

Governance at the Authority is achieved within a framework of delegation and supporting financial regulations. This is a formalised approach, with the necessary supporting information supplied at the point that decision-making takes place for example detailed budget information, supplied to the Finance and Resources Committee when the annual draft budget is prepared.

How the body monitors and ensures appropriate standards, such as meeting legislative/regulatory requirements and standards in terms of officer or member behaviour (such as gifts and hospitality or declarations/conflicts of interests).

The Monitoring Officer provides guidance as part of the governance processes to ensure that in advance of decisions being made by the Authority there is consideration of legislative and regulatory requirements. The Monitoring Officer is supported by the Deputy Monitoring Officer who has specific responsibility for ensuring that the planning service remains compliant the regulations associated with planning law. The Authority has a process for reporting gifts, hospitality and declarations of interest. The Authority also has a in place a Members Code of Conduct and a Standards Committee to support member compliance with the code. The Authority reviews all policies on a five year cycle, unless there is a substantive change in the law.

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable to make informed decisions and properly manage its risks.

Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

How financial and performance information has been used to assess performance to identify areas for improvement.

Budget monitoring is undertaken monthly by the Senior Management Team and quarterly by Members of the Finance & Resources Committee. Both financial and outcomes-based performance management information is used to assess progress made against corporate targets, and to identify areas where additional resources, or a different approach to delivery, may be required.

How the body evaluates the services it provides to assess performance and identify areas for improvement

The Authority undertakes an annual programme of project and performance reviews, which are decided each year by Members. The reviews are supported where relevant by professional support either from within or outside the Authority, for example, internal audit were engaged to undertake a review of the implementation of the Planning IT system. Members periodically receive updated objectives reporting so they can assess how the Authority is performing against the annual non-financial targets.

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable it to use information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers services.

How the body ensures it delivers its role within significant partnerships, engages with stakeholders it has identified, monitors performance against expectations, and ensures action is taken where necessary to improve

The Authority works with many 'partners' and for all of these relationships, the Authority undertakes an annual review, to ensure that the resources expended on such work are manageable and that the arrangements (however constituted) are appropriate. A significant partnership for the Authority is the Westmorland Dales Project, a Heritage Lottery funded scheme which has the Authority working in formal partnership with the Friends of the Lake District: for this partnership arrangements have been formalised and the project is managed by a dedicated, and independent, board and by a management team made up of officers from both organisations; this project includes extensive stakeholder engagement as one of its outcomes.

Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness (continued)

How the body ensures that commissioning and procuring services is done in accordance with relevant legislation, professional standards and internal policies, and how the body assesses whether it is realising the expected benefits.

The Authority has had the arrangements we would expect to see to enable it to use information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers services.

Procurement polices are set out in Financial Regulations, and these are supported by appropriate polices (e.g. Procurement Strategy). The Monitoring Officer provides support on procurement activity, and arranges training for officers with purchasing responsibility. In line with the Authority's Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation there are identified procedures for large procurements such as the legal processes that must be followed. The Authority has arrangements in place to ensure payments are made on the supply of goods and services so that the expected benefits have been realised at the point of purchase.

Forward look

The Authority faces further challenge and change beyond 2021 which will form part of our 2021/22 VFM arrangements work.

Looking forward to 2021 and beyond, the Authority will continue to manage challenges such as:

- Continuing to operate with a frozen National Park Grant in time of challenging inflation.
- The Authority's response to social and environmental factors and the associated financial risks.

Section 5

Other Reporting Issues

Other Reporting Issues

Governance Statement

We are required to consider the completeness of disclosures in the Authority's governance statement, identify any inconsistencies with the other information of which we are aware from our work, and consider whether it complies with relevant guidance.

We completed this work and did not identify any areas of concern.

Whole of Government Accounts

We have not yet performed the procedures required by the National Audit Office (NAO) on the Whole of Government Accounts consolidation pack submission. The guidance for 20/21 is yet to be issued. We will liaise with the Authority to complete this work as required.

Report in the Public Interest

We have a duty under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to consider whether, in the public interest, to report on any matter that comes to our attention in the course of the audit in order for it to be considered by the Authority or brought to the attention of the public.

We did not identify any issues which required us to issue a report in the public interest.

Other powers and duties

We identified no issues during our audit that required us to use our additional powers under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Control Themes and Observations

As part of our work, we obtained an understanding of internal control sufficient to plan our audit and determine the nature, timing and extent of testing performed. Although our audit was not designed to express an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control, we are required to communicate to you significant deficiencies in internal control identified during our audit.

We have adopted a fully substantive approach and have therefore not tested the operation of controls.

Our audit did not identify any controls issues to bring to the attention of the Audit & Review Committee.

Appendix A

Audit Fees

Audit Fees

The table below sets out the analysis of our fees

Description	Final Fee 2020/21 £	Planned Fee 2020/21 £	Final Fee 2019/20 £
Base Audit Fee – Code work	9,319	9, 319	9,319
Scale Fee Variation	** 36,161	-	6,800
VFM & Pensions additional work	5,050	-	
Total audit fee – code work	50,980	9,319	16,119

* We have also been in correspondence with management to outline the impact that the changing risk and regulatory environment is having on our audits and why we do not believe the existing scale fees provide a clear link with either a public sector organisation's risk or its complexity and the work required to deliver a safe audit opinion. We outlined to management that we believe the fee for the Park should be set at £45,480. Management has not agreed to this increase in the scale fee and we have provided the PSAA with our assessment of the fee.

** In addition to our correspondence regarding the scale fee above; we have had to perform additional procedures as part of our audit, to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on the financial statements. This has included:

- Increased risk assessment and procedures on PPE valuations and Pensions disclosures; and
- Increased scope of Value for money work under new NAO 2020 code.

Additional fees are subject to approval by the PSAA

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Ernst & Young LLP, 1 More London Place, London, SE1 2AF.

ey.com