



Coventry City Council

# Public report

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**Report to**

Audit and Procurement Committee

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership – Councillor G Duggins

**Director approving submission of the report:**

Director of Finance and Resources

**Ward(s) affected:**

City Wide

**Title:**

Internal Audit Plan 2024-25

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive summary:**

The purpose of this report is to share the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2024-25 with the Audit and Procurement Committee to allow the Committee to express its views on the extent and nature of the planned coverage.

**Recommendation:**

Audit and Procurement Committee is recommended to consider and approve the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2024-25, attached as Appendix One to the report.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1 - Draft Internal Audit Plan 2024-25

**Background papers:**

None

**Has it or will it be considered by scrutiny?**

No other scrutiny consideration other than the Audit and Procurement Committee

**Has it, or will it be considered by any other council committee, advisory panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:**

Draft Internal Audit Plan 2024-25

**1. Context (or background)**

1.1 The Audit and Procurement Committee, within its terms of reference, is required to:

'Consider the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report and Opinion, and a summary of internal audit activities (actual and proposed) and the level of assurance given within the Annual Governance Statement incorporated in the Annual Accounts'.

1.2 In terms of proposed audit activities, the draft Internal Audit Plan attached at Appendix One documents the outcome of the audit planning process for 2024-25. This report provides the mechanism for allowing the Audit and Procurement Committee to discharge its responsibility as highlighted above, but also enables the Committee to support delivery of the Internal Audit Charter by approving the Internal Audit plan.

**2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

2.1 **Background** – Internal Audit is an essential part of the Council's corporate governance arrangements. In considering the Public Sector Internal Standards (PSIAS) which became applicable to local authorities in April 2013 (and updated March 2017), Internal Audit is defined 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".

The priorities of internal audit activity are determined through the development of an annual risk- based Internal Audit Plan. This report documents the planning process and identifies the outcome of this process, namely the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2024-25.

In developing the Audit Plan, the Service aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To provide a cost effective, targeted and value-added service to our customers. This requires the Service to achieve a balance between delivering standard audit reviews and responding to new / emerging risks faced by the Council, both at the operational and corporate level.
- To provide a quality Internal Audit Service in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, to assist the Council in achieving its aims and objectives.
- To provide the Service with a degree of flexibility to allow it to be able to respond to the changing needs of stakeholders during the year and provide relevant assurance.

- Ensuring that the level and skills of audit resources available is appropriate to meet the audit needs of the Council.
- To allow the Chief Internal Auditor to provide the Council with an annual opinion on the effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, internal control and governance arrangements.

2.2 **Draft Audit Plan 2024-25** – The results of the initial assessment of priorities are shown in Appendix One. Key points to note include:

- The draft plan is based on an allocation of priorities against the current level of audit resources available. For 2024-25, it has been assessed that the resources available are 650 days for audit and corporate fraud work. This is an increase of approximately 250 days when compared with 2023-24 and reflects that as the two trainee posts have now completed their level four Internal Audit Apprenticeship and successfully obtained a professional Internal Audit qualification, they have been included within the assessment of resources. As previously reported to the Audit and Procurement Committee, the structure of the Internal Audit Service is currently being reviewed and in the event that there is a significant change in the available audit days over the course of the year, flexibility will be retained in how these resources are utilised. Updates on the resource position and any resulting change to the audit plan will be provided in future reports to the Committee.
- In focusing the available resources to develop a plan which meets the needs of the Council and adds value, the following approach has been taken:
  - An initial risk assessment has been undertaken, which considers the Council's corporate risk register and any priorities identified from consultation with Directors, and other senior managers, alongside other priorities linked to areas of risk which have been highlighted by the Chief Internal Auditor. Where appropriate, an assessed risk level has been included in Appendix One. Where the risk has been assessed as medium rather than high, this generally reflects the findings of previous audit reviews in the respective area / an initial assessment of the control environment.
  - Where appropriate to do so, the audits of key financial systems are undertaken on a bi-annual basis (e.g. where there is a history of the system being well controlled).
  - Given that the number of local authority maintained schools has reduced over recent times, a cyclical programme of school audits has been re-introduced, with the strategy that all schools are now audited every five years.
  - A flexible and responsive approach to issues highlighted by senior officers with dialogue to ensure resources are directed in accordance with their priorities.

- A flexible approach to corporate fraud investigations, offering expert advice and support rather than undertaking the Investigating Officer role.
- Where appropriate, planned days for individual audits have taken account of the individual auditor's level of experience and supervision required.
- Areas of planned work include:
  - Corporate Risks – the focus of audit coverage in 2024-25 in regards to the corporate risk register is aligned to those areas where it is clear Internal Audit can make a contribution to the management of these risks, including emerging issues linked to these activities. This includes reviews of near miss reporting, homelessness, equal pay working practices, public health funding outcomes and assurance over the governance of the Council's group of companies.
  - ICT – The programme of IT audit work is established through an IT audit needs assessment which identifies areas of focus. In 2024-25, the areas which have been agreed are, artificial intelligence governance and IT disaster recovery.
  - Council / Audit priorities – this incorporates audit work linked to specific priorities which have a corporate impact such as equality impact assessments, payment kiosks, and emergency planning / business continuity.
  - Regularity – this includes work to meet the assurance requirements of grant funding received by the Council, and co-ordination of the Annual Governance Statement and declarations of interest exercise. In respect of grant funding the required audit work represents less than 10% of the overall audit plan and consequently does not significantly impact on the Service's ability to undertake its core assurance related work.
  - Directorate risks – this audit area includes those issues highlighted through dialogue with Directors which could affect the achievement of operational objectives. In 2024-25 identified areas include management of plant and equipment, property disposals, energy billing, building control, and the Health Visitors contract.

As a result, it is believed that the draft Audit Plan for 2024-25 is sufficient for the work required to report on governance, the management of risks and internal controls in the year and to prepare our annual opinion and report.

### **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 There is an on-going process of consultation with Senior Officers across the Council to inform development of the Audit Plan and areas of specific focus throughout the year.

#### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 The Internal Audit Plan is an annual plan and is based on a completion date of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. Progress is monitored by the Audit and Procurement Committee. In addition to the planned quarterly progress reports, the Internal Audit Service is required to produce an annual report. This report is due in June / July 2025 and will include the opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor on the adequacy of the Council's risk management, internal control and governance arrangements, highlighting issues relevant to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement.

#### **5. Comments from the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance**

##### **5.1 Financial Implications**

There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. Internal audit work has clear and direct effects, through the recommendations made, to help improve value for money obtained, the probity and propriety of financial administration, and / or the management of operational risks.

##### **5.2 Legal implications**

The effective planning of audit activity across the organisation ensures that the Council meets its statutory obligations in respect of maintaining an internal audit function and represents good governance.

#### **6. Other implications**

- 6.1 **How will this contribute to achievement of the One Coventry Plan?**  
<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/strategies-plans-policies/one-coventry-plan>)

Internal Auditing is defined in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 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". As such the work of Internal Audit is directly linked to the Council's key objectives / priorities with specific focus agreed on an annual basis and reflected in the annual Internal Audit Plan.

- 6.2 **How is risk being managed?**

In terms of risk management, there are two focuses:

- Internal Audit perspective - The main risks facing the Service are that the planned programme of audits is not completed, and that the quality of audit reviews fails to meet customer expectations. Both these risks are managed through defined processes (i.e. planning and quality assurance) within the Service, with the outcomes included in reports to the Audit and Procurement Committee. Delays in the delivery of individual audits could occur at the

request of the customer, which could impact on the delivery of the plan. The risk is managed through on-going communication with customers to agree timing and identify issues at an early stage to allow for remedial action to be taken.

- Wider Council perspective - The key risk is that actions agreed in audit reports to improve the control environment and assist the Council in achieving its objectives are not implemented. To mitigate this risk, a defined process exists within the Service to gain assurance that all actions agreed have been implemented on a timely basis. Such assurance is reflected in reports to the Audit and Procurement Committee. Where progress has not been made, further action is agreed and overseen by the Audit and Procurement Committee to ensure action is taken.

**6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

**6.4 Equalities / EIA**

None

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

No impact

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None

**Report author:**

**Name and job title:**

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**Service area:**

Finance and Resources

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Michelle Salmon	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	3/7/2024	3/7/2024
Tina Pinks	Finance Manager Corporate Finance	Finance and Resources	3/7/2024	9/7/2024
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Barry Hastie	Director of Finance and Resources	-	3/7/2024	10/7/2024
Councillor G Duggins	Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership	-	3/7/2024	8/7/2024
Councillor R Lakha	Chair of Audit and Procurement Committee	-	3/7/2024	4/7/2024

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## Appendix One – Internal Audit Plan 2024-25

KEY DRIVER	RISK LEVEL	AUDIT AREA	PLANNED DAYS
<b>Corporate Risk</b>			
	High	ICT and Digital*	25
	Medium	CWRT loan book health check	6
	High	Governance over group of companies	15
	High	Near miss reporting	15
	High	Homelessness	20
	High	Equal pay working practices	10
	High	Public health funding outcomes	15
<b>Council / Audit Priorities</b>			
	Medium	Payment Audit*	3
	Medium	Equality Impact Assessments	15
	Medium	Payment Kiosks	15
	Medium	Business support grants	10
	Medium	Emergency planning / Business Continuity*	5
<b>Financial Systems</b>			
	High	Care Director	20
	High	Business Rates	15
	Medium	Council tax	15
	Medium	Corporate Income	15
	Medium	Housing Benefits / Council tax support	15
<b>Regularity</b>			
		Grants	57
		Corporate Governance	15
		Risk Management	7
		Schools	63
<b>Other</b>			
		Contingency / Directorate Risks	154
		Fraud	30
		Follow up	45
		2023/24 B/Fwd	45
		<b>Total Days Available</b>	<b>650</b>

\* Undertaken by third parties