

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council



Internal Audit Charter

**Audit & Assurance
Finance Department**

Latest Approval: Audit Committee 30 March 2021

Background

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (the PSIAS), provide a consolidated approach to the function of internal auditing across the whole of the public sector enabling continuity, sound corporate governance and transparency. The PSIAS encompass the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) standards, and also additional requirements and interpretations for the UK public sector.

The purpose of this Internal Audit Charter is to define internal audit's purpose, authority and responsibility in accordance with the requirements of the PSIAS. These are consistent with the Internal Audit Mission, which is set out below. It establishes internal audit's position, as performed by Audit & Assurance within the Council, and reporting lines, authorises access to records, personnel and physical property relevant to the performance of audit work, and defines the scope of internal audit activities.

This Charter also covers the arrangements for the appointment of the Head of Audit, & Assurance and internal audit staff, and identifies the nature of professionalism, skills and experience required.

The Internal Audit Mission

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

Definition

The Audit & Assurance team has adopted the following definition of internal auditing from the PSIAS. 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.

The PSIAS require that the internal audit charter defines the terms 'board' and 'senior management' in relation to the work of internal audit. For the purposes of internal audit work, the 'board' refers to the Council's Audit & Governance Committee which has delegated responsibility for overseeing the work of internal audit. Senior management is defined as the Chief Executive and Directors.

Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

The Core Principles, taken as whole, articulate internal audit effectiveness. For an internal audit function to be considered effective, all Principles should be present and operating effectively. The Head of Audit & Assurance is responsible for ensuring that internal auditors, as well as the internal audit activity, demonstrate achievement of the Core Principles. Failure to achieve any of the Principles would imply that an internal audit activity was not as effective as it should be in achieving internal audit Mission. The internal audit activity must achieve the following Core Principles:

- Demonstrate integrity.
- Demonstrate 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.
- Demonstrate quality and continuous improvement.
- Communicate effectively.
- Provide risk-based assurance.
- Is insightful, proactive, and future-focused.
- Promote organisational improvement.

Standards

Internal audit is a statutory service in the context of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, which require authorities to ensure that they have a sound system of internal control which:

- facilitates the effective exercise of its 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 Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 also state 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 internal audit function is required to comply with the PSIAS. The Relevant Internal Audit Standard Setters, which includes the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in respect of local government, adopted the common set of PSIAS from 1 April 2013. Compliance with the Standards is subject to an on-going quality assurance and improvement programme (QAIP), developed and implemented, in line with the Standards. This Programme will cover all aspects of the internal audit activity and includes a self-assessment on a regular basis and an external assessment which must be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation. Results of quality reviews shall be reported to the Audit & Governance Committee by the Head of Audit & Assurance.

Responsibilities and Objectives of Internal Audit

Internal audit is responsible for establishing procedures and applying the required resources to ensure that the service conforms to the Mission Statement, Definition of Internal Auditing and the Standards. The members of the internal audit team must demonstrate conformance with the PSIAS Core Principles, Code of Ethics and the Standards. In addition, all internal audit staff are also required to adhere to the Code of ethics of their professional bodies where appropriate.

The Head of Audit & Assurance must deliver an annual internal audit opinion and report that can be used by the organisation to inform its annual governance statement. The annual internal audit opinion must conclude on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation’s framework of governance, risk management and control. This is the ‘assurance role’ for internal audit.

Internal audit may also provide an independent and objective consultancy service, which is advisory in nature and generally performed at the specific request of the organisation. The aim of the consultancy service is to help line management improve the Council’s risk

management, governance and internal control. This is the 'Consultancy' role for internal audit and contributes towards the overall opinion.

Responsibilities of the Council

The Council is responsible for ensuring that internal audit is provided with all necessary assistance and support to ensure that it meets the required standards. The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) will make appropriate arrangements for the provision of an internal audit service. This will include the formal adoption of this Charter by the Audit & Governance Committee and the adoption of corresponding elements in the Financial Procedure Rules.

The Council will ensure it has taken all necessary steps to provide internal audit with information on its objectives, risks, and controls to allow the proper execution of the audit strategy and adherence to internal audit standards. This will include notifying internal audit of any significant changes in key control systems which may affect the internal audit plan. The Council, through the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and other relevant managers, will respond promptly to audit plans, reports and recommendations. Responsibility for monitoring and ensuring the implementation of agreed recommendations rests with the Council.

Independence and Objectivity of Internal Audit

The internal audit activity must be independent and internal auditors must be objective in performing their work. Audit & Assurance have adopted the PSIAS definition of independence. This is defined as the freedom from conditions that threaten the ability of the internal audit activity to carry out internal audit responsibilities in an unbiased manner. The Financial Procedure Rules recognise the organisational independence of the internal audit function as performed by Audit and Assurance. Although structurally part of the Finance Department and reporting, initially, to the Director of Finance, who has line management responsibilities for the team, to achieve the degree of independence necessary to effectively carry out the responsibilities of the internal audit activity the Head of Audit, & Assurance has direct reporting, and other, access to the Chief Executive and the Audit & Governance Committee. Additionally the internal audit function as performed by Audit & Assurance will have, as far as possible, little or no non-audit responsibilities.

Internal auditors will have no direct operational responsibility or authority over any of the activities audited. Accordingly, they will not implement internal controls, develop procedures, install systems, prepare records, or engage in any other activity that may impair internal auditors' judgment. Internal auditors are required to declare any potential conflict of interest. Where internal auditors have a perceived conflict of interest in undertaking a particular piece of work, this will be managed through the internal audit planning, management and supervisory process.

Internal auditors must exhibit the highest level of professional objectivity in gathering, evaluating, and communicating information about the activity or process being examined. Internal auditors must make a balanced assessment of all the relevant circumstances and not be unduly influenced by their own interests or by others in forming judgments.

The Head of Audit & Assurance also manages the functions of risk management and insurance. When audits covering these functions are undertaken they will be led by a Principal Internal Auditor, with draft reports being issued to the Principal Insurance Officer for a management response. The Head of Audit & Assurance will take no part in this process.

The Head of Audit & Assurance will confirm to the Audit & Governance Committee at least annually, the organisational independence of the internal audit activity.

Head of Audit & Assurance

The Head of Audit & Assurance will be appointed by the Council and will have sufficient skill, experience and competencies to work with the Executive Team and the Audit & Governance Committee and influence the risk management, governance and internal control of the Council. The Head of Audit & Assurance is responsible for ensuring that there is access to the full range of knowledge, skills, qualifications and experience to deliver the audit plan and meet the requirements of the PSIAS. In addition to internal audit skills, the Head of Audit & Assurance will specify any other professional skills that may be needed by the internal audit team. The Head of Audit & Assurance will hold a full, professional accountancy qualification, defined as a member of one of the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies (CCAB), Chartered Member, Institute of Internal Auditors (CMIIA) or equivalent professional accountancy membership and adhere to professional values and the Code of Ethics.

Relationships

The Head of Audit & Assurance reports directly to the Director of Finance. The Head of Audit & Assurance, or an appropriate representative of the internal audit team, shall attend meetings of the Audit & Governance Committee unless, exceptionally, the Committee decides that they should be excluded from either the whole meeting or for particular agenda items.

The Head of Audit & Assurance shall have an independent right of access to the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee. In exceptional circumstances, where normal reporting channels may be seen to impinge on the objectivity of the audit, the Head of Audit & Assurance may report directly to the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.

Internal Audit and External Audit will agree a protocol for co-operation which will make optimum use of the available audit resources.

Scope of Internal Audit

The Head of Audit & Assurance should develop and maintain a strategy for providing the Director of Finance economically and efficiently, with objective evaluation of, and opinions on, the effectiveness of the Council's risk management, governance and internal control arrangements. The annual internal audit plan will be risk based, prepared in consultation with Departmental Management Teams and presented to the Audit & Governance Committee for approval. The Head of Audit & Assurance opinions are a key element of the framework of assurance the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council need to inform the completion of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

The Head of Audit & Assurance will communicate the impact of resource limitations and significant interim changes to senior management and the Audit & Governance Committee.

Opinion Work

The internal audit activity must evaluate and contribute to the improvement of governance, risk management and control processes using a systematic and disciplined approach that is aligned with all of the strategies, objectives and risks to the Council.

Governance

Internal audit must assess and make appropriate recommendations for improving the governance process in its accomplishment of the following objectives:

- promoting appropriate ethics and values within the organisation;
- ensuring effective organisational performance management and accountability;
- communicating risk and control information to appropriate areas of the organisation; and,
- co-ordinating the activities of and communicating information among the Audit & Governance Committee, external and internal auditors and management.

Risk Management

Internal audit must evaluate the effectiveness and contribute to the improvement of risk management processes by assessing:

- organisational objectives support and align with the organisation's mission;
- significant risks are identified and assessed;
- appropriate risk responses are selected that align risks with the organisation's risk appetite; and
- relevant risk information is captured and communicated in a timely manner across the organisation, enabling staff, management and the board to carry out their responsibilities.

Internal Control

Internal audit must assist the organisation in maintaining effective controls by evaluating their effectiveness and efficiency and by promoting continuous improvement. The internal audit activity must evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of controls in responding to risks within the organisation's governance, operations and information systems regarding the:

- achievement of the organisation's strategic objectives;
- reliability and integrity of financial and operational information;
- economical, effective and efficient use of resources;
- effectiveness and efficiency of operations and programmes;
- safeguarding of the Council's assets and interests from losses of all kinds, including those arising from fraud, irregularity corruption or bribery; and
- compliance with laws, regulations, policies, procedures and contracts.

Internal Audit use a risk based planning system designed to proactively identify audits to address any emerging and developing risks on an ongoing and 'future focussed' basis.

Internal audit will promote and contribute to continuous ongoing improvements in systems across the Council by identifying and recommending best practice actions following audit work completed.

Where key systems are being operated on behalf of the Council or where key partnerships are in place the Head of Audit & Assurance must ensure arrangements are in place to form an opinion on their effectiveness.

Where the Council operates systems on behalf of other bodies, the Head of Audit & Assurance must be consulted on the audit arrangements proposed or in place.

It is management's responsibility to ensure the provision for relevant audit rights of access in any contract or Service Level Agreement the Council enters into, either as provider or commissioner of the service.

Non-Opinion Work

Internal audit may provide, at the request of management, a consultancy service which evaluates the policies, procedures and operations put in place by management. A specific contingency should be made in the internal audit plan to allow for management requests and consultancy work.

The Head of Audit & Assurance must consider the effect on the opinion work before accepting consultancy work or management requests over and above the contingency allowed for in the internal audit plan. In the event that the proposed work may jeopardise the delivery of the internal audit opinion, the Head of Audit & Assurance must advise the Director of Finance before commencing the work. The Head of Audit & Assurance must consider how the consultancy work contributes towards the overall opinion.

Fraud

Managing the risk of fraud is the responsibility of line management. The Director of Finance has specific responsibilities in relation to the detection and investigation of fraud and may request internal audit to assist with the investigation of suspected fraud or corruption. The relationship between the Head of Audit & Assurance, the Director of Finance, and HR, Governance & Engagement staff has been set out in a fraud response plan that has been agreed by all parties. Internal audit should be notified of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety, to inform their opinion on the control environment and their audit plan.

Whilst it is not a primary role of internal audit activity to detect fraud, it does have a role in providing an independent assurance on the effectiveness of the processes put in place by management to manage the risk of fraud. Internal audit can do additional work, although it cannot be prejudicial to this primary role. Typical activities may include:

- investigating the cause of fraud;
- responding to whistleblowers;
- considering fraud in every audit;
- making recommendations to improve processes; and
- review fraud prevention controls and detection processes put in place by management.

Reporting

The Head of Audit & Assurance will agree reporting arrangements with the Section 151 Officer which will include procedures for the:

- distribution and timing of draft audit reports;
- Council's responsibilities in respect of responding to draft audit reports;
- distribution of finalised audit reports;
- follow up by internal audit of agreed recommendations; and
- escalation of recommendations where management responses are judged inadequate in relation to the identified risks.

The Head of Audit & Assurance will present a formal report annually to the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and the Audit & Governance Committee giving an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management, and internal control. The report will also include significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by senior management and the Audit & Governance Committee. The annual report will state any areas of non-conformance with PSIAS and will be timed to support the production of the Council's Annual Governance Statement. Reports of progress against the planned work will be presented to the Audit & Governance Committee on a regular basis during the year.

Internal Audit Access Rights

The Financial Procedure Rules (B2) state that the Director of Finance or his/her authorised representative (interpreted to be any Audit & Assurance internal audit officers) shall have authority, without necessarily giving prior notice, to:

- access at all reasonable times to any Council premises or land;
- require any officer or member to produce any cash, stores or any other Council property under his/her control;
- require from any officer or member access to all records, documents, vouchers and correspondence relating in any way to both the financial or other transactions of the Council and the development of processes or activities within the Council or its partners, including documents of a confidential nature;
- require and receive such information and explanations he or she considers necessary concerning any matter under examination.

Where the Council works in partnership with other organisations, the role of internal audit will be defined on an individual basis. Where internal audit undertakes work on behalf of any other organisations, this will be determined in conjunction with the organisation's Board and in consultation with the Director of Finance to ensure that appropriate audit resources are available to provide assurance over the Council's activities.

Internal Audit Resources

Internal Audit must be appropriately staffed in terms of numbers, grades, qualifications and experience, having regard to its objectives and standards. Leadership will be provided by qualified accountants experienced in the field of audit, and support will be provided by qualified or experienced auditors, accounting technicians or trainees preparing to become qualified auditors, accountants or technicians. Auditors need to be properly trained to fulfil their responsibilities, and should maintain their professional competence through an appropriate ongoing development programme. The Head of Audit & Assurance is responsible for appointing Internal Audit staff and will ensure that appointments are made to achieve the correct mix of qualifications, experience and audit skills.

If the Head of Audit & Assurance or the Audit & Governance Committee consider that the level of audit resources or the terms of reference in any way limit the scope of internal audit, or prejudice the ability of internal audit to deliver a service consistent with the Definition of Internal Auditing and the Standards, they should advise the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance accordingly.

Review

The Internal Audit Charter will be reviewed and reported to the Audit & Governance Committee at least every two years.