

Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2022/23

Report of the Chief Internal Auditor

For further information about this report please contact Andy Bromage, Head of Internal Audit Shared Service, Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service, on 01905 722051

1 Executive Summary

To provide the Committee with:

- the overall results in terms of meeting Internal Audit's (IA's) objectives as set out in the internal audit plan for 2022/2023,
- an audit opinion and commentary on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control environment.
- a copy of the current internal audit charter.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the report and the 2022/23 Internal Audit Opinion and Commentary.

3 Background

The Authority is responsible for maintaining or procuring an adequate and effective internal audit of the activities of the Authority under Authority under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2018. This includes considering, where appropriate, the need for controls to prevent and detect fraudulent activity. These should also be reviewed to ensure that they are effective. This duty has been delegated to the Head of Finance, and Internal Audit was provided by Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (WIASS) under a contractual agreement. Management is responsible for the system of internal control and should set in place policies and procedures to ensure that the system is functioning correctly. The Authority is required to publish an Annual Governance Statement to accompany the accounts later in the year.

Objectives of Internal Audit

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounts (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the United Kingdom defines internal audit as: “an assurance function that primarily provides an independent and objective opinion to the organisation on the control environment comprising risk management, control and governance by evaluating its effectiveness in achieving the organisation’s objectives. It objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic and effective use of resource”.

Aims of Internal Audit

The objectives of WIASS are to:

- Examine, evaluate and report on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control and risk management across the Fire Service and recommend arrangements to address weaknesses as appropriate
- Examine, evaluate and report on arrangements to ensure compliance with legislation and the Fire Service’s objectives, policies and procedures.
- Examine, evaluate and report on procedures that the Fire Service’s assets and interests are adequately protected and effectively managed.
- Undertake independent investigations into allegations of fraud and irregularity in accordance with Fire Service’s policies and procedures and relevant legislation.
- Advise upon the control and risk implications of new systems or other organisational changes.

WIASS is committed to providing an audit function which conforms to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) as amended.

Assurance Sources

We recognise there are other review functions providing other sources of assurance (both internally and externally) over aspects of the Council’s operations. Where possible we seek to place reliance on such work thus increasing the internal audit coverage.

Independence and Safeguards

WIASS internal audit activity is organisationally independent. Internal Audit reports to the Head of Finance but has a direct and unrestricted access to the senior management team and the Audit Committee Chair.

Where WIASS helps with the preparation of areas of work such as Risk Management or the Annual Governance Statement there are clear safeguards in place to ensure independence is not compromised. Safeguards include review within the audit service by an independent person to those who have completed the work as well as independent scrutiny by the Head of Finance of the Authority. The Audit Committee can also challenge the reported findings and the minutes would record this.

To try to reduce duplication of effort we understand the importance of working with the External Auditors. The audit plan was available to the external auditors for information.

Risk Management

Risk Management is a high-profile activity due to the nature of the Authority. Regular updates have been brought before Committee and a robust and embedded risk management process exists within the Fire Authority. Regular review of the risk profile takes place with appropriate mitigation agreed and reported.

Summary of the prime features

2022/2023 Key Internal Audit planned Inputs for WIASS

A summary of the position is provided at Appendix 1

2022/2023 Key Internal Audit planned Outputs for WIASS

During 2022/23 Internal Audit was originally required to:

- complete seven systems audits (including critical friend reviews) of which four needed to suitably assist the External Auditor reach their “opinion”.
- provide sufficient audit resources for other operational areas which assist the Fire Service maintaining/improving its control systems and risk management processes or implementing / reinforcing its oversight of such systems, i.e., provide an on-going consultancy to managers on internal control, for example where system changes are being made
- meet Internal Audit’s external work requirements
- achieve a benchmark of delivery for 2022/23 of all audits as agreed in the operational programme.

Most audits, on completion, are assigned an assurance using a predefined definition and all reported recommendations are given a priority. The audit assurance and recommendation priority are agreed with Management before the final report is published. An example of the assurance and priority definitions is provided at Appendix 2 for information.

The overall assurance that has been attributed to the various areas that have been audited regarding the 2022/23 programme reflects the fact there have been no 'high' priority recommendations to report.

Productive Work

During 2022/23, 56 productive audit days were delivered by WIASS against an overall budget of 64 days. Although the 2022/23 plan remained flexible, there was no need to formally revise it. The core financial areas of the business were completed and reported on and have been used as a benchmark for the future. The Standards, Audit and Performance Committee was continually and regularly informed of progress throughout the year.

Consultancy, advice and guidance are demand led activities and can fluctuate from year to year but were contained well within the agreed budget during 2022/23.

Follow up was a little more complicated during 2022/23 due to the change of Internal Auditors but good progress and a positive direction of travel has been achieved and maintained by the management team in respect of the implementation of audit recommendations. This is expected to continue into 2023/24.

Internal audit has worked with external audit to try and avoid duplication of effort, provide adequate coverage for the 2022/23 financial year so that an internal audit opinion can be reached, and support External Audit by carrying out reviews in support of the accounts opinion work, sharing outcomes where required.

Work of interest to the External Auditor

The results of the work that we performed on four systems audits during 2022/23 was of direct interest to External Audit. Audit reports are passed to the external auditor on request for their information and for them to inform their opinion.

Dialogue continues with the External Auditor to ensure that the IA work will continue to provide the assurance they seek at an acceptable standard.

Quality Measures – internal

Managers are asked to provide feedback on systems audits as the audit progresses. Comments have been received from several Managers who have expressed their appreciation of the audit approach and the fact that it will assist them to add value to their service area. Feedback has predominantly been immediately forthcoming from the appropriate Managers. A questionnaire is available / provided where a more formal response is required. WIASS analyse the returns during the year to ensure that the audit programme continues to add value.

The Head of Finance, Senior Management Board and External Audit have also confirmed a high satisfaction with the audit product during discussions with the Head of the Internal Audit Shared Service.

Further quality control measures embedded in the service include independent individual audit reviews and regular Head of Finance feedback. WIASS staff work to a given methodology and have access to reference material and the Charter which reflects the requirements of the standards. A copy of the Charter is included at Appendix 4 for information.

The Client Officer Group (i.e., management board for the Shared Service) meet on a regular basis and consider the strategic overview and performance of the Shared Service including progress against the Service Plan as well as promoting continuous improvement of the Service.

To further assist the Committee with their assurance of the overall delivery WIASS conforms to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards as amended.

Appendix 3 provides the audit opinion and commentary which provides further assurance to the Committee.

4 Conclusions

During 2022/23 a full internal audit programme was delivered and outcomes reported allowing for an annual audit opinion and commentary to be provided indicating the internal control arrangements are generally adequate. The Committee is asked to note the report and Opinion therein.

5 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An e-EQIA is not, therefore, required.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1

Overview of Internal Audit Delivery 2022/23

Appendix 2

Definition of Assurance and Priority Levels

Appendix 3

Internal Audit Opinion and Commentary 2022/23

Appendix 4

Internal Audit Charter

9 Background Papers

All supporting information is held by Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service and is available on request with the intellectual rights remaining with Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority. The key documents are the Audit Reports and Audit and Governance Committee Progress Reports.

**SHROPSHIRE & WREKIN FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN FOR 2022/23**

Audit Area	Source	Original Planned days 2022/23		Service	Comment/ Potential Outline Scoping	Strategy link	Final Report Delivered
Accountancy & Finance Systems							
Main Ledger (inc Budgetary Control & Bank Rec)	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	6		Finance	Standard scoping for core financial.	Annual Plan	8 Mar 2023
Creditors (a/c's payable)	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	7		Finance	Standard scoping for core financial.	Annual Plan	8 Mar 2023
Debtors (a/c's receivable)	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	4		Finance	Standard scoping for core financial.	Annual Plan	23 Feb 2023
Payroll & Pensions	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	10		Service Support	Standard scoping for core financial.	Annual Plan	21 Feb 2023 Q3
SUB TOTAL		27					
Corporate Governance							
Risk Management	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	9		Service Support	Process, embedding, inter relationship of corporate and local risk registers, use as a management decision making tool and reporting	Annual Plan	2 Dec 2022

Audit Area	Source	Original Planned days 2022/23	Service	Comment/ Potential Outline Scoping	Strategy link	Final Report Delivered
Management and Statistical Information	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	10	Service Support	Process of capture, raw data credibility, reporting accuracy, management use	Annual Plan	3 Jan 2023
SUB TOTAL		19				
System / Management Arrangements						
Procurement	Fundamental to S&WFRS CRMP delivery	10	Service Support	Process, frameworks, use of exemptions, legislative adherence, tendering.	Annual Plan	19 Dec 2022
SUB TOTAL		10				
Support						
Follow up Reviews	Good governance	0				
Advice, Guidance, Consultation, Contingency.	Support	2				Q1-Q4 where necessary
Audit Cttee support, annual planning and management liaison	Support	6				Q1-Q4 where necessary
SUB TOTAL		8				
Predicted Days		64				
Actual Days Used		56				

Summary of 2022/23 Audit Assurance Levels

2022/23	Number of Fire and Rescue Service Audits	Assurance	Overall % (rounded)
From 7 reviews	2	Full	29%
	5	Significant	71%
	Nil	Moderate	0
	Nil	Limited	0
	Nil	No	0
	Nil	To be finalised	0
	Nil	Critical Friend	0
	Nil	Deferred to 23/24	0

Overall Conclusion:

- 100% of the finalised audits undertaken for 2022/23 which have been allocated an assurance returned a level of significant or above.
- Senior Officers, Managers and the Head of Finance continue to be satisfied with the audit process and service delivery from the feedback received from them.

Audit Reports 2022/23

Definition of Audit Opinion Levels of Assurance

Opinion	Definition
Full Assurance	<p>The system of internal control meets the organisation's objectives; all of the expected system controls tested are in place and are operating effectively.</p> <p>No specific follow up review will be undertaken; follow up will be undertaken as part of the next planned review of the system.</p>
Significant Assurance	<p>There is a generally sound system of internal control in place designed to meet the organisation's objectives. However isolated weaknesses in the design of controls or inconsistent application of controls in a small number of areas put the achievement of a limited number of system objectives at risk.</p> <p>Follow up of medium priority recommendations only will be undertaken after 6 months; follow up of low priority recommendations will be undertaken as part of the next planned review of the system.</p>
Moderate Assurance	<p>The system of control is generally sound however some of the expected controls are not in place and / or are not operating effectively therefore increasing the risk that the system will not meet its objectives. Assurance can only be given over the effectiveness of controls within some areas of the system.</p> <p>Follow up of high and medium priority recommendations only will be undertaken after 6 months; follow up of low priority recommendations will be undertaken as part of the next planned review of the system.</p>
Limited Assurance	<p>Weaknesses in the design and / or inconsistent application of controls put the achievement of the organisation's objectives at risk in many of the areas reviewed. Assurance is limited to the few areas of the system where controls are in place and are operating effectively.</p> <p>Follow up of high and medium priority recommendations only will be undertaken after 6 months; follow up of low priority recommendations will be undertaken as part of the next planned review of the system.</p>
No Assurance	<p>No assurance can be given on the system of internal control as significant weaknesses in the design and / or operation of key controls could result or have resulted in failure to achieve the organisation's objectives in the area reviewed.</p> <p>Follow up of high and medium priority recommendations only will be undertaken after 6 months; follow up of low priority recommendations will be undertaken as part of the next planned review of the system.</p>

Definition of Priority of Recommendations

Priority	Definition
H	<p>Control weakness that has or is likely to have a significant impact upon the achievement of key system, function or process objectives.</p> <p>Immediate implementation of the agreed recommendation is essential in order to provide satisfactory control of the serious risk(s) the system is exposed to.</p>
M	<p>Control weakness that has or is likely to have a medium impact upon the achievement of key system, function or process objectives.</p> <p>Implementation of the agreed recommendation within 3 to 6 months is important in order to provide satisfactory control of the risk(s) the system is exposed to.</p>
L	<p>Control weakness that has a low impact upon the achievement of key system, function or process objectives.</p> <p>Implementation of the agreed recommendation is desirable as it will improve overall control within the system.</p>

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Audit Opinion and Commentary 2022/23

1. Internal Audit: Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority's responsibility for maintaining an adequate and effective internal audit function is set out in the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2018.
2. 2022/23 financial year saw the change of Internal Audit provision from Shropshire County Council to Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service on a contractual basis. The change was relatively seamless with a full internal audit programme being delivered during the year. To establish a benchmark of assurance there was a thorough audit of the financial systems as well as other key risk areas. There was a continuance of remote and flexible working within the Authority, further moving away from traditional office-based working model. This continues to present challenges and risks, especially cyber risk as well managing statutory and best practice requirements.

Overall Governance Conclusion

3. Based on the audits performed against the 2022/23 audit plan, the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service has concluded although not all audits have achieved full assurance the lack of serious shortcomings found in the range of audits carried out indicates that the Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Service internal control arrangements are generally adequate and have effectively managed the principal risks identified by management and the audit plan and can be reasonably relied upon to ensure that the Authority's corporate objectives have been met.

Risk Management Conclusion

4. The Head of Internal Audit can confirm the development of formal risk management systems continued during the year and risk management continues to feature prominently throughout the activities of the Fire Authority.
5. The corporate risk register was regularly updated, and the Audit Committee have received the necessary updates on key risks. There is an expectation updates will continue to be made regularly to the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee. The link between risk identification and control is of fundamental interest to internal auditors, although the responsibility for controlling the risk itself rests firmly with line managers, who must ensure that appropriate controls are considered to mitigate the identified risks.

Findings

6. The Internal Audit function is provided by the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (WIASS) which was set up as a shared service in 2010/11 and hosted by Worcester City for 5 district councils and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority became a full voting member of the shared service during 2016/17. The shared service operates in accordance with, and conforms to, the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards as amended. It objectively reviews, on a continuous basis, the extent to which the internal control environment supports and promotes the achievement of the Fire and Rescue Authority objectives and contributes to the proper, economic and effective use of resources.

7. The 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan was agreed with the Head of Finance and Strategic Management Board. It included:
 - several core systems which were designed to provide a benchmark of assurance and suitably assist the external auditor to reach their 'opinion', and,
 - other corporate systems for example procurement and risk management.
8. Regular updates regarding review outcomes were reported before the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee during the year. Follow up has been more challenging during 2022/23 due to the change of provision but has continued to take place. 2022/23 has seen good progress and a positive direction of travel maintained regarding the implementation of recommendations. Based on the audits performed by WIASS in accordance with the audit plan the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service can report that the Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority governance framework arrangements during 2022/2023, two have provided assurance outturns of 'full' in regard to core financial areas along with 'significant' assurances in regard to other operational aspects. There were no 'limited' or below assurances reported.
9. 'Full' to 'moderate' assurance essentially provides there is generally a sound system of internal control in place, no significant control issues have been encountered and no material losses have been identified.
10. In relation to the planned seven reviews during 2022/23, all were finalised and reported on.
11. WIASS can conclude that no system of control can provide absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss, nor can Internal Audit give that assurance. This statement is intended to provide those charged with the responsibility of governance with a reasonable assurance based on the audits performed in accordance with the plan and reflects the new norm of hybrid working and a move away from traditional office-based protocols.

Andy Bromage
Head of Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service
July 2023



Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (WIASS)

Internal Audit Charter

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

Definitions

1. Management refers to the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Directors and Area Commanders/Heads of Service.
2. Board refers to the Audit & Standards Committee

1. Introduction

Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this charter is to define what Internal Audit is and explain its purpose, role and responsibilities.

Provision of Internal Audit Services

- 1.2 WIASS covers five district authorities Wychavon, Malvern Hills, Bromsgrove, Redditch and Worcester and one Fire Service, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority. WIASS will provide internal audit services to third parties under contractual arrangements.
Worcester City Council hosts the Shared Service provision under an on-going Administrative Collaborative Agreement. It is governed by a Client Officer Group (COG) which is made up of the district and Fire Service s151 officers each having an 'equal say'. The Client Officer Group meets approximately 4 times a year.
- 1.3 For line management matters internal audit will report to the Corporate Director of Resources (s151 Officer within Worcester City Council) and the Monitoring Officer in their prolonged absence.

2. Mission and Definition

- 2.1 Mission:

"To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight".

Additional information can be found on the local intranet site:

<https://staffroom.worcester.gov.uk/internal-audit>

- 2.2 Definition:

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 bring a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

3. Scope and Authority of Internal Audit Work

- 3.1 Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 No. 234 Part 2 Regulation 5:
(1) 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) Any officer or member of a relevant authority must, if required to do so for the purposes of the internal audit—
(a) make available such documents and records; and
(b) supply such information and explanations;
as are considered necessary by those conducting the internal audit.
(3) In this regulation "documents and records" includes information recorded in an electronic form.

To aid compliance with Regulation 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2018 as amended, the CIPFA Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the United Kingdom 2006 details that "Internal Audit should work in partnership with management to improve the control environment and assist the organisation in achieving its objectives".

Internal Audit work should be planned, controlled and recorded in order to determine priorities, establish and achieve objectives.

- 3.2 In the course of their reviews internal audit staff, under the direction of the Head of Service, shall have authority in all partner organisations to:-
- at all reasonable times after taking account of audit requirements, enter on any partners' premises or land;

- have access to, and where internal audit deem necessary take into their possession, any records, documents and correspondence relating to any matter that is the subject of an audit;
- require and receive such explanations as may be considered necessary from any officer of the Partner regardless of their position;
- require any officer of the Partner to produce forthwith cash, stores or any other property under their control.

for the Partner in which the internal audit service is being provided.

3.3 Internal Audit work will normally include, but is not restricted to:

- review and assess the soundness, adequacy, integrity and reliability of financial and non-financial management and performance systems, and quality of data;
- reviewing the means of safeguarding assets;
- examine, evaluate and report on compliance with legislation, plans, policies, procedures, laws and regulations;
- promote and assist the Partner in the effective use of resources
- examine, evaluate and report on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control and risk management across the Partner and recommend arrangements to address weaknesses as appropriate;
- advise upon the control and risk implications of new systems or other organisational changes.
- provide a 'critical friend' to assist services to achieve value for money
- undertake independent investigations into allegations of fraud and irregularity in accordance with the Partner's policies and procedures and relevant legislation
- at the specific request of management¹, internal audit may provide consultancy services provided:
 - the internal auditors independence is not compromised
 - the internal audit service has the necessary skills to carry out the assignment, or can obtain skills without undue cost or delay
 - the scope of the consultancy assignment is clearly defined and management¹ have made proper provision for resources within the annual plan
 - management understands that the work being undertaken is not internal audit work.

3.4 IA's remit extends across the entire control environment of the organisation and is not limited to certain aspects or elements.

4. Responsibility of Management¹ and of Internal Audit.

4.1 At all times internal audit will operate in accordance with the partner's Constitution and legal requirements and all internal audit staff will adhere to recognised Professional Standards and Codes of Conduct and Ethics e.g. the Institute of Internal Auditors' and/or CIPFA as well as the Partner's Codes of Conduct and Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policies.

4.2 It is the responsibility of Management to put in place adequate controls to ensure systems meet their objectives and that they are notified without delay of any instances where systems are failing to operate properly. However, where there has been, or there are grounds to suspect that there is risk of a serious breakdown in a significant system, the Head of Service should be informed of the problem and any counter measures already in hand or proposed, as quickly as

- possible, in order that the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service can decide whether audit involvement is needed.
- 4.3 Similarly, it is the responsibility of Management to put in place adequate controls to prevent and detect fraud, irregularities, waste of resource, etc. Internal Audit will assist Management to effectively manage these risks. However, no level of controls can guarantee that fraud and the like will not occur even when the controls are performed diligently with due professional care. As a consequence all cases of actual or suspected fraud should be reported to the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service forthwith. The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service will then decide the course of action to be taken with due regard to the Partner's Constitution, e.g. Whistleblower's Charter, Stopping Fraud and Corruption Strategy, etc.
- 4.4 Any officer of a partner organisation who has genuine concerns at raising a suspected instance of fraud or malpractice through their normal reporting channels can raise the matter under the Partner's Whistleblower's Charter directly with any of the persons named in the policy document, including the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service. Head of Internal Audit Shared Service will then pursue the matter in accordance with the provisions of the policy document.
- 4.5 Internal audit is not responsible for any of the activities which it audits. WIASS will not assume responsibility for the design, installation, operation or control of procedures. However, should any partner/client contract for specialist services within an area then the WIASS staff member assigned will not be asked to review any aspect of the work undertaken until two years have passed from the completion of the assignment.
- 4.6 The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service will ensure that the relevant Head of Service and/or Section 151 Officer is briefed on any matter coming to the attention of internal audit, either through a review or otherwise, that could have a material impact on the finances, create an unacceptable risk or be fraudulent for the Partner as quickly as possible, and will ensure the appropriate Officer of the Authority e.g. Director, Monitoring Officer is regularly briefed on the progress of audits having a corporate aspect. Matters involving fraud or malpractice are to be reported in line with the anti-fraud and corruption policy. The most appropriate action/engagement of the relevant Head of Service will be determined by the HoWIASS depending on the circumstances.
- 4.7 In order to (1) maintain a broad skills base within Internal Audit and (2) maximise the ability of the team to offset the cost of providing the internal audit function to the Partner, the strategic plan will include a commitment that internal audit obtains income to the Partner from external work either from partnership working and/or selling its expertise. Such activities will be governed by targets set out in the Collaborative Administrative Agreement and will be approved and reported on to the Client Officer Group.

5. Planning and Reporting

- 5.1 To meet the objectives above, the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service shall:-
- a) prior to the beginning of each financial year, following consultation with Management¹ and after taking into account comments from Members arising from the reporting process set out below, provide the Committee with:
 - a risk based audit plan forecasting which of the Partner's activities are due to receive audit attention in the next 12 months. The risk based plan will take into consideration a number of risk factors including corporate risk register, service risk register, local knowledge, corporate promises or objectives, key strategic documents e.g. five year plan and any external audit guidance. Where there is a potential difference between strategy/plan and resource this is reported to the Board²;
 - a detailed operational plan using a risk based assessment methodology showing how/what resources will be required/allocated in the coming financial year in order to meet the requirements of the Partners

strategic plans. The Plans will be flexible and include a small contingency contained as part of the consultancy budget to allow for changes in priorities, emerging risks, ad hoc projects, fraud and irregularity, etc. The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service will bring to the attention of the s151 Officer if this budget is depleted so an additional contingency can be agreed. 'Consultancy', for the purposes of WIASS activity, is defined as work that is of a specialist nature and commissioned/requested in regard to an area of work activity within a service area that is in addition to the agreed partners audit plan. The work can be financial or governance based and the output will provide management¹ with challenges to consider depending on its nature. The approach to the assignment can be flexible but follow a similar path in regard to the methodology.

- b) during the course and at the close of each financial year provide the Board² with:
 - quarterly progress reports on actual progress compared to the plan and performance indicators. Such reports to highlight serious problems, either affecting the implementation of the plan, or, in the take up of audit recommendations;
 - an annual report summarising the overall results for the year compared to the plan and pointing out any matters that will impact on internal audit's ability to meet the requirements in the strategic plan;
- c) during the course and close of each full systems/risk audit provide the client manager¹ with:
 - a copy of an audit brief and audit information request setting out the objectives and scope of the audit prior to commencement of the audit and a confirmation of resource requirements for the audit.
 - draft recommendations, which will be discussed with the responsible manager¹ prior to sending the draft audit report. The manager¹ is responsible for confirming the accuracy of the audit findings and is invited to discuss the report during the 'clearance' meeting prior to the issue of the draft report.
 - an audit report containing an overview of the quality of the control system, an opinion as to the level of system assurance and detailed findings and recommendations including priority. 'Assurance', for WIASS purposes, is defined as the determination of an overall outcome against a predetermined criteria leading to an applied level giving an overall summary for the work audited.
- d) shortly after the close of each financial year provide for the purposes of the Annual Governance Statement:
 - an annual audit opinion of the Partner's system of controls based on the audit work performed during the year in accordance with the plans at 5.1(a) above and reported in accordance with 5.1(b) and (c) above and on the assurance methodology adopted, and, a statement of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the results of quality assurance and improvement programme.

5.2 Expectations of Clients:

Managers and staff should co-operate with the Auditors, and responses should be made to draft reports as outlined at 3 above. Responses should include an action plan, dates for action and responsibility where actions are delegated. The final 'High' and 'Medium' recommendations will be reported to the Board².

5.3 Audit reports will be drawn up following the internal audit report framework. A matrix type report displaying audit findings, risks and recommendations along with a column for management comments, as per 5.1(c), will be provided to management¹. The report will also contain an introduction and priority categories for each of the recommendations. A covering report will be attached to the matrix providing details of the partner organisation, circulation, audit scope and

objectives, an audit opinion, an executive summary and an audit assurance rating as well as a clear indication of what action is required by management.

- 5.4 Upon completion of audits, the audit exceptions will be discussed with the relevant line manager and will form the basis of the draft audit reports. The draft audit reports are issued to the relevant line managers for them to confirm the accuracy of the audit findings and content. Managers are invited to contact the Auditor if they wish to discuss the report and asked to show their response in the form of an action plan to each recommendation on the draft report. For accepted recommendations, dates for action or implementation are recorded. The managers' responses are recorded in the final reports that are issued to the appropriate Management¹ officers as deemed relevant for the audit.
- 5.5 In accordance with professional standards, after three/six months from the date of issue of the final report, follow-up audits are undertaken to ensure that the agreed recommendations and action plans have been implemented, or, are in the process of being implemented. A formal follow up procedure / methodology is used to follow up audit reports and reported on an exceptions basis.
- 5.6 Internal Audit works to the reporting quality standards of:
- draft audit reports to be issued within 5 working days of the clearance meeting;
 - management responses received within 10 working days;
 - final audit reports to be issued within 5 working days of the final discussions of the draft audit report and receipt of management responses;
 - final reports to be followed-up initially within 3 to 6 months of the date issue of the final audit report depending on the recommendation priority and residual risk, to ensure that the accepted recommendations due for implementation have been established.
- 5.7 Escalation for late or non return of audit reports will be instigated when after two requests the reports have not been provided by management. The escalation will commence with the s151 Officer being informed of the late return. If the report remains outstanding then the Board² will be informed of the inaction with a view to them calling in the Officer to justify the late return.

6. 7 Principles of Public Life and how WIASS interprets and applies them.

1. Selflessness - protecting the public purse and ensuring all actions taken are solely in the public interest.

2. Integrity - completely independent and above undue bias or influence in the work that we do.

3. Objectivity – demonstrate impartiality and fairness in all aspects of our work and when reporting uses only the best evidence without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability – provide transparency and assurance holding people to account in regard to decisions and actions and provide assurance to those in governance roles.

5. Openness – to promote and ensure through good governance that decisions are taken in an open and transparent manner and no information is withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing

6. Honesty – to provide independent assurance to those in governance of confirmation of truthfulness

7. Leadership – through the audit work actively promotes and robustly supports the principles and shows a willingness to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

For further information on the principles of public life:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

7. Core Principles for Professional Practice and how WIASS interprets and applies them.

1. Demonstrates integrity:

WIASS works independently, without influence or undue bias. The audit plan is created so that there are no conflicts of interest between the officer and the audit. Potential conflicts of interest are formally checked annually with all members of the WIASS team. Areas of risk for WIASS are identified and mitigated. Potential areas of risk include, but are not limited to, auditors re-auditing Risk Management, NFI, and Regulatory Services in consecutive years and Services that they have transferred from. Officers that have conflicts of interest, or if they are / have been working in the area of audit, will not undertake any audits in the conflicting area for a minimum of three years, safeguarding the officers and WIASS' integrity. Further protection is in place by using randomly selected testing samples and a series of independent review stages. All audit working papers, reports and findings are reviewed and if necessary challenged before being issued to the client by either the Head of Service or Team Leader.

2. Demonstrates competence and due professional care:

All reports are reviewed and signed off by either the WIASS Head of Service or Team Leader both of which are highly qualified and governed by professional institution standards. Regular 1-2-1 meetings are held with each officer to ensure progress and personal development. An "open door" culture is adopted throughout WIASS allowing all team members to ask for assistance advice and support at any time. Training (both in-house and external) is available and is provided should it be deemed relevant and appropriate by Head of Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (HoWIASS) / Team Leader.

3. Is objective and free from undue influence:

Independence and safeguarding is a key element of internal audit provision. All WIASS staff are vetted via the Basic Disclosure Check, as well as making a Declaration of Interest on an annual basis declaring any potential conflicts of interest with upcoming audit programme and the partners that WIASS work with. No auditor, who has transferred from a Service, will audit that Service for a minimum of three years. The Service is organisationally independent for all Partners. Although the HoWIASS reports directly to the s151 Officers of the Partner organisations the role has direct and unrestricted access to the senior management team and Committee Chair. The Client Officer Group, who governs the Service, meets on a quarterly basis and is made up of the Partner s151 Officers. They each have an equal vote and consider the strategic direction of the Service as well as progress and performance. Further independence and

safeguard checks are reported throughout this Charter in the form of checks, actions and process.

4. Aligns with the strategies, objectives, and risks of the organisation:
The audit plan and its content is discussed with Management¹ and s151 Officers to ensure that risks are identified; appropriate processes, systems and strategies are tested and that areas of risk are monitored and mitigated. Corporate and service risk registers are used along with corporate knowledge and the promises and objectives. Five year plans are also considered as part of the risk profiling and plan definition.
5. Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced:
As a shared service, WIASS is hosted by Worcester City Council, but audit allocations ensure a presence in all authorities that it serves across the year. Resources are monitored and tracked throughout the annual audit plan, with forecasting used as often as possible to prevent resources becoming too stretched resulting in reduced coverage. WIASS is governed by a Client Officer Group made up from the Partner s151 Officers but also has direct access to Management¹ and the Board² Chairs. Delegated powers are used should there be any resourcing issues.
6. Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement:
Continuous monitoring of the teams performance via trackers is conducted. Quarterly and annual reports are issued to committee and board members demonstrating trends in productivity and value. Individual reviews via 1-2-1 meetings are held monthly with the Team Leader and include personal development plans for all team members. Improvements and changes will also be made using external assessment as well as internally generated client feedback forms. A self assessment will be completed each municipal year to further provide assurance of quality and improvement. The Service is working with partners to ensure that it continues to provide a 'fit for purpose' Service by developing techniques that will complement requirements, continue to add value and work in a changing environment e.g. critical friend reviews. There is a continuous desire to ensure that the Service changes and adopts best practice methods as identified by the professional institutions e.g. IIA, CIPFA.
7. Communicates effectively:
Various forms of communication are adopted (verbal, written, diagram / graph) throughout the review process by all members of the WIASS team. Continued monitoring and improvements to the methodology are conducted, making the report and testing documents clearer for all users. Findings are discussed verbally with management¹ prior to the issue of a formal report. Reports are issued to Officers and Committee¹ on a regular basis.
8. Provides risk-based assurance:
The audit plans are risk based with reviews being classified from high to low risk. The review scope is risk based which drives the review without creating restrictions on the areas covered. All findings are rated high, medium or low risk. Risks associated with the findings are linked directly to the recommendation and the management action to mitigate it. The review risk is combined to create the overall assurance level of the audit, which will be presented to the client with explanation and reasoning in the form of a report.
9. Is insightful, proactive and future-focused:

Insightful – where possible WIASS officers with relevant background experience will be assigned to conduct audits in similar fields. Continued monitoring of current “audit and fraud affairs” is distributed to all WIASS team members. A sharing of knowledge is encouraged in the Service and pre-engagement research. Identification of best practice is shared amongst the authorities. Reports identify areas that are working well as well as those that require improvement. Reviews look for efficiencies and better ways of working.

Proactive – scoping meetings are held for all audits allowing for changes to the audit scope in line with changes in service delivery and legislation between annual planning and audits starting. There is also an ability to vary the plan should an emerging risk present itself using delegated powers so the audit service can be proactive in providing assurance to those in governance. Consultancy days are built into the plans to allow for pre implementation of new system/process advice.

Future-focused – The Service will scan the horizon for risks and issues that are emerging. Networking using, for example, the Midlands Audit Group is used to help inform the audit plans and consultancy assignments to provide information to the partners before it becomes a potential issue for them. Monitoring of the next generation initiatives from Central Government and having a team of auditors aware of the potential risks and impact along with environmental control issues will assist in adding value for our partners.

10. Promotes organisational improvement:

Ethics and culture are key aspects to organisation improvement. WIASS reviews consider ethical and cultural aspects and the potential impact and associated risk. Liaison with s151 Officers, Senior Management Teams and governance boards where applicable to promote continuous organisational development. Audit Reports are issued to management¹ to ensure oversight of the organisation and areas of concern including common themes are looked at and improved on. High and Medium priority findings are followed up after a 3 or 6 month period respectively using an established methodology to ensure that potential risks are being mitigated and there is continuous improvement. Findings will be followed up until such time that they are satisfied. Follow up on findings will be documented and reported to Management, Heads of Service and or the appropriate s151 to give assurance of action and risk mitigation.

For further information please reference:

<https://na.theiia.org/standards-guidance/mandatory-guidance/Pages/Core-Principles-for-the-Professional-Practice-of-Internal-Auditing.aspx>

8. External Relationships

8.1 The main contacts are with:

- Institute of Internal Auditors
- External Auditors
- Local Authorities in the Worcestershire area
- Local Authorities in the Midlands area
- Organisations within the Exeter Benchmarking Group
- CIPFA (publishers of the systems based auditing control matrices written by Exeter IA section)
- National Fraud Initiative via DCLG and Cabinet Office

but may include other external parties as necessary.

- 8.2 Assurance will be accepted and reported from 3rd parties as long as WIASS can rely on their work, and they are suitably qualified to carry out the assessment. The relevance of the work will also be a consideration in using a 3rd party certification e.g. IT integrity testing.
- 8.3 Where work is undertaken on a contractual basis assurance will be provided to 3rd parties outside of the partnership as appropriately agreed. The methodology applied to audit 3rd party organisations will be the same as the methodology used for the members of the partnership. All of the safeguards used to protect the integrity of the audits carried out for the partnership will be extended to 3rd parties as well and appropriate reporting protocols established as part of any contractual agreement. These will be established as part of the engagement with a clearly identified engagement officer and requirements. No contract will be entered into if it is considered that the independence or integrity of the Service will be compromised. If, during the delivery of a contract, it becomes apparent that there is undue influence being brought to bear and/or that the actions of the client is undermining the ethos of internal audit the HoWIASS will inform the Client Officer Group without delay so a strategic decision can be made to avoid any potential reputational damage or compromised independence. Any assurances provided to 3rd Parties will be based on the established internal methodology and the defined definitions of the different levels and priorities.

Notes

- a) In the absence of the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service all provisions relating to him/her above will apply to the relevant Team Leader in accordance with the duties allocated by the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service.

Version Control:	Date of Change	Action	Updated by
1.0	June 2023	Review of Charter	AB