



Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Internal Audit Charter

Introduction

Organisations in the UK public sector have historically been governed by an array of differing internal audit standards. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which took effect from the 1 April 2013, provide a consolidated approach across the whole of the public sector providing continuity, sound corporate governance, and transparency.

The Standards require all internal audit activities to implement and retain an 'Internal Audit Charter'. The purpose of the Internal Audit Charter is to formally define the internal audit activity's purpose, authority, and responsibility.

Authority

The requirement for an internal audit function in local government is detailed within the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, which states that a relevant body must:

'undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.'

The standards for 'proper practices' in relation to internal audit are laid down in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013 [the Standards].

Purpose

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate arrangements for:

- risk and performance management;
- assurance and control frameworks including anti-fraud and whistleblowing;
- financial management;
- achieving effectiveness and securing value for money; and
- governance.

The purpose of internal audit is to provide reasonable assurance to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority that necessary arrangements are in place and operating effectively, and to identify risk exposures and areas where improvements can be made.

Internal Audit activity should support Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority in maintaining and improving the overall control / assurance framework, to assist with the achievement of the organisation's vision, service plan, and intention to be the best.

It will do this through:

- Assurance work - which involves assessing how well the systems and processes are designed and working;
- Consulting activities - available to help to improve those systems and processes where necessary; and
- Adding value - by sharing learning opportunities and improvements based on knowledge of best practice across the public sector.

The role of Internal Audit is best summarised through its definition within the Standards, as an:

'independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes'.

Definitions

In this charter the following definitions apply:

The Board – the governance group charged with independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment, and the integrity of financial reporting. For Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority this is the Standards and Governance Committee.

Senior Management – those responsible for the leadership and direction of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. This is the Senior Management Team and the Chief Finance Officer.

Responsibility

The responsibility for maintaining an adequate and effective system of internal audit within Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority lies with the Authority's Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer).

The Authority and its Members must also be satisfied about the adequacy of the advice and support it receives.

For Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority, internal audit is provided by the Southern Internal Audit Partnership.

The Chief Internal Auditor (Deputy Head of Southern Internal Audit Partnership) is responsible for effectively managing the internal audit activity in accordance with the *'Definition of Internal Auditing'*, the *'Code of Ethics'* and *'the Standards'*.

Senior management is responsible for ensuring that internal control, risk management and governance arrangements are sufficient to address the risks facing the delivery of the vision and service plan objectives agreed for Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority.

Accountability for responding to internal audit's advice lies with senior management, who either accept and implement the advice, or formally reject it. Audit advice is without prejudice to the right of internal audit to review the policies, procedures, and operations at a later date.

The Chief Internal Auditor must be satisfied that senior management accept accountability for, and provide an adequate response to, issues raised through internal audit's work. When the Chief Internal Auditor is not satisfied, the matter will be escalated to the audit sponsor, the Chief Finance Officer, the Director of Support Services, Chief Officer or Standards and Governance Committee as appropriate.

Position in the organisation

The Chief Internal Auditor reports functionally to the Board, and organisationally to the Chief Finance Officer who has statutory responsibility as proper officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, for ensuring an effective system of internal financial control and proper financial administration of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority's affairs.

The Chief Internal Auditor has direct access to the Chief Officer who carries the responsibility for the proper management of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and for ensuring that the principles of good governance are reflected in sound management arrangements.

The Chief Internal Auditor has direct access to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority's Monitoring Officer where matters arise relating to the Chief Officer's responsibility, legality, and standards.

Where it is considered necessary to the proper discharge of the internal audit function, the Chief Internal Auditor has direct access to elected Members of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and in particular those who serve on committees charged with governance (i.e. the Standards and Governance Committee).

The Chief Internal Auditor will meet regularly with the external auditors to consult on audit plans, discuss matters of mutual interest and to seek opportunities for cooperation in the conduct of audit work. The external auditors will have the opportunity to take account of the work of internal audit where appropriate.

Quarterly liaison meetings are held with the Chief Finance Officer, Director of Professional Services and Head of Knowledge Management to facilitate discussion of key risks to ensure that internal audit plans continue to meet the needs of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and to review the delivery of the plan and any issues arising from the reviews.

Internal audit resources

The Chief Internal Auditor will be professionally qualified (CMIIA, CCAB, or equivalent) and have wide internal audit and management experience, reflecting the responsibilities that arise from the need to liaise internally and externally with Members, senior management and other professionals.

The Chief Finance Officer will provide the Chief Internal Auditor with the resources necessary to fulfil Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority's requirements and expectations as to the robustness and scope of the internal audit opinion.

The Chief Internal Auditor will ensure that the internal audit service has access to an appropriate range of knowledge, skills, qualifications, and experience required to deliver the audit strategy and operational audit plan.

The annual operational plan will identify the resources required to complete the work, thereby highlighting sufficiency of available resources. The Chief Internal Auditor can propose an increase in audit resource or a reduction in the number of audits if there are insufficient resources.

Senior Management and the Board will be advised where, for whatever reason, internal audit is unable to provide assurance on any significant risks within the timescale envisaged by the risk assessment process.

The annual operational plan will be submitted to senior management and the Board, for approval. The Chief Internal Auditor will be responsible for delivery of the plan. The plan will be kept under review to ensure it remains responsive to the changing priorities and risks of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority.

Significant matters that jeopardise the delivery of the plan or require changes to the plan will be identified, addressed, and reported to senior management and the Board.

If the Chief Internal Auditor, the Board, or Senior Management considers that the scope or coverage of internal audit is limited in any way, or the ability of internal audit to deliver a service consistent with the Standards is prejudiced, they will advise the Chief Finance Officer, accordingly.

Independence and objectivity

Internal auditors must be sufficiently independent of the activities they audit to enable them to provide impartial, unbiased, and effective professional judgements and advice.

Internal auditors must maintain an unbiased attitude that allows them to perform their engagements in such a manner that they believe in their work product and that no quality compromises are made. Objectivity requires that internal auditors do not subordinate their judgement on audit matters to others.

To achieve the degree of independence and objectivity necessary to effectively discharge its responsibilities, arrangements are in place to ensure the internal audit activity:

- retains no executive or operational responsibilities;

- operates in a framework that allows unrestricted access to senior management and the Board;
- reports functionally to the Board;
- reports in their own name;
- rotates responsibilities for audit assignments within the internal audit team;
- completes individual declarations confirming compliance with rules on independence, conflicts of interest and acceptance of inducements; and
- ensures the planning process recognises and addresses potential conflicts of interest through internal audit staff not undertaking an audit for at least two years in an area where they have had previous operational roles.

If independence or objectivity is impaired in fact or appearance, the details of the impairment will be disclosed to Senior Management and the Board. The nature of the disclosure will depend upon the impairment.

Due professional care

Internal auditors will perform work with due professional care, competence, and diligence. Internal auditors cannot be expected to identify every control weakness or irregularity but their work should be designed to enable them to provide reasonable assurance regarding the controls examined within the scope of their review.

Internal auditors will have a continuing duty to develop and maintain their professional skills, knowledge, and judgement based on appropriate training, ability, integrity, objectivity, and respect.

Internal auditors will apprise themselves of the *'Definition of Internal Auditing'*, the *'Code of Ethics'* and the *'Standards'* and will work in accordance with them in the conduct of their duties.

Internal auditors will be alert to the possibility of intentional wrongdoing, errors and omissions, poor value for money, failure to comply with management policy and conflicts of interest. They will ensure that any suspicions of fraud, corruption, or improper conduct are promptly reported to the Chief Internal Auditor in accordance with laid down procedures.

Internal auditors will treat the information they receive in carrying out their duties as confidential. There will be no unauthorised disclosure of information unless there is a legal or professional requirement to do so. Confidential information gained in the course of internal audit work will not be used to affect personal gain.

Access to relevant personnel and records

In carrying out their duties, internal audit (on production of identification) shall have unrestricted right of access to all records, assets, personnel and premises, belonging to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority or its key delivery partner organisations.

Internal audit has authority to obtain such information and explanations as it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. Such access shall be granted on demand and not subject to prior notice.

Scope of Internal Audit activities

The Chief Internal Auditor is responsible for the delivery of an annual audit opinion and report that can be used by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority to inform its governance statement. The annual opinion will conclude on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management, and control.

A range of internal audit services are provided (Annex 1) to form the annual opinion. The approach is determined by the Chief Internal Auditor and will depend on the level of assurance required, the significance of the objectives under review to the organisations success, the risks inherent in the achievement of objectives and the level of confidence required that controls are well designed and operating as intended.

In accordance with the annual audit plan, auditors will plan and evaluate their work so as to have a reasonable expectation of detecting fraud and identifying any significant weaknesses in internal controls. Additionally, proactive fraud reviews will be incorporated within the plan to deter and detect fraud, covering known areas of high risk.

Managers are required to report all suspicions of theft, fraud and irregularity to the Chief Internal Auditor so that they can consider the adequacy of the relevant controls, evaluate the implication of the fraud on the risk management, control and governance processes and consider making recommendations as appropriate. Internal audit will not carry out investigations unless commissioned to do so and where this is the case, the Chief Internal Auditor will ensure that investigators are fully trained in carrying out their responsibilities.

Internal audit also facilitate Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority's participation in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) in which data from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority's main systems are matched with data supplied from other Local Authorities and external agencies to detect potential fraudulent activity.

Where appropriate Internal audit will also use their experience of working with other public sector clients to identify areas of best practice and learning opportunities that may assist Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority review and improve the efficiency of their own processes and control framework.

Reporting

Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Report and Opinion

The Chief Internal Auditor shall deliver an annual internal audit opinion and report that can be used by the organisation to inform its governance statement.

The annual internal audit report and opinion will conclude on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management, and control.

The annual report will incorporate as a minimum:

- The opinion;
- A summary of the work that supports the opinion; and

- A statement on conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the results of the quality assurance and improvement programme.

Senior Management

As those responsible for the leadership and direction of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service it is imperative that the Senior Management Team is engaged in:

- approving the internal audit charter (minimum annually);
- approving the risk based internal audit plan;
- receiving communications from the Chief Internal Auditor on the internal audit activity's performance relative to its plan and other matters;
- making appropriate enquiries of management and the Chief Internal Auditor to determine whether there are inappropriate scope and resource limitations; and
- receiving the results of internal and external assessments of the quality assurance and improvement programme, including areas of non-conformance.

The Standards and Governance Committee (The Board)

Organisational independence is effectively achieved when the Chief Internal Auditor reports functionally to the Board. Such reporting will include:

- approving the internal audit charter;
- approving the risk based internal audit plan;
- approving the internal audit budget and resource plan;
- receiving communications from the Chief Internal Auditor on the internal audit activity's performance relative to its plan and other matters, including the annual report and opinion;
- making appropriate enquiries of management and the Chief Internal Auditor to determine whether there are inappropriate scope and resource limitations;
- receiving the results of internal and external assessments of the quality assurance and improvement programme, including areas of non-conformance; and
- approval of significant consulting services not already included in the audit plan, prior to acceptance of the engagement.

Quality assurance and performance monitoring

The internal audit team will work to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards to maintain consistency in service provision. This requirement will be enforced through appropriate supervision and supervisory/management review of all audit working papers, action plans and audit reports.

Feedback forms will be distributed to key contacts at the end of each audit assignment to assess the value of the assignment and to seek suggestions for improvement. All completed forms will be reviewed by Audit Manager(s) / the Chief Internal Auditor and the auditor conducting the assignment and responded to appropriately.

In addition, in line with the Standards:

- an annual self assessment will be completed by internal audit against the Standards

- an external assessment of internal audit will also be conducted at least once every five years by an external, qualified, independent assessor or assessment team
- to enable senior management and the Standards and Governance Committee to formally monitor the performance of the internal audit service, a set of key performance indicators will be agreed. Details of actual delivery against these targets will be reported to senior management and the Standards and Governance Committee.

Ownership of documentation

Internal audit files and working papers, which address compliance with the Standards, are the property of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority.

Internal audit's data retention policy on the archiving and secure destruction of audit files requires that all audit files are retained for a period of four years (three plus the current) except for those papers used in the course of a fraud investigation which will be retained for a period of six years after legal proceedings have been completed. An annual programme is in place for the secure destruction of files once these time frames have elapsed.

Indemnity and Insurance

Internal Audit's professional indemnity cover is provided through a third party insurer and is sufficient to meet all eventualities in respect of external contract arrangements up to the sum of £5 million. Southern Internal Audit Partnership will indemnify Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority against claims and costs arising from its negligence or wilful breach of any obligation under this agreement provided that its maximum liability shall not exceed £5 million.

Fees

The fees for internal audit work will be agreed in advance of each financial year to reflect the number and mix of days required and movements in cost base.

If specific assignments are requested in addition to the annual plan, fees will be agreed in advance based on the staff mix required.

Review of the internal audit charter

This charter will be reviewed annually (minimum) by the Chief Internal Auditor and presented to Senior Management and the Board for approval.

Annex 1

Assurance Services

- **Risk based audit:** in which risks and controls associated with the achievement of defined business objectives are identified and both the design and operation of the controls in place to mitigate key risks are assessed and tested, to ascertain the residual risk to the achievement of managements' objectives. Any audit work intended to provide an audit opinion will be undertaken using this approach.

Where appropriate, internal audit will also use their experience of working with other public sector clients to identify areas of best practice and learning opportunities that may assist HFRA review and improve the efficiency of their own processes and control framework.

- **Developing systems audit:** in which:
 - the plans and designs of systems under development are assessed to identify the potential weaknesses in internal control and risk management; and
 - programme / project management controls are assessed to ascertain whether the system is likely to be delivered efficiently, effectively and economically.
- **Compliance audit:** in which a limited review, covering only the operation of controls in place to fulfil statutory, good practice or policy compliance obligations are assessed.
- **Quality assurance review:** in which the approach and competency of other reviewers / assurance providers are assessed in order to form an opinion on the reliance that can be placed on the findings and conclusions arising from their work.
- **Fraud and irregularity investigations:** Internal audit may also provide specialist skills and knowledge to assist in or lead fraud or irregularity investigations, or to ascertain the effectiveness of fraud prevention controls and detection processes. Internal audit's role in this respect is outlined in Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority's Anti Fraud and Anti Corruption Strategy.
- **Advisory / Consultancy services:** in which advice can be provided, either through formal review and reporting or more informally through discussion or briefing, on the framework of internal control, risk management, and governance. It should be noted that it would not be appropriate for an auditor to become involved in establishing or implementing controls or to assume any operational responsibilities and that any advisory work undertaken must not prejudice the scope, objectivity and quality of future audit work.
- **Third party assurance:** the availability of objective assurance from other assurance providers will be considered in determining audit needs. Where internal audit needs to work with the internal auditors of other organisations, a practice which is expanding with the development of more organisational strategic partnerships, the roles and responsibilities of each party, as well as billing arrangements, will be clearly defined, agreed and documented prior to the commencement of work. Internal audit will also ensure awareness of and seek to place reliance on the work of other review bodies such as HMIC and HMRC etc.