

Signed off by	Interim Head of Finance
Author	Luke Harvey, Project & Performance Team Leader
Telephone	Tel: 01737 276519
Email	Luke.Harvey@reigate-banstead.gov.uk
To	Audit Committee
Date	Tuesday, 15 March 2022

Key Decision Required	N
Wards Affected	(All Wards);

Subject	Internal audit plan and Charter 2022/23
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Recommendations

- (i) That the Audit Committee approve the internal audit plan for 2022/23 as set out in annex 1; and,
- (ii) That the Audit Committee approve the internal audit Charter for 2022/23 as set out in annex 2.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Council has a statutory obligation to undertake an adequate and effective internal audit function. The approval of the audit plan and Charter is integral to this.

Executive Summary

The Audit Committee is responsible for agreeing the Council's internal audit plan and Charter. The audit plan and Charter (attached as annex 1 and 2 respectively) will provide independent and objective assurance that the Council's systems and processes are appropriate, operating effectively and provide sufficient control for the purposes of risk management, internal control and governance.

The Committee has the authority to approve the above recommendations.
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Statutory Powers

1. The requirement of an internal audit function in local government is detailed within the Accounts and Audit (England) regulations (2015), which state that authorities must: 'undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of [their] risk

management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance’.

2. The standards are defined in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which were last updated in 2017.
3. Under Section 151 of the Local Government Act (1972), the Council’s Chief Financial Officer holds the statutory responsibility for the overall financial administration of the Council’s affairs and is therefore responsible for maintaining an adequate and effective internal audit function.

Background

4. The Council’s internal auditors are the Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP). The Partnership is hosted by Hampshire County Council and is comprised of a number of local authorities and other public sector organisations.
5. A professional, independent and objective internal audit service is a key element of ensuring good corporate governance
6. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards defines internal audit as 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’.
7. The Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. Internal audit plays a vital role in advising the Council that these arrangements are in place and are operating effectively.
8. The Council’s response to internal audit activity should lead to the strengthening of the control environment and, therefore, contribute to the achievement of the organisation’s objectives.
9. The Council’s Chief Internal Auditor – the Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership – is responsible for the management of the Council’s internal audit activity. Key to doing this is the setting of an annual risk based internal audit plan.
10. Under the Council’s constitution the Audit Committee has responsibility for approving the Council’s internal audit plan and Charter, as well as receiving regular progress reports on the plan’s delivery.
11. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s (CIPFA) guidance of the role of the Audit Committee in Local Government provides further background and context to this requirement.

Key Information

The internal audit plan and Charter

12. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards state that a risk-based internal audit plan should be established on an annual basis in order to determine the priorities of internal audit activity. The plan for 2022/23 is provided at annex 1.
13. In previous years the Committee (and O&S before it) has approved a rolling three-year audit plan. However, given the significant shift in the Council’s risk profile

following the Covid-19 pandemic, the internal auditors feel it most appropriate to now present an annual plan instead of a rolling three-year plan.

14. The audit plan provides the mechanism through which the Council's internal auditors are able to ensure the most appropriate use of resources. The eventual culmination of the work as detailed by the plan is a clear statement of assurance on risk management, internal control and governance arrangements, expressed in an annual opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor.
15. The Chief Internal Auditor holds overall responsibility for the delivery of the plan.
16. The audit plan has been developed in consultation with the Council's senior management and with due regard to the Council's strategies, objectives and risks.
17. The plan is kept under constant review in order to ensure that it continues to remain relevant to the Council's risk profile. Any subsequent revisions to the plan are reported to the Committee through the quarterly progress reports.
18. The Charter – updated annually – formally defines the purpose, authority and responsibility of internal audit.

Options

19. The Committee has two options:
 - Option 1: approve the internal audit plan and Charter for 2022/23 as set out in annex 1 and 2 respectively. This is the recommended option as it will allow the swift commencement of the work programme for 2022/23.
 - Option 2: defer approval. This is not the recommended option as it will cause delay and may prove injurious to SIAP's ability to deliver the 2022/23 plan to schedule.

Legal Implications

20. The adoption of the internal audit plan and Charter will fulfil the Council's statutory duty to maintain an independent and effective internal audit function.
21. An effective internal audit function supports good governance which, in turn, reduces the risk of the Council being subject to successful legal challenge.

Financial Implications

22. The cost of funding the Audit Plan is covered within the Council's revenue budget.
23. The cost of any additional work – including, for instance, ad-hoc consultancy – that is not provided for within the audit plan will be funded from the service area that requires the additional support.

Equalities Implications

24. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Communication Implications

25. There are no communications implications arising from this report.

Risk Management Considerations

26. An effective internal audit function is an important part of risk management.

27. The Council's strategic and operational risk registers have influenced the development of the audit plan.

Other Implications

28. There are no other implications arising from this report.

Consultation

29. The plan and Charter have been developed alongside the Council's Corporate Governance Group, Heads of Service and Management Team.

Policy Framework

30. Internal audit makes a significant contribution to ensuring the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control throughout the Council, which covers all Corporate Plan Priority areas.

Background Powers

None.