



Audit Charter

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An Audit Charter is a mandatory requirement of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the associated Local Government Application Note (PSIAS) and sets out the purpose, responsibilities and authority of the internal audit service within Worcestershire County Council. These services are provided by the Risk and Assurance Service of Warwickshire County Council under an administrative delegation of internal audit functions from Worcestershire to Warwickshire.

This document was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee on 21st July 2016 and applies until amended.

Context

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Council to have a sound system of internal control which:

- facilitates the effective exercise of their functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives
- ensures that the financial and operational management of the Authority is effective; and
- includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.

The Regulations require accounting systems to include measures to ensure that risk is appropriately managed. Furthermore, the CIPFA/SOLACE governance framework “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government” outlines the need for risk management to be embedded into the culture of the organisation, with members and officers recognising that risk management is part of their jobs.

The requirement for an internal audit function is also contained in the Regulations which require the council to:

“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 PSIAS also includes a mandatory Code of Ethics and all auditors in the public sector must also have regard to the Committee on Standards of Public Life’s Seven Principles of Public Life – the Nolan principles. The PSIAS also articulate the core principles that must be present and operating effectively for any internal audit section to be considered effective. These are:

- Demonstrates integrity.
- Demonstrates competence and due professional care.
- Is objective and free from undue influence (independent).
- Aligns with the strategies, objectives, and risks of the organisation.
- Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced.

- Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement.
- Communicates effectively.
- Provides risk-based assurance.
- Is insightful, proactive, and future-focused.
- Promotes organisational improvement.

It is essential that Internal Audit works in partnership with management to improve the control environment and assist the Council in achieving the objectives outlined in the County Council's Corporate Plan, Worcestershire Future Fit.

Definitions

The role of the "Board" outlined in the PSIAS is fulfilled by the Audit and Governance Committee. The role of senior management is fulfilled by the Chief Financial Officer. The role of the Chief Audit Executive (Head of Internal Audit) is fulfilled by the Chief Risk and Assurance Manager of Warwickshire County Council.

Purpose

The Council has to comply with the PSIAS which define internal audit 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."

The key word in the definition is assurance; the role of audit is to provide assurance to the organisation (Chief Executive, directors, heads of service, other managers and the Audit and Governance Committee) and ultimately the taxpayers that the Authority maintains an effective control environment that enables it to manage its significant business risks. We help the Council achieve its objectives and provide assurance that effective and efficient operations are maintained.

The Service also assists the Chief Financial Officer in discharging his delegated responsibilities under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires that authorities:

"make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs".

Scope and Responsibility

The Service is responsible for providing assurance in accordance with all relevant professional standards and guidance across the council's entire control environment and across all activities, including:

- services provided on behalf of other organisations by the Authority, and
- services provided by other organisations on behalf of the Authority.

In addition to core assurance work the Service also provides the following work:

Consultancy

The Service also undertakes consultancy work designed to improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes at the request of management, subject to the availability of skills and resources.

Due to its detailed knowledge of systems and processes the Service is well placed to provide advice and support to managers on the implications of changes to policy or processes. As such, the Service must be informed and consulted about plans for major or complex changes to systems. The Service will advise / comment on proposed changes and the controls to be incorporated in new and revised systems but the final decision on whether to accept the audit advice rests with the relevant manager(s). However, where appropriate the Head of Internal Audit may escalate the issue to more senior management. The provision of such advice does not prejudice the Service's right to evaluate the established systems and controls at a later date.

Fraud

All managers are responsible for the prevention and detection of fraud, corruption and other irregularities. However, the Service assists with these responsibilities. Internal auditors when conducting audit assignments are alert to opportunities, such as control weaknesses that could allow fraud. If the Service discovers evidence of a fraud or other irregularity the relevant line manager will be informed.

Managers should immediately inform the Head of Internal Audit if a fraud or other irregularity is suspected and also ensure that any supporting documentation or other evidence is secured. The Head of Internal Audit will inform the Chief Financial Officer. Other officers will in turn be informed as appropriate and consistent with the need to ensure confidentiality is maintained so as not to prejudice any subsequent investigation.

Investigations into potential irregularities may be undertaken either by managers or by the audit service. Usually straight forward matters will be investigated by the Service concerned with support provided by internal audit. Where an investigation is undertaken by internal audit the service may either be charged for the work involved or the planned investigations contingency used. Where the Head of Internal Audit's view is that an investigation is required but either the service does not want to proceed or does not want to pay for this

work this will be reported to the Chief Financial Officer for a decision to be made on how to progress the matter.

In all cases it is the responsibility of the relevant manager(s) to determine what action to take as a result of the investigation.

The Service is responsible for reviewing the Authority's response to fraudulent activity in order to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. Once an investigation is concluded, the Service will undertake a review to determine whether controls should be strengthened.

The Head of Internal Audit is responsible, following consultation with relevant managers, for reporting frauds and subsequent liaison with the Police and other investigative agencies.

Value for money

The Service will assist managers by identifying any instances of over control but will not specifically examine or evaluate the extent that value for money is achieved as part of routine reviews.

At the request of the Chief Financial Officer, a Head of Service or other senior manager the Service will also:

- undertake or participate in specific value for money, or similar, reviews / projects;
- facilitate the introduction of best practices across the Authority.

The Service will take account of the timing and scope of such reviews when planning its work.

Where a review team is actively looking at options that have a material impact on risks and controls the Head of Internal Audit must be informed at an early stage. Where requested, and subject to the agreement of the relevant manager, the Service will assist reviewers by supplying information and knowledge gained during audits where this is relevant to the scope of the review.

Other

The Head of Internal Audit may, at the request of senior managers or the Council or any of its committees, carry out investigations into issues where the Authority's strategic, corporate or financial interests are at stake.

Any significant unplanned non-assurance work that would impact delivery of the core assurance work will be discussed with the Chief Financial Officer and reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

Independence

The Service is managed by the Head of Internal Audit who is professionally qualified as required by PSIAS. Although the Head of Internal Audit's direct reporting line on

audit matters is to the Chief Financial Officer he also reports functionally to the Audit and Governance Committee which has responsibility for overseeing audit arrangements.

Wherever possible, staff responsible for providing consultancy on a particular topic will not undertake assurance work on that topic for at least 12 months. Where this is unavoidable management supervision will ensure that no conflict of interest arises and objectivity is maintained. Apart from this the Service does not have any executive responsibilities and is independent of the activities that it audits. This enables it to provide impartial and unbiased professional opinions and recommendations. The Service is free to plan, undertake and report on its work, as the Head of Internal Audit deems appropriate, in consultation with relevant managers and the Audit and Governance Committee.

Line managers are fully responsible for the quality of internal control within their area of responsibility. They should ensure that appropriate and adequate control and risk management arrangements exist without depending on internal audit activity.

The Service provides advice and assistance to managers and provides assurance that their control responsibilities are being properly fulfilled. Line managers are accountable for accepting the Service's advice and implementing their recommendations.

Audit and Governance Committee

The Council is responsible for maintaining an audit committee which complies with all relevant guidance. This function is discharged by the Audit and Governance Committee. The Committee's responsibilities include:

- formally approving the audit charter
- formally approving (but not directing) the overall internal audit programme of audits to ensure that it meets the council's overall strategic direction (paying particular attention to whether there is sufficient and appropriate coverage);
- reviewing and commenting on summaries of work done, key findings, issues of concern and progress made on implementing agreed audit recommendations; and
- receiving and reviewing the annual report from the Chief Risk and Assurance Manager in order to reach an overall opinion on the internal control environment and the quality of internal audit coverage.

As required by the Cipfa guidance the Head of Internal Audit has the right to meet privately with the Committee.

Right of access

To undertake its work the Service has unrestricted access to all the Authority's personnel, premises, documents, records, information and assets including those of

partner organisations¹. The Service has authority to access all computer data as part of their work, including that registered under the Data Protection Act.

The Service is authorised to obtain the information and explanations they consider necessary from any employees, partners or agents of the Authority to fulfil their objectives and responsibilities. Managers must ensure that internal audit access is considered when preparing partnership agreements or contracts for the purchase or supply of goods and services.

The Service has the right of access to any data required for their work that is owned by the Authority, but is processed or held elsewhere by third parties.

The Head of Internal Audit has the right of direct access to the Leader, Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, directors and heads of service.

Standards

The Service operates in accordance with the best practice standards and guidance in the PSIAS.

Individual auditors are required to comply with the standards, all relevant ethical and technical standards issued by their professional bodies and with all relevant codes of conduct issued by Warwickshire County Council.

Internal auditors are expected to:

- exercise due professional care based upon appropriate experience, training, ability, integrity and objectivity;
- maintain and keep up to date their professional knowledge and skills and to participate in any continuing professional development scheme (CPD) operated by their professional body;
- participate in Warwickshire County Council's staff appraisal scheme;
- comply with Warwickshire's rules about declaring interests; and
- obtain and record sufficient audit evidence to support their findings and recommendations.

The Service will safeguard the information obtained in carrying out its duties. Information obtained will not be used for personal gain or disclosed unless there is a legal or professional requirement to do so (for example under the Freedom of Information Act).

Planning

Internal audit work is planned at all levels of operation in order to establish priorities, achieve objectives and ensure the efficient and effective use of audit resources.

¹ Regulation 5 Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

The Head of Internal Audit produces an annual plan. This is developed in consultation with senior managers and takes account of the Authority's risk management process. The Audit and Governance Committee agrees each year's plan. The plan includes an element of contingency to allow internal audit to be responsive to changing conditions and requests for assistance from managers. It is the responsibility of the Chief Financial Officer to ensure that the budget allocated to internal audit is sufficient.

The Head of Internal Audit is authorised, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer, to amend the plan during the year as necessary to reflect changes to systems or processes or in the risks facing the Authority. Any significant changes will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee. All managers are expected to notify the service of such changes immediately they become aware of them.

Terms of reference are prepared for each routine assignment and usually discussed with relevant line managers before the work is started.

Reasonable notice will usually be given to the relevant manager of the start of an audit and will minimise any disruption to the smooth running of the unit under review. However, the Service reserves the right for unannounced visits where the Head of Internal Audit considers it necessary.

Reporting

All findings are reported to appropriate managers. Significant issues are reported in writing but minor issues may be discussed with the relevant manager at the closing meeting. The reports include an opinion on the adequacy of controls in the area reviewed, make recommendations for improvement and specify the officer responsible for implementation. Opinions on individual assignments feed into the overall opinion given in the annual report. Recommendations are prioritised.

Reports will usually be agreed with the relevant Head of Service and the final agreed report will be copied to the relevant Director. Reports identifying significant financial issues will also be copied to the Chief Financial Officer. Audits resulting in a limited opinion will also be reported to the Strategic Leadership Team.

Worcestershire County Council is responsible for publishing agreed reports as they consider appropriate

The Head of Internal Audit is responsible for monitoring and reporting to the Audit and Governance Committee on the extent of implementation of agreed internal audit recommendations.

The Head of Internal Audit submits regular reports to the Audit and Governance Committee outlining the results of audits. An annual report will be provided giving an opinion on the Authority's system of internal control which feeds into the Authority's Annual Governance Statement.

Co-operation

The Service co-ordinates internal audit plans and activities with external auditors to ensure the most efficient use of the total resources devoted to audit and review. However, our roles and responsibilities are different and consequently, in accordance with relevant standards, external auditors will not usually place reliance on the work of internal audit. The Head of Internal Audit is authorised to share information with external auditors.

It is the responsibility of every manager to be open, frank and honest about any risks, concerns or problems that may exist.

Where services are provided by or to other organisations the Head of Internal Audit is authorised to agree the responsibility for internal audit of those services with the internal auditors of those organisations. Managers setting up a shared service / partnership or outsourcing a service must consider the requirement for internal audit and include appropriate provisions in any agreement.

Quality of service

The Head of Internal Audit manages a quality assurance programme to ensure that internal audit work complies with professional standards and achieves its objectives.

The Service takes the following steps to provide a quality service:

- adopts a flexible risk driven approach;
- works in partnership with managers and staff to develop and maintain adequate and reliable systems of internal control;
- continually seeks to improve the efficiency of its services in consultation with managers from across the Authority;
- regularly reviews its procedures to ensure that they remain appropriate.

The quality assurance programme includes:

- suitable guidance, support and review of all internal audit work;
- seeking feedback from line managers on the quality of internal audit work;
- periodic internal quality audits to monitor services provided by all internal auditors; and
- regular internal and external assessments in accordance with the PSIAS.

The Head of Internal Audit will investigate and respond promptly to all complaints about internal auditors or the service provided.

G Rollason
Head of Internal Audit
13 June 2016