

Internal Audit Charter

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Internal Audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the operations of Cheshire East Council. It assists the Council in accomplishing its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes.

2 Role

- 2.1 The requirement for an internal audit function in local government is detailed within the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which states 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’.
- 2.2 The standards in relation to internal audit are laid down in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013 [‘the Standards’].

3 Professionalism

- 3.1 Internal Audit will govern itself by adherence to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2013 [‘the Standards’]. The mandatory Standards constitute the fundamental requirements for the professional practice of internal auditing in the public sector and for evaluating the effectiveness of Internal Audit's performance.
- 3.2 The Local Government Application Note for the United Kingdom Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (LGAN) will also be adhered to as applicable to guide operations. In addition, Internal Audit will adhere to Cheshire East Council's relevant policies and procedures and the Internal Audit Manual.

4 Authority

- 4.1 Internal Audit, in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations and with strict accountability for confidentiality and safeguarding records and information, is authorised full, free, and unrestricted access to any and all of Cheshire East Council's records, physical properties, and personnel pertinent to carrying out any engagement. All employees are requested to assist Internal Audit in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. Internal Audit will also have free and unrestricted access to the Audit and Governance Committee.

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5 Organisation

5.1 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will report functionally to the Audit and Governance Committee and administratively (i.e. day to day operations) to the Corporate Manager – Professional and Commercial Services on an interim basis. This administrative reporting line will be subject to review following the appointment of the Director of Resources.

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

- Approve the Internal Audit Charter.
- Approve the risk based internal audit plan.
- Receive communications from the Corporate Manager Governance and Audit on Internal Audit's performance relative to its plan and other matters.
- Make appropriate inquiries of management and the Corporate Manager Governance and Audit to determine whether there is inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
- Receive the annual report, which includes:
 - the annual opinion,
 - a summary of the work on which internal audit has based the opinion,
 - a statement on conformance with PSIAS and the LGAN and
 - the results of the quality assurance and improvement programme.

5.2 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will communicate and interact directly with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee as appropriate and will also have free and unfettered access to the Chief Executive.

6 Independence and Objectivity

6.1 Internal Audit will remain free from interference by any element in the organisation, including matters of audit selection, scope, procedures, frequency, timing, or report content to permit maintenance of a necessary independent and objective mental attitude.

6.2 Any assurance activity in areas where the Corporate Manager Governance and Audit has operational responsibility will be carried out by auditors with no involvement in the process and overseen by the Corporate Manager – Professional and Commercial Services, thus maintaining independence and objectivity in line with the PSIAS.

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

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- 6.4 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will confirm to the Audit and Governance Committee, at least annually, the organisational independence of Internal Audit.

7 Responsibility

- 7.1 The scope of internal auditing encompasses, but is not limited to, the examination and evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk management, and internal controls as well as the quality of performance in carrying out assigned responsibilities to achieve the organisation's stated goals and objectives. This includes:

- Evaluating risk exposure relating to achievement of the Council's strategic objectives.
- Evaluating the reliability and integrity of information and the means used to identify, measure, classify, and report such information.
- Evaluating the systems established to ensure compliance with those policies, plans, procedures, laws, and regulations which could have a significant impact on the Council.
- Evaluating the means of safeguarding assets and, as appropriate, verifying the existence of such assets.
- Evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency with which resources are employed.
- Evaluating operations or programmes to ascertain whether results are consistent with established objectives and goals and whether the operations or programmes are being carried out as planned.
- Monitoring and evaluating governance processes.
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Council's risk management processes.
- Evaluating the degree of coordination between internal and external providers of assurance – sharing information and coordinating activities to ensure proper coverage and minimise duplication of effort.
- Performing consulting and advisory services related to governance, risk management and control as appropriate for the organisation.
- Reporting periodically on Internal Audit's purpose, authority, responsibility, and performance relative to its plan.
- Reporting significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by the Audit and Governance Committee.
- Evaluating specific operations at the request of the Audit and Governance Committee or management, as appropriate.

- 7.2 The Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. Internal Audit plays a vital part in advising the organisation that these arrangements are in place and operating properly.

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- 7.3 The provision of assurance is, therefore, the primary role for internal audit. This role requires the Corporate Manager Governance and Audit to provide an annual internal audit opinion and report which is timed to inform the Annual Governance Statement and is based on an objective assessment of the framework of governance, risk management and control.
- 7.4 Internal Audit may also undertake non-assurance work including fraud related and consultancy work, at the request of the organisation, and work for other bodies, subject to there being no impact on the core assurance work and the availability of skills and resources.
- 7.5 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will be made aware of major new systems and proposed initiatives. The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will consider what if any audit work needs to be done to help ensure risks are properly identified and evaluated and appropriate controls built in.

8 Role of Internal Audit in Fraud Related Work

- 8.1 Managing the risk of fraud and corruption is the responsibility of management. The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will be informed of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety to inform their opinion on the internal control environment and Internal Audit's work programme.
- 8.2 At the request of management, Internal Audit may go beyond the work needed to meet its assurance responsibilities and assist with, for example, the investigation of suspected fraud and corruption.

9 Internal Audit Plan

- 9.1 At least annually, the Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will submit to the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee an internal audit plan for review and approval. The internal audit plan will consist of a work schedule as well as budget and resource requirements for the next financial year. The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will communicate the impact of resource limitations and significant interim changes to the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 9.2 The internal audit plan will be developed based on a prioritisation of the audit universe using a risk-based methodology, including input of the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee. The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will review and adjust the plan, as necessary, in response to changes in the Council's business, risks, operations, programmes, systems, and controls. Any significant deviation from the approved internal audit plan will be communicated to the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee through periodic activity reports.

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10 Reporting and Monitoring

- 10.1 A written report will be prepared and issued by the Corporate Manager Governance and Audit or designee following the conclusion of most internal audit assignments and will be distributed as appropriate. Internal audit results will also be communicated to the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 10.2 The internal audit report will include management's response and corrective action taken or to be taken in regard to the specific findings and recommendations. Management's response will include a timetable for anticipated completion of action to be taken and an explanation for any corrective action that will not be implemented.
- 10.3 Internal Audit will be responsible for appropriate follow-up on engagement findings and recommendations.
- 10.4 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will periodically report to the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee on Internal Audit's purpose, authority, and responsibility, as well as performance relative to its plan. Reporting will also include significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 10.5 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit is responsible for the delivery of an annual audit opinion and report that can be used by the Council to inform its governance statement. The annual opinion concludes on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

11 Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme

- 11.1 Internal Audit will maintain a quality assurance and improvement programme that covers all aspects of the internal audit activity. The programme will include an evaluation of Internal Audit's conformance with the Definition of Internal Auditing and the *Standards* and an evaluation of whether internal auditors apply the Code of Ethics. The programme also assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of Internal Audit and identifies opportunities for improvement.
- 11.2 The Corporate Manager Governance and Audit will communicate to the Management Group Board and the Audit and Governance Committee on Internal Audit's quality assurance and improvement programme, including results of ongoing internal assessments and external assessments conducted at least every five years.