

Report to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

11 February 2021

Subject:	Internal Audit Charter
Director:	Rebecca Maher Acting Section 151 Officer
Contact Officer:	Peter Farrow Audit Services and Risk Management Manager, peter_farrow@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendation

- 1.1 Review and approve the Internal Audit Charter.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 For the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to perform an annual review of, and approve the Internal Audit Charter.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

Internal Audit operates across the council and helps it accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluating and improving the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 There is a statutory requirement for internal audit to work in accordance with the 'proper audit practices'. These 'proper audit practices' are in effect the 'Public Sector Internal Audit Standards' and the council's Internal Audit Charter reflects this. The Charter was originally approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in September 2013 and has been reviewed by the committee annually since, and is now due for its latest review.

4.2 There has been one change since the Charter was last reviewed, with a paragraph added to reflect the arrangements whereby the Council's Internal Audit team provide the internal audit service to external clients.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 The purpose of the report is to inform committee of the latest Internal Audit Charter. As such, there is no alternative option.

6 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	Internal audit is a statutory service in the context of the Local Government Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment)(England) 2015. The Act states that: " <i>A relevant authority 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</i> ". These Standards have been adopted by the council's internal audit section.
Risk:	The agreed actions detailed in Internal Audit reports are designed to mitigate risks.
Equality:	It was not necessary to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no direct health and wellbeing implications from this report.
Social Value	There are no direct social value implications from this report.

7. Appendices

There are no appendices.

8. Background Papers

None.

Definition of internal auditing

Internal auditing is 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.

Mission of internal audit

To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight.

Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

- 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

Authority and standards

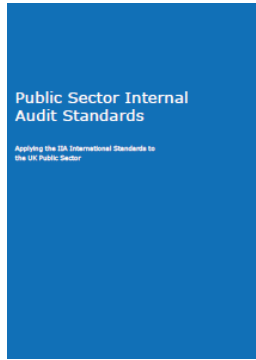
Internal audit is a statutory service in the context of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment)(England) 2015. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires local authorities to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and appoint a Chief Financial Officer to have responsibility for those arrangements

The regulations state that: *“A relevant authority 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”*. These Standards have been adopted by the council's internal audit section.

The responsibility for ensuring that the council has an effective internal audit has been delegated to the Chief Financial Officer/Section 151 Officer.

Internal audit have the right of access to all records, assets, personnel and premises, including those of partner organisations, and has the authority to obtain such information and explanations as it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities.

Throughout the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, reference is made to the terms 'Chief Audit Executive', 'board' and 'senior management'. For the purposes of this Charter, the 'Chief Audit Executive' is defined as the Audit Services Manager (Head of Audit) the 'board' as the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and 'senior management' as the Leadership Team.



Public Sector Internal
Audit Standards

Applying the ISB International Standards to
the UK Public Sector

Scope and objectives of internal audit activities

The scope of work of internal audit is to determine whether the council's risk management, control, and governance processes are adequate and effective in order to ensure that:

- Key risks are identified and managed;
- Key financial, managerial, and operating information is accurate, reliable, and timely;
- Employees' actions are in compliance with policies, standards, procedures, and applicable laws and regulations;
- Resources are acquired economically, used efficiently, and adequately protected;
- Programs, plans, and objectives are achieved;
- Quality and continuous improvement are fostered in the council's control process; and
- Key legislative and regulatory issues impacting the council are identified and addressed appropriately.

Internal audit's remit extends to the entire control environment of the council and not just financial controls.

Where other internal or external assurance providers may have undertaken relevant assurance and audit work, internal audit will seek to rely on the work of these other assurance providers where professional standards would make it appropriate to do so.

Responsibilities

Internal audit has a responsibility to:

- Provide a cost effective and value added full internal audit service;
- Develop a flexible annual audit plan using a risk-based methodology;
- Implement the annual audit plan;
- Track status of outstanding management actions;
- Provide regular updates on the work of internal audit to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and where appropriate, senior officers;
- Assist, as needed, in the investigation of significant suspected fraudulent activities within the organisation; and
- Work with the External Auditor and other review bodies to share assurance and minimise duplication.

Organisational independence

Internal audit is involved in the determination of its priorities in consultation with those charged with governance. The Audit Services Manager has direct access and freedom to report in his own name to all officers and councillors and particularly to those charged with governance. If required the Audit Services Manager may request to meet privately with the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Internal audit will remain sufficiently independent of the activities that it audits to enable auditors to perform their duties in a manner which facilitates impartial and effective professional judgements and recommendations.

Objectivity is presumed to be impaired when individual auditors review any activity in which they have previously had operational responsibility. If individual auditors are extensively consulted during system, policy or procedure development, and independence could be seen as being compromised, or if they have had previous operational roles, they will be precluded from reviewing and making comments during routine or future audits, for the remainder of that financial year and for the following financial year after their involvement.

Accountability, reporting lines and relationships

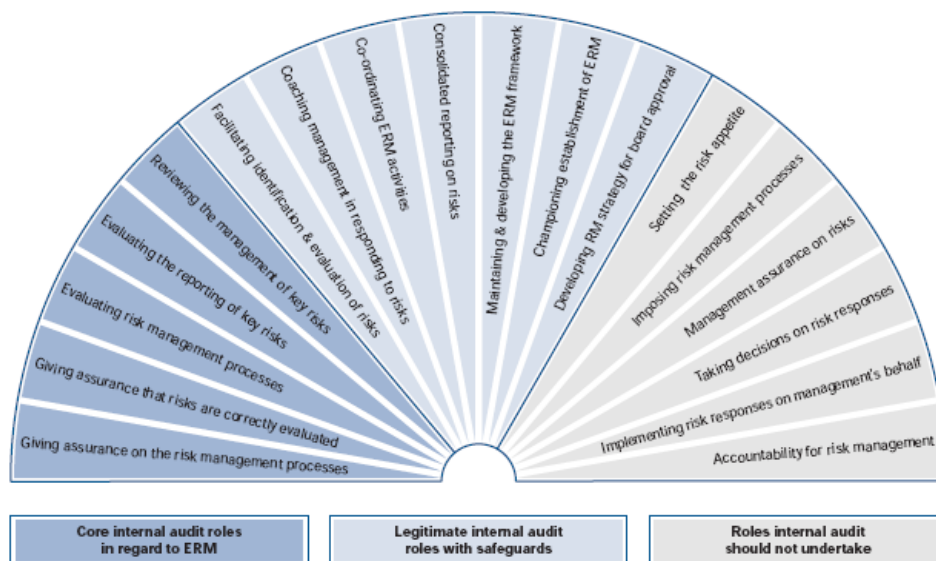
The Audit Services Manager reports on an administrative basis to the Head of Finance and reports functionally to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, the Chief Executive and

other senior management. The Audit Services Manager also, where appropriate, works closely with the Monitoring Officer. An Annual report will also be produced and presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee which will include an 'opinion' from the Audit Services Manager on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control, risk management and governance within the Authority.

A written report will be prepared by internal audit for every internal audit review. The report will be subject to an internal quality review before being issued to the responsible officer and, where appropriate, will include an 'opinion' on the adequacy of controls in the area that has been audited. The responsible officer will be asked to respond to the report in writing. The written response must show what actions have been taken or are planned in relation to each recommendation. Accountability for the response to the advice and recommendation of internal audit lies with management, who either accept and implement the advice or formally reject it.

The strategic element of risk management sits under the responsibility of the Audit Services Manager. There is a current post within the service area that leads on this. It should be noted that management remains responsible for risk management and Audit Services do not manage any of the risks on behalf of management.

In order to provide guidance on the roles that are permissible and the safeguards needed to protect internal audit's independence and objectivity, the council adopted the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (UK) position statement on the role of internal audit in risk management. Based on this position statement, the table below presents the range of risk management activities and indicates which roles Audit Services do and, equally importantly, do not undertake:



The full role and responsibilities of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee are detailed in their terms of reference, which are based on the model provided by CIPFA in their "Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities".

Internal audit resourcing

Internal audit must be appropriately staffed in terms of numbers, grades, qualification levels and experience. Internal auditors need to be properly trained to fulfill their responsibilities and should maintain their professional competence.

The Head of Finance is responsible for the appointment of the Audit Services Manager, who must be suitably qualified and experienced. The Audit Services Manager is responsible

for appointing all of the other staff to internal audit and will ensure that appointments are made in order to achieve the appropriate mix of qualifications, experience and audit skills. The Audit Services Manager is responsible for ensuring that the resources of internal audit are sufficient to meet its responsibilities and achieve its objectives. If a situation arose whereby it was concluded that resources were insufficient, this must be formally reported to the Head of Finance, and if the position is not resolved, to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Fraud

Managing the risk of fraud is the responsibility of management. Audit procedures alone, even when performed with due professional care, cannot guarantee that fraud or corruption will be detected. Internal audit does not have responsibility for the prevention or detection of fraud and corruption. Internal auditors will, however, be alert in all their work to risks and exposures that could allow fraud or corruption. Internal audit may be requested by management to assist with fraud related work.

The council's Financial Regulations require that all suspected irregularities are reported to the Audit Services Manager, and the council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy states that all frauds have to be reported to the S151 Officer, or their nominated officer (generally the Audit Services Manager) and that it is the responsibility of Audit Services to investigate any instances of fraud and corruption being perpetrated by any employee of the council.

Advisory work

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards allow that internal audit effort may, where considered to have the right skills, experience and available resource, sometimes be more usefully focused towards providing advice rather than assurance over key controls. Any such internal audit involvement in consultancy and advisory work, would only take place where it would not constitute a conflict of interest in keeping an independent stance. Any significant additional consulting services will be approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee beforehand.

External Clients

The Council's Internal Audit team provide the internal audit service to a number of additional clients. These currently are:

- West Midlands Fire Service
- Sandwell Children's Trust
- Sandwell Leisure Trust

Where such arrangements are in place, and where appropriate, there will be a separate Internal Audit Charter and reporting arrangements to these organisations respective Audit Committees (or equivalent).

Review of the internal audit charter

This charter will be reviewed annually by the Audit Services Manager and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.