



Audit and Standards Committee Report

Report of **Linda Hunter, Senior Finance Manager (Internal Audit)**

Date: **20th June 2024**

Subject: **Internal Audit Tactical Plan 2024/25**

Author of Report: **Linda Hunter**

Summary:

The report presents the Internal Audit planning methodology and programme of work for 2024/25.

Recommendations:

In respect of the provision of the statutory Internal Audit function and in order to comply with best professional practice (including Public Sector Internal Audit Standards - PSIAS) it is recommended that Members endorse the attached programme of work for 2024/25.

Background Papers:

Category of Report: **Open**

* Delete as appropriate

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
No Cleared by Linda Hunter
Legal Implications
NO Cleared by:
Equality of Opportunity Implications
NO Cleared by:
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO
Human rights Implications
NO:
Environmental and Sustainability implications
NO
Economic impact
NO
Community safety implications
NO
Human resources implications
NO
Property implications
NO
Area(s) affected
Corporate
Relevant Scrutiny Committee if decision called in
Not applicable
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press release
NO

REPORT TO SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

20th June 2024

Senior Finance Manager Report – 2024/25 Work Programme

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present and communicate to members of the Audit and Standards Committee the internal audit plan for 2024/25.
2. The audit plan that has been developed needs to be flexible and reactive, to respond promptly to changing issues and risks that require Internal Audit review and input. At mid-year (September 2024) members of the Audit and Standards Committee will be provided with an update on the audit plan.

Background

3. The strategy for Internal Audit is to focus on areas of high-risk activity in order to provide independent assurance that risk and internal control systems are being properly managed by Directors in service areas.
4. The plan has been developed to ensure sufficient coverage across the Council to inform the overall internal audit opinion, required as part of the Accounts and Audit Regulations. Management are asked to contribute to the planning process; however, the plan and its contents are entirely the responsibility of Internal Audit.
5. Five years ago, an allocation of internal audit resource was re-assigned from assurance work to offer advice and guidance for services as change projects occurred – this was entitled **Internal Audit Business Partnering**. This resource was used to deliver a number of activities and was very positively received by Directorates. It also enabled Internal Audit to obtain assurances about new systems and processes as they were established and so will assist as the annual internal audit opinion is developed. For 2024/25 the Business Partnering days have been reduced, in comparison to previous years, solely due to a high number of first call audits that are classed as ‘critical’ and need to form part of the main tactical plan. The Business Partnering allocation will be reviewed at mid-year and adjusted where necessary.
6. A number of areas have already been highlighted by Directors as significant risk areas and concerns. The tactical plan has been developed to reflect some of these key issues. This will enable more significant risk areas to be audited as the priority for 2024/25.

7. The Global Internal Audit Standards (released January 2024) come into effect from April 2025 and the Internal Audit team are reviewing these new standards and adopting new practices during the next 9 months to ensure compliance. The standards guide internal auditing and serve as a basis for evaluating and elevating the quality of the internal audit function. At the heart of the standards are 15 guiding principles that enable effective internal auditing. The current International Standards remain approved for use during this transition period.

Planning Methodology

8. To develop a work programme for the use of Internal Audit's resources, consideration is given to the following:
 - The corporate risk management process including the corporate risk register and directorate risk management plans.
 - The information provided by Directors under the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) process.
 - The areas of highest perceived new or emerging risk as determined by the Chief Executive/Executive Directors/Directors/Heads of Service/Senior Finance Managers/ Internal Audit and Risk Managers.
 - Learning from other Core Cities and SouthWest Yorkshire Group (SWYG) and more general best professional practice.
 - The outcomes from the internal audit risk-scoring methodology.
 - Grants that specify in the grant determination letter that the Head of Internal Audit needs to verify and sign off.

Utilisation of the Corporate Risk Management Arrangements

9. The current risk management process requires service areas to consider risks and either manage and mitigate risks or escalate them up through a process to leadership teams and/or Performance and Delivery Board (and going forward the Assurance Board). The information contained within the corporate risk register and directorate/service risk management plans provide a broad range of risks facing the Council and identifies risk controls, costs, escalation process etc. A number of the higher risk rating entries on the registers/risk management plans have been included in the audit plan.
10. The risk management team comes under the remit of the SFM Internal Audit. There is a close correlation between the work undertaken within the two areas and closer collaborative working has informed both the scope and content of individual audits reviewed to date. During internal audit fieldwork, auditors are also conducting compliance checks regarding adherence to risk management processes. This will continue for 2024/25.

Utilisation of the Annual Governance Statement

11. The process for collating information to produce the AGS is managed by Legal and Governance. The Assurance Statement is designed around key governance themes such as Legal, Financial and HR compliance. The returns, which Directors submit and sign up to, provide a wealth of information on how some of the most important internal control arrangements are managed within services. Internal Audit and Risk Managers review this information when identifying areas for the audit plan.
12. In addition, Internal Audit will perform a review of the annual governance statement process to provide assurance that it operates effectively.

Structure of the Plan

13. The format of the tactical plan remains similar to last year, with sections for each directorate/key service area (which includes the business partnering allocation), a section for corporate reviews and then resources dedicated to fraud investigation work and statutory main financial system reviews. An additional column on each tab this year is reference to the Council Plan (2024-2028).
14. Where a directorate or corporate risk register entry exists for a particular auditable area, this is identified on the tactical plan. In scoping each individual audit, the key governance themes of the AGS are considered. More than one theme may be included within the scope of a single audit. All AGS themes are covered to varying degrees and this will help to support the internal audit opinion on the governance, risk and control environment which is provided to the Audit and Standards Committee annually in September.
15. The service continues to look for service improvements and effective ways of working and is currently undertaking a procurement exercise to upgrade the current Internal Audit Management system. The intention is also to include a Risk Management and Recommendation Tracker element within this process. Internal Audit staff resources have been assigned to help successfully procure this package, including a training and support element for the Internal Audit team.

Fraud Allegations (Re-active investigations)

16. An allocation of time is included in the plan to provide for the investigation of allegations of fraud, theft, and corruption. This allocation was increased from 2021/22 and the 2024/25 allocation has been slightly increased further due to the increasing number, complexity and time spent last year on fraud allegations.
17. Some investigations are carried out directly by Internal Audit and for others Internal Audit provides support to management for them to carry out their own reviews.
18. Housing Tenancy and Right to Buy Frauds are not investigated by the Internal Audit team and therefore do not form part of this audit plan. Cases are investigated by the Housing Fraud Team (this is a small team which is part of the housing service and has 2 qualified investigators).

Pro-active Counter Fraud Work

19. The National Fraud Initiative (NFI), under the remit of the Cabinet Office, has grown in recent years and is looking to continue to expand. It is no longer exclusively focused on housing benefit fraud, as new areas of scrutiny continue to be added e.g. SCC data matched with HMRC. Additional data sets are also added and amended on a regular basis.
20. Internal Audit continues to administer the system and oversee the submission of data for the NFI, the process works (on the most part) on a 2-year cycle, except for grants and Single Person Discount, which are done annually. We shall be submitting the required data sets to the Cabinet office later this year. Internal Audit monitor the matches distributed to the relevant service areas for review, investigation, and correction where necessary. Internal Audit will ensure the match work is completed to the required standards and timescales and subsequently report on the outcomes later in the year.
21. In addition to the above Internal Audit has five pieces of proactive fraud work planned. These reviews look at activities that are more susceptible, by the nature of what they encompass, to fraud. Internal Audit examines each activity's overall fraud risks to ensure that all the areas of fraud have been identified. These exercises have been successful in identifying weak or inconsistent controls and management arrangements.

22. The work on proactive fraud may subsequently lead to more specific case investigations. Flexibility is therefore required in the use of the fraud investigation resource. Nevertheless, if the volume of fraud allegations increases, or a large-scale investigation becomes necessary, resources will be transferred from other areas of the internal audit plan.
23. The fraud awareness e-learning course was refreshed 2 years ago. This course is mandatory training for all managers and available for all staff across the Council to complete on the Go Learn platform.

Main Financial Systems (MFS)

24. Internal Audit reviews the key financial systems of the Council every year, and this aspect of the work of Internal Audit is crucial in supporting the S151 officer responsibilities.
25. From April 2018, Internal Audit introduced a cyclical testing regime for the MFS reviews, which will involve a full system review in year 1 followed by transaction testing, which meets External Audit requirements, in year 2.

Risk Based Audits of Systems/Services/Functions

26. The resource not utilised on the above elements is devoted to undertaking reviews of the areas of most perceived risk as identified by Internal Audit in consultation with key officers i.e. principally the Executive Directors and Directors.
27. At the beginning of each audit assignment the relevant Service Manager will also be consulted to ensure that current risk areas are included in the remit for the work.

Internal Audit Business Partnering

28. This assurance work offers advice and guidance as change projects occurred and is very positively received by Directorates.
29. We can take a pro-active, supportive role to assist services in embedding change. It also enables Internal Audit to obtain assurances about new systems and processes as they were established and so will assist in the development of the annual internal audit opinion.
30. The Business Partnering resource will continue to be monitored as part of the performance indicators for Internal Audit.

31. Internal Audit is also a 'core' member of the Finance Design Assurance Group (FDAG) so some Business Partnering resource has been assigned to this area of work. The Group works with key stakeholders across the organisation, to oversee the development of robust yet flexible financial design principles that supports the development of changes to systems/ structure or scope of operations with financial implications. The Group assesses proposals that have a material impact on the Council's financial systems and processes and considers impact assessments. Internal audit are also members of the Standards and Policy Group and Finance Systems Transformation Board.

Summary of the Audit Plan

32. The following represents the summary of the planned audit time for the current year.

Auditable Area		Days	% of the total
Corporate Reviews		62	4
City Futures	Assurance	116	7
	Business Partnering	35	2
Neighbourhood Services	Assurance	221	14
	Business Partnering	18	1
Children Services	Assurance	210	14
	Business Partnering	15	1
Adult, Wellbeing and Care Services	Assurance	122	8
	Business Partnering	25	2
Strategic Support Services	Assurance	324	21
	Business Partnering	74	5
Public Health and Integrated Commissioning	Assurance	19	1
	Business Partnering	0	0
Main Financial Systems	Assurance	55	4
	Business Partnering	0	0
Investigations	Assurance	192	12
	Business Partnering	63	4
Total		1551	100%

Assessed Priority	Outputs
High Priority	92
Medium Priority	0
Low Priority	0
Statutory	25
Total	117

33. Attention is also drawn to the first call list (last page/tab of the audit plan), which highlights the reviews identified during the planning process which may not be completed in 2024/25. In some cases, there are service-based reasons why an audit review cannot be undertaken in 2024/25, and other audits have been allocated to first call due to the lack of audit resources.
34. The first call list is effectively the 18 month audit plan, as reviews included on the first call list will be included in the plan for 2025/26, assuming they are still relevant.
35. The 2024/25 annual plan is attached at Appendix 1.

Future Considerations

36. Throughout the coming year, Internal Audit will evaluate the plan to ensure we are directing internal audit resources at the main risks facing the authority.
37. It is recommended in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards that any significant changes to the plan are also reported to the Audit and Standards Committee. As a result, Internal Audit have defined 'significant' as a 15% change to the audits ratified in the June meeting, and in the event of this level of change, will report to the October Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

38. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

39. There are no equal opportunities implications arising from the report.

CONCLUSION

40. The audit plan summarises a risk based programme of work which demonstrates that the Council has made provision to discharge its (and officers) statutory responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION

41. In respect of the provision of the statutory internal audit function and in order to comply with best professional practice it is recommended that members endorse the attached programme of work for 2024/25.

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