

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 2011, which states that a relevant body must:

'undertake an adequate and effective internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with the proper practices in relation to internal control'.

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

Purpose

The County Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. Internal audit plays a vital role in advising the County Council that these arrangements are in place and operating effectively. The County Council's response to internal audit activity should lead to the strengthening of the control environment and, therefore, contribute to the achievement of the organisations objectives.

This is achieved through internal audit providing a combination of assurance and consulting activities. Assurance work involves assessing how well the systems and processes are designed and working, with consulting activities available to help to improve those systems and processes where necessary.

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 organisations 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'.

Responsibility

The responsibility for maintaining an adequate and effective system of internal audit within Hampshire County Council lies with the Director of Corporate Resources, as the authority's Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer).

For the County Council, internal audit is provided by the Southern Internal Audit Partnership.

The Chief Internal Auditor (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'.

Definitions

For the purposes of this charter the following definitions shall 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. At the County Council this shall mean the Audit Committee.

Senior Management – those responsible for the leadership and direction of the Council. At the County Council this shall mean the Corporate Management Team

Position in the organisation

The Chief Internal Auditor reports functionally to the Board, and organisationally to the Director of Corporate Resources 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 the County Council's affairs.

The Chief Internal Auditor has direct access to the Chief Executive who carries the responsibility for the proper management of the County Council and for ensuring that the principles of good governance are reflected in sound management arrangements.

The Chief Internal Auditor has direct access to the County Council's Monitoring Officer where matters arise relating to Chief Executive 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 the Council and in particular those who serve on committees charged with governance (i.e. the Audit Committee).

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 Director of Corporate Resources, will provide the Chief Internal Auditor with the resources necessary to fulfil the County Council'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 the County Council.

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*' consider 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 Director of Corporate Resources, 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 recognise and address 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 disclose will depend upon the impairment.

To ensure the independence of the Chief Internal Auditor is safeguarded and that remuneration and performance assessment are not inappropriately influenced by those subject to audit, the Chief Executive will both countersign and contribute feedback to the performance appraisal of the Chief Internal Auditor. Feedback will also be sought from the Chair of the Audit Committee.

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 the County Council's 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 effect 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 the County Council 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 the County Council 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

The County Council both host and assume a strategic partner role within the Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP). The SIAP currently provides internal audit services to a wide portfolio of public sector clients. (Annex 1) through a variety of partnership and sold service delivery models.

A range of internal audit services are provided (Annex 2) to form the annual opinion for each member / client of the SIAP. 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. The Chief Internal Auditor manages and controls all investigations and will ensure that investigators are fully trained in carrying out their responsibilities.

Where there is evidence that County Council staff are committing fraud, internal audit will liaise with Human Resources and the department concerned. The decision on whether to invoke criminal proceedings will be made by the Chief Internal Auditor in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer.

The monitoring of the County Council's Anti-Fraud Strategy will be the responsibility of the Chief Internal Auditor, as part of the monitoring of the annual internal audit plan.

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

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 the Council it is imperative that the Corporate Management Team are 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 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;
- agreement of the scope and form of the external assessment as part of the quality management and improvement plan;
- 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

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

Southern Internal Audit Partnership – Client Portfolio

Strategic Partners:

Hampshire County Council
Southampton City Council

Key Stakeholder Partners:

Havant Borough Council
East Hampshire District Council
Winchester City Council

External clients:

Hampshire Fire & Rescue Authority
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
/ Hampshire Constabulary
Hampshire Pension Fund

Higher Education Institutions

University of Winchester

Further Education Institutions

Brockenhurst;
Eastleigh;
Fareham;
FCoT;
Highbury;
Itchen;
Peter Symonds;
Portsmouth;
QMC;
St Vincent's;
Taunton's; and
Totton

Academies

Highcliffe

Annex 2

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.
- **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 the County Council'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.