

# **Internal Audit Charter**

**This document sets out the purpose, authority and principal responsibilities of the Internal Audit Service for North Somerset Council**

## **1 Internal Audit's Purpose and Mission**

- 1.1 Internal Audit is an assurance function that primarily provides an independent and objective opinion to the Council on its control environment. Internal Audit helps the organisation to achieve its objectives through a systematic and disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control, processes. Its mission is to enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk based and objective assurance, advice and insight.

## **2 Internal Audit's Statutory Role**

- 2.1 The Accounts & Audit Regulations 2015 (Local Government England & Wales) states 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”.

- 2.2 Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to designate an Officer to be responsible for “making arrangements for the proper administration” of the Council’s financial affairs. One of the ways by which this duty is discharged is by maintaining an adequate and effective Internal Audit Service.

- 2.3 The Audit Committee responsibilities are recorded in its Terms of Reference which were last updated significantly during 2019/20.

## **3 Standards for Professional Practice of Internal Auditing**

- 3.1 Internal Audit will govern itself by adherence to the mandatory elements of The Institute of Internal Auditors’ International Professional Practices Framework, including the Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, and the Definition of Internal Auditing. The Head of Audit and Assurance will report periodically to the Council’s Chief Financial Officer (S151 Officer) and the Audit Committee regarding Internal Audit conformance to the Code of Ethics and the Standards.

## **4 Management's Responsibilities for Internal Control**

- 4.1 Responsibility for internal control rests fully with Management, who shall ensure that arrangements are appropriate and adequate. Management shall establish and maintain an adequate system of internal control to enable them to discharge their responsibilities and to ensure that the Council's resources are properly applied in the manner intended. This includes responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud.

## **5 Internal Audit Responsibility & Objectives**

- 5.1 Internal Audit is responsible for carrying out an appraisal of all the Council's activities, financial or otherwise, in line with this Internal Audit Charter. Internal Audit will provide an annual opinion to the Council (Audit Committee) and will carry out Audits and other assurance work in order to deliver this opinion. In addition, Internal Audit will report to Management any material facts that may affect the delivery of the opinion.
- 5.2 As stated in Section 3, Internal Audit will comply with the Professional Practices Framework, (including the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards), and will complete internal assessment of compliance with the Standards and an evaluation of whether internal auditors apply the Code of Ethics. The findings of internal assessments and any required actions will be reported to the Council's Audit Committee. Compliance will also be verified through an external review assessment every five years.
- 5.3 One of the key service objectives of Internal Audit will be to produce a risk based Annual Audit Assurance Plan for approval by the Council's Audit Committee. The Audit Plan will remain flexible to take account of the Council's changing environment and risk profile.
- 5.4 Completion of all or a significant proportion of the approved Audit Plan will be a key performance measure of the Internal Audit Service.
- 5.5 Internal Audit will directly employ staff and contract as necessary to provide a service to the Council. This is carried out through a services agreement with Bath & North East Somerset Council who work in partnership with North Somerset Council for Internal Audit Services.

## **6 The Scope of Internal Audit**

- 6.1 Internal Audit's work is not limited to the Council's financial systems and records, it extends to all activities of the Council. This enables Internal Audit to give an independent and objective opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and the control environment as a source of assurance to management. Work includes: reviewing and evaluating compliance with policies, laws and regulations; assessing the reliability and integrity of information; and, safeguarding Council assets. In addition to this core internal audit work, it will undertake, where appropriate, other non-assurance work at the request of management. This may include consultancy and fraud / irregularity related work.

- 6.2 Where appropriate, there may be instances whereby Internal Audit works in partnership to meet objectives and deliver services. In these instances, Internal Audit will decide whether to conduct the work required itself or can place reliance on the work carried out by other Auditors or sources of assurance. If Internal Audit were to carry out the work, then access rights need to be established to all systems and documents. Management should ensure these are established as part of the partnership arrangements.

## **7 Internal Audit reporting lines**

- 7.1 The Head of Audit and Assurance fulfills the role of the Council's "Chief Internal Auditor" through its contractual arrangements and reports to the Client - Director of Corporate Services/ Section 151 Officer. The Head of Audit and Assurance has freedom of reporting access without fear or favour to all relevant Members and Officers (including the Leader of the Council, the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Council's Statutory Officers - Chief Executive {Head of Paid Service}; Director of Corporate Services {Section 151} and the Assistant Director Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer.
- 7.2 The Council has an Audit Committee whose Terms of Reference include responsibility for monitoring the performance of the Internal Audit Service and approving its Annual Audit Plan. The Head of Audit and Assurance reports regularly to the Audit Committee and is required on an annual basis to provide a formal opinion of the adequacy of the Internal Control Framework and systems to manage risk.

## **8 Internal Audit Independence**

- 8.1 A critical element of the performance of Internal Audit is independence from the activities it audits. This enables Internal Audit to form impartial and effective judgment for the opinions and recommendations made. To help ensure independence Internal Audit is allowed unrestricted access to Senior Management & Members, as stated in Section 7.1. the Head of Audit and Assurance reports in their own name and has enhanced independence through the contractual arrangements with Bath & North East Somerset Council.
- 8.2 Internal Auditors will be impartial, have an unbiased attitude and avoid any conflict of interest. Auditors will not undertake audit reviews in services where they have previously worked (directly working for the function or carrying out 'consultancy services') in the last two years. In terms of 'consultancy services' this is work which is going beyond providing an opinion on the control environment, i.e., they are designing or developing systems to fulfil an objective.
- 8.3 Internal auditors will disclose any impairments of independence or objectivity, in fact or appearance, to appropriate parties.
- 8.4 Before Internal Audit agrees to carry out consultancy services consideration will be given to any potential conflicts of interest. If it is concluded that the proposed work

would compromise delivery of the service's prime function, then the work would be declined.

- 8.5 Where the Head of Audit and Assurance has or is expected to have roles and/or responsibilities that fall outside of internal auditing, safeguards will be established to limit impairments to independence or objectivity.
- 8.6 The Head of Audit and Assurance will confirm to the Audit Committee at least annually of the independence of the internal audit activity.

## **9 Internal Audit Fraud related work**

- 9.1 Internal Audit does not have responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud. However, Internal Audit staff shall be alert in all their work, to risks and exposures that could allow fraud or corruption. Internal Audit work alone cannot guarantee that fraud and irregularities will be picked up even when work is performed in compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- 9.2 The main source for Internal Audit to be alerted to possible fraud and irregularities will be through the awareness of Council Officer and Members of the Council's Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy and associated policies (Anti-Money Laundering Policy; Anti-Bribery & Corruption Policy and Whistleblowing Policy). Internal Audit maintain the Council's Strategy and Policies and report on this to the Audit Committee. The Strategy adheres to the themes and principles of the CIPFA Local Government Counter Fraud Strategy.
- 9.3 Internal Audit assist in the detection of fraud by assisting the Council's Director of Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer) in roles related to the Cabinet Office National Fraud Initiative (NFI). Internal Audit assists Council Services in the preparation and submission of data to the Cabinet Office and then the review and investigation of data matches.
- 9.4 Internal Audit may also be requested by Management to assist with the investigation of potential cases of fraud and financial irregularities. The objective of the Internal Audit Service is to ensure that: 1) the matter is fully investigated and if deemed necessary referred for Police or disciplinary action; and 2) the system of internal control is enhanced to avoid a repeat of the issue. All reported irregularities would be investigated in line with adopted strategies, policies and protocols.

## **10 Internal Audit's Right of Access**

- 10.1 The Accounts & Audit Regulations 2015 provides that any Officer of the Council must make available such documents of the Council which relates to its' accounts and other records as appear to be necessary for the purpose of the Audit.

In addition, the Council's Financial Regulations state that the Head of Audit and Assurance or their authorised representative, shall have authority to:

- Enter at any reasonable times, any operational or administrative Council premises or land and have access to all Council property;
- Have access to (and where necessary to copy or retain) all records whether manually or electronically held, documentation, correspondence and computer systems relating to any transaction of the Council, or non-official funds operated by Council staff;
- Require and receive such explanations as are necessary concerning any matter under examination;
- Require any employee of the Council to produce or account for cash, stores or any other property under their custody or control,
- Examine any work or services carried out for the council by an employee or contractor, and any goods purchased on behalf of the Council,
- Review appraise and report on the soundness, adequacy and application of internal controls. This includes those controls to protect Council resources, property and assets from loss / waste.

## **11 Relationship with External Audit & other Assurance Providers**

- 11.1 The relationship between Internal Audit and the Council's External Audit should take account their differing roles. The External Auditor has a statutory responsibility to express an opinion on the Council's financial statements, whilst Internal Audit is responsible for assessing the adequacy and evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes and advising Management accordingly.
- 11.2 Internal Audit will co-operate and co-ordinate with External Audit and other review agents to:
- Ensure that duplication of work is minimised
  - Consider joint delivery where appropriate
  - Determine the level of assurance that can be obtained from their work
  - Review the reliance that can be placed on that assurance as part of Internal Audit's opinion on the control environment
  - To enable access to all Internal Audit records as appropriate.
- 11.3 As part of its drive to secure efficiencies, Internal Audit will use all sources of assurance available to it to inform its opinion.

## **12 Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan**

- 12.1 The Head of Audit and Assurance has developed a quality assurance and improvement programme that covers all aspects of the internal audit activity. It has been designed to enable an evaluation of the internal audit activity's conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and an evaluation of whether internal auditors apply the Institute of Internal Auditors Code of Ethics. Identifying opportunities for improvement is a key requirement of the programme.

- 12.2 Internal assessments will be carried out to review compliance with the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors International Professional Practices Framework. The results of internal assessments referencing any related action plans will be reported in the annual report to the Council's Audit Committee.
- 12.3 An external assessment will be carried out at least every five years by a qualified, independent assessor from outside the organisation.
- 12.4 The Head of Audit and Assurance will inform the Audit Committee of the form of the external assessment and clarify the qualifications and independence of the external assessor. The results of the external assessment including any action plans will be reported in the relevant annual report to the Audit Committee.
- 12.5 Any non-conformance to the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing and Code of Ethics will be highlighted for consideration for inclusion in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.