

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
Report to:	Governance and Audit Committee
Date:	09 December 2021
Subject:	Internal Audit Charter
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Nature and Reason for Reporting: The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards require the chief audit executive to produce an Internal Audit Charter, which the Governance and Audit Committee must approve. A review to ensure continued appropriateness has not identified any significant changes.	

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards provides for a periodic review of the Internal Audit Charter, with final approval of the charter residing with the Governance and Audit Committee.
- 1.2. The Governance and Audit Committee last reviewed and approved the Charter in February 2021. The Head of Audit and Risk has undertaken a review to ensure continued appropriateness, which has not identified any significant changes.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Governance and Audit Committee notes the review and approves the continued appropriateness of the Internal Audit Charter.



INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER DECEMBER 2021

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION _____	3
INTERNAL AUDIT'S PURPOSE _____	4
INTERNAL AUDIT'S AUTHORITY _____	5
Internal audit's rights of access _____	5
Scope of internal audit's work _____	6
Independence _____	6
INTERNAL AUDIT'S RESPONSIBILITIES _____	7
REPORTING _____	8
Internal Audit Strategy _____	8
Annual Opinion _____	8
Assignment Reporting _____	8
Assurance Rating _____	9
INTERNAL AUDIT'S ROLE IN FRAUD-RELATED WORK _____	10
INTERNAL AUDIT RESOURCES _____	11
Internal Audit and Risk Management (December 2021) _____	11
SAFEGUARDS TO LIMIT IMPAIRMENTS OF INDEPENDENCE OR OBJECTIVITY _____	12

INTRODUCTION

1. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards¹ (PSIAS) define the nature and set out basic principles for internal auditing in the UK public sector.
2. The Standards require the chief audit executive to define the purpose, authority and responsibility of the internal audit activity in an internal audit charter. Final approval of the Internal Audit Charter rests with the Governance and Audit Committee.
3. The internal audit charter establishes:
 - internal audit's purpose within the Council
 - internal audit's authority and its access records, personnel and physical properties relevant to the performance of its work
 - internal audit's responsibilities
 - reporting lines and the nature of the chief audit executive's relationship with senior management and the board
 - the scope of internal audit's work, including the nature of its assurance role and consultancy services
 - the role of internal audit in fraud-related work
 - arrangements for resourcing the internal audit service
 - the safeguards to limit impairments of independence or objectivity.
4. The PSIAS use generic terms that, in the Isle of Anglesey County Council's case, are translated as:

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Chief audit executive	Head of Audit & Risk
Senior management	Senior Leadership Team
The board	The Executive

¹ Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, Issued by the Relevant Internal Audit Standard Setters, March 2017

INTERNAL AUDIT'S PURPOSE

5. A professional, independent and objective internal audit service is one of the key elements of good governance, as recognised throughout the UK public sector.
6. The provision of assurance services is the primary purpose for internal audit. Through our annual internal audit opinion and other reports, we give assurance to elected and lay members and management, highlighting areas for improvement.
7. The PSIAS define internal audit as:

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.

8. Our role is unique; it provides effective challenge and acts as a catalyst for positive change and continual improvement in governance in all its aspects. Our role is particularly important when the Council is facing uncertain and challenging times.
9. To provide optimum benefit to the organisation, we work in partnership with management to assist the organisation in achieving its objectives.
10. Our main objectives are to:
 - Provide independent assurance and advice to management and lay and elected members on risk management, governance and internal control
 - Develop and promote our role to make a significant contribution to the Council's priority to modernise and deliver efficiencies and improve services for our customers
 - Add value in all areas of our work, providing excellent service to our customers.

INTERNAL AUDIT'S AUTHORITY

11. Internal audit is a statutory requirement for local authorities and obtains its authority and obligations from two pieces of legislation:
12. Part 3, Regulation 7 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014² 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”.
13. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires every authority to make arrangements for the administration of its financial affairs and to ensure that one of the officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs. CIPFA has defined ‘proper administration’ in that it should include ‘compliance with the statutory requirements for accounting and internal audit’.
14. In addition, the CIPFA statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government states that the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) must:
 - ensure an effective internal audit function is resourced and maintained
 - ensure that the authority has put in place effective arrangements for internal audit of the control environment
 - support the authority’s internal audit arrangements
 - ensure that the Audit Committee receives the necessary advice and information, so that both functions can operate effectively.
15. The Council’s Financial Procedure Rules also provide for the maintenance of a continuous internal audit under independent supervision, overseen by the Council’s Governance and Audit Committee, and subject to professional audit standards (4.8.5.3.1).

Internal audit’s rights of access

16. The Council’s Financial Procedure Rules (4.8.5.3.2) provide for internal audit’s rights of access, providing the service with authority to:
 - enter at all reasonable times Council premises, land or contract sites;
 - have access to all records, documents or correspondence relating to any financial and other transactions of the Council;
 - require and receive such explanations as are necessary from employees of the Council;
 - require employees of the Council to produce cash, stores or any other property of the Council under their control for examination.

² The Accounts and Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 amend the 2014 Regulations but do not affect this requirement.

Scope of internal audit's work

17. The internal audit service is proactive and innovative, constantly aiming to improve. We have a customer-focused approach to audit planning, project scoping and service delivery, involving elected members, senior management and operational staff.
18. Our strategy takes account of the corporate risk register and other assurances that the Council may receive, internal or external, to prevent duplication and co-ordinate regulatory work. It also takes account of discussions with senior management.
19. Our work provides a risk-based approach that allows the Head of Audit and Risk to form and evidence her opinion on the control environment to support the Council's Annual Governance Statement.
20. Internal Audit may occasionally provide guidance and advice, e.g. on new systems or may help to develop new processes using our specific skills. Services may also occasionally ask us to carry out specific projects on a consultancy basis. On these occasions, we make it clear from the outset that we are working on a consultancy basis rather than internal audit basis and are not giving audit assurance on these occasions.

Independence

21. The PSIAS require that the chief audit executive must report to a level within the organisation that allows the internal audit activity to fulfil its responsibilities; reporting to the board or its delegated equivalent is the generally accepted method of helping to ensure the achievement of organisational independence.
22. The Head of Audit and Risk has direct access to the Governance and Audit Committee and is free to report directly to any member of the senior leadership team or head of service.
23. Although functionally reporting to the Director of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer, the Head of Audit and Risk has direct access to the Chief Executive Officer and Monitoring Officer, which is provided for in the Council's Financial Procedure Rules (4.8.5.3.5).
24. These extended reporting lines provide internal audit with sufficient independence of the activities that it reviews to enable its auditors to perform their duties objectively, allowing them to make impartial and effective professional judgements and raise issues for improvement.
25. The Director of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer annually appraises the Head of Audit and Risk's performance with input and feedback from the Chief Executive Officer and the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee. This ensures that the Head of Audit and Risk's opinion and scope of work cannot be limited or affected by her functional line management position within the Council.

INTERNAL AUDIT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

26. In maintaining internal audit activity, the chief audit executive takes account of the mandatory elements of the PSIAS:
 - Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing
 - Code of Ethics
 - Standards
 - Definition of Internal Auditing.
27. All members of the internal audit team are required to comply with the PSIAS, including its Code of Ethics. In addition, all auditors sign an annual declaration stating that we will respect the confidentiality of information we access during our work, declare any interests we may have in any services that we review, and have read the PSIAS, Code of Ethics and Council's Code of Conduct for Officers.
28. All internal auditors must:
 - work with others to promote and demonstrate the benefits of good governance throughout the Council
 - promote the highest standards and ethics across the Council based on integrity, objectivity, competence and confidentiality
 - exercise sound judgement in identifying weaknesses in the Council's control environment and provide a balanced view on how significant these are
 - be committed to continuous improvement
 - demonstrate integrity
 - report on what is found, without fear or favour
 - give clear, professional and objective advice
 - hold an appropriate qualification and have an active programme for personal professional development.
29. In addition, the Head of Audit and Risk must:
 - be a senior manager with regular and open engagement across the Council particularly with senior management and the Audit and Governance Committee
 - be suitably qualified and experienced
 - give assurance on the control environment, including risk and information management and internal controls across the Council
 - produce an evidence-based annual internal audit opinion on the Council's control environment, reflecting the work done during the year and summarising the main outcomes and conclusions, highlighting any specific concerns
 - liaise closely with the Council's external regulators to share knowledge and use audit resources most effectively
 - determine the resources, expertise, qualifications and systems for the internal audit service that are required to meet its objectives and provide an annual audit opinion.
30. The chief audit executive also takes account of the CIPFA Statement on the Head of Internal Audit (2019), which sets out individual and organisational responsibilities, and represents best practice guidance to support internal audit effectiveness.

REPORTING

Internal Audit Strategy

31. The Head of Audit and Risk prepares the internal audit strategy in consultation with the Director of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer, and senior management. The Senior Leadership Team regularly reviews internal audit priorities.
32. The Head of Audit and Risk presents the strategy annually to the Governance and Audit Committee for approval and provides in-year revisions to the Committee as part of the update report presented at each meeting.

Annual Opinion

33. The Head of Audit and Risk provides the Council with an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk management and control arrangements in support of the Annual Governance Statement.
34. In giving the opinion, it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute; the most that can be provided is a reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in governance, risk management and control processes. The Head of Audit and Risk provides the annual opinion in the Annual Internal Audit Report after the year-end.

Assignment Reporting

35. The Internal Audit Service is fully committed to the Council's Welsh Language policy. Reporting is bilingual and the team includes bilingual staff who can undertake reviews in the language of choice of those assisting with reviews.
36. All audit reviews are the subject of formal reports. Debrief meetings are held with the managers responsible for the area under review to agree the factual accuracy of the issues and risks raised.
37. After agreement, we issue draft reports to the relevant manager who records the action that will be taken to address the issues / risks raised and the officers assigned responsibility to implement along with timescales for implementation. Once the action plan has been fully completed and agreed with the auditor, we issue a final report.
38. The Head of Audit and Risk provides a copy of every report to the Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, members of the Governance and Audit Committee and the relevant Portfolio Holder. The Head of Audit and Risk presents a summary of each report to the Governance Audit and Committee at each meeting.
39. Members of the Governance and Audit Committee and the Portfolio Holder will also receive copies of any associated agreed action plans where reports have received a 'Limited' or 'No' assurance rating.

Assurance Rating

40. We provide an opinion on the overall level of assurance for each individual internal audit assignment. In reaching a conclusion, we use the following definitions, which the Governance and Audit Committee approved at its meeting in April 2019:

Level of Assurance	Definition
Substantial Assurance	<p>Arrangements for governance, risk management and internal control are good.</p> <p>We found no significant or material Risks/Issues.</p>
Reasonable Assurance	<p>Arrangements for governance, risk management and/or internal control are reasonable.</p> <p>There are minor weaknesses in the management of risks and/or controls but there are no risks to the achievement of objectives. Management and Heads of Service can address.</p>
Limited Assurance	<p>Arrangements for governance, risk management and internal control are limited.</p> <p>There are significant weaknesses in the management of risks and/or controls that put the achievement of objectives at risk. Heads of Service need to resolve and SLT may need to be informed.</p>
No Assurance	<p>Arrangements for governance, risk management and internal control are significantly flawed.</p> <p>There are fundamental weaknesses in the management of risks and/or controls that will lead to a failure to achieve objectives. The immediate attention of SLT is required, with possible Executive intervention.</p>

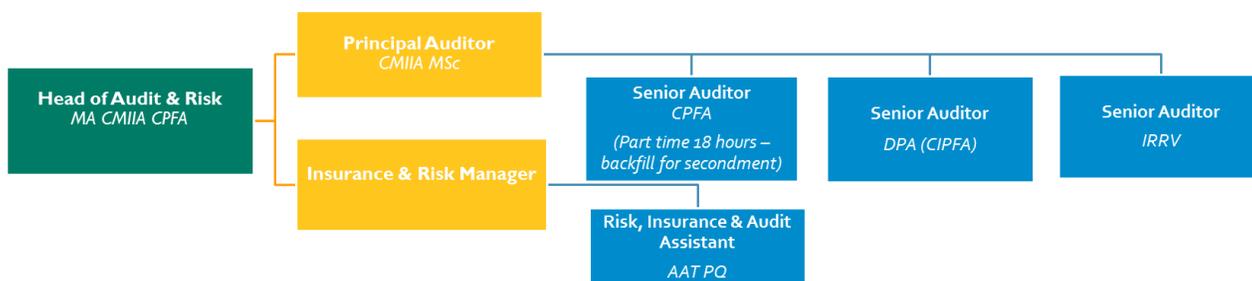
INTERNAL AUDIT'S ROLE IN FRAUD-RELATED WORK

41. Internal audit is not responsible for managing the risk of fraud - this lies with the Council's senior management.
42. The Council's policy for the Prevention of Fraud and Corruption requires managers to inform the Head of Audit and Risk of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety, to inform her opinion on the internal control environment and internal audit's work programme, as well as to allow her to ensure the Council takes appropriate action.
43. Although internal audit carries out proactive projects to identify potential fraud, bribery and / or corruption and can carry out special investigations into alleged irregularities, the Head of Audit and Risk retains the right to decide on an appropriate course of action, which may mean a joint investigation or investigation by the service. However, management should send the outcome of all investigation activities to the Head of Audit and Risk for inclusion in the Internal Audit Annual Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Report.
44. Where it is thought necessary, the external auditor may conduct investigations, either in liaison with internal audit or independently.

INTERNAL AUDIT RESOURCES

45. We have a well-qualified and experienced team, with a mix of relevant qualifications to reflect the varied functions of the internal audit service.

Internal Audit and Risk Management (December 2021)



46. The Governance and Audit Committee annually reviews the resources of the internal audit service through the acceptance of the internal audit strategy and updates on its priorities.
47. Where particular specialisms are not present, the Head of Audit and Risk will source these from outside the Council where resources are available.
48. The Standards require that internal auditors must enhance their knowledge, skills and other competencies through continuing professional development. The Head of Audit and Risk carries out a regular review of the development and training needs of all auditors through ongoing one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals.

SAFEGUARDS TO LIMIT IMPAIRMENTS OF INDEPENDENCE OR OBJECTIVITY

49. To be effective, internal audit must be independent and be seen to be independent. To ensure this, internal audit will operate within a framework that allows:
- unrestricted access to senior management and the chair of the Governance and Audit Committee
 - reporting in its own name
 - segregation from line operations.
50. Every effort will be made to preserve objectivity by controlling the involvement of audit staff in non-audit duties in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest, specific exceptions are however acceptable in respect of participation in service improvement projects, where a 'critical friend' role will be held.
51. In addition, appropriate arrangements are in place to limit the impairment of independence and objectivity due to the Head of Audit and Risk's line management of the Risk Management and Insurance service. The Head of Audit and Risk will not scope or review internal audit activity relating to this service area. The Director of Function (Resources) and Section 151 Officer will sign off reports.