

**AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**  
**17 JULY 2024**

**INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER 2024/25**

**Report by Executive Director of Resources**

**RECOMMENDATION**

The committee is RECOMMENDED to:

- a) **Approve the Internal Audit Charter.**
- b) **Note the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.**

**Executive Summary**

1. This report presents both the Internal Audit Charter and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme for 2024/25. These are subject to annual review.

**Internal Audit Charter**

2. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) came into force on 1 April 2013. (Updated 1 April 2017). These Internal Audit standards apply across the whole public sector. The PSIAS requires that an Internal Audit Charter is in place for each local authority. The Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit Charter is included within Appendix 1.
3. The Internal Audit Charter sets out the purpose, authority and responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council's Internal Audit function, in accordance with the PSIAS. The Internal Audit Charter establishes the position of Internal Audit within the organisation, access and reporting requirements. It also outlines the key responsibilities of the Audit & Governance Committee.
4. This Internal Audit Charter is subject to approval by the Audit & Governance Committee of Oxfordshire County Council on an annual basis, in line with PSIAS requirements. There have been no material changes made since the Internal Audit Charter was last approved by the Committee in July 2023.
5. The Internal Audit Charter will be subject to review and amendment during 2024/25, in light of the introduction of the new Global Internal Audit Standards which will be effective from January 2025. In response to the new global

standards, the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards Advisory Board (IASAB) are reviewing the standards with a view to identifying and producing any sector specific interpretations and guidance material. The effective date of implementation of the new material developed by the IASAB will be 1 April 2025. Until then we are advised to continue to operate in accordance with the existing Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

### **Quality Assurance Improvement Programme (QAIP)**

6. The PSIAS require that the internal audit activity maintain a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP). This is included within Appendix 2.
7. The Chief Internal Auditor is required to communicate to senior management and the Audit & Governance Committee on the internal audit activity's quality assurance and improvement programme, including results of ongoing monitoring at least annually, internal assessments upon completion and external assessments conducted at least every five years. The QAIP details what will be reported to the Audit & Governance Committee and the frequency.
8. For 2023/24 the QAIP included four opportunities for improvement within the internal audit activity. Implementation of those improvements are as follows:

#### **Opportunities for improvement – previously identified for 2023/24:**

<b>Opportunity for improvement</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Update</b>
<p><b>Data analytics</b> - to be embedded into the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud assurance activities.</p> <p>This will include the development of a documented Data Analytics Strategy.</p> <p>The Counter Fraud Intelligence &amp; Data Officer's job role has already been redefined to assist with the implementation of data analytics across the Internal Audit &amp; Counter Fraud Service. The</p>	<p>Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor / Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager.</p> <p>Nick Stokes, Intelligence &amp; Data Officer to support</p>	<p>Data Analytics Strategy for Internal Audit and Counter Fraud in place by 01/09/23.</p> <p>Improvements to assurance activities embedded throughout 2023/24.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Several audits were completed utilising data analytics and full population testing approaches – this led to improvements in the assurance activities.</p>

<p>team's digital maturity will be assessed and any gaps addressed / there will be a continued focus on improved awareness and application across the team.</p>			
<p><b>Practice standards</b> – we will implement a programme of briefings / training with the team covering PSIAS and key internal audit practice themes. (For example engagement planning, conflicts of interest, code of ethics, risk scanning).</p>	<p>Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor / Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager.</p>	<p>Quarterly, commencing Summer 2023.</p> <p>(Already covered in monthly team meetings – however recognise would be an improvement to formalise training / briefing plan)</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p><b>Data Protection</b> – we will review arrangements for internal audit and counter fraud compliance, including electronic document retention and data sharing arrangements.</p>	<p>Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor / Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager.</p> <p>Emma Vickers, Assistant Auditor to support.</p>	<p>01/09/23</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p><b>Management Action Follow Up System</b> – we are required by the current supplier of the software used to monitor the implementation of management actions to upgrade to a new version. We will use this as an opportunity to undertake necessary housekeeping of how directorates are structured / how officers are set up, and to review whether there are any improvements required to our reporting and follow up processes.</p>	<p>Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor / Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager.</p> <p>Emma Vickers, Assistant Auditor to support.</p>	<p>New version implemented before 31/03/24.</p>	<p>Upgrade undertaken in June 2024 – complete.</p>

9. Opportunities for improvement for 2024/25 have been included within the QAIP in Appendix 2. Progress in implementation of these will be reported back to the Audit & Governance Committee.

### **PSIAS – Self Assessment / External Assessment Update**

10. Internal Audit received a CIPFA external assessment against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) during November 2023. This was reported to the Audit & Governance Committee in January 2024. The results of the assessment were very positive, with an overall conclusion that Oxfordshire County Council's Internal Audit Service FULLY CONFORMS to the requirements of the standards. There were no areas of either partial or non-conformance with the standards identified and no recommendations arising.
11. There is a requirement for an annual self-assessment against PSIAS to be completed (with external assessment scheduled every 5 years). The self-assessment will be scheduled for quarter 4 of 2024/25, considering any changes in relation to the implementation of the new Global Internal Audit Standards and subsequent guidance issued by the UK Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards Advisory Board.

### **Financial Implications**

12. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by: Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources  
[lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **Legal Implications**

13. There are not direct legal implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Law & Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer  
[paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **Staff Implications**

14. There are no direct staff implications arising from this report.



## ANNEX 1:



# Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit Charter

## Introduction

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) came into force on 1 April 2013. (Updated 1 April 2017). These are the first Internal Audit standards to apply across the whole public sector. The PSIAS requires that an Internal Audit Charter is in place for each local authority.

The Standards form part of the wider mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) which includes the mission, core principles, definition of Internal Audit and Code of Ethics.

This Charter sets out the purpose, authority and responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council's Internal Audit function, in accordance with the PSIAS and additional requirements for Local Government which are published via the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

This Internal Audit Charter has been drawn up in line with the PSIAS requirements and replaces all previous Internal Audit Terms of Reference.

This Internal Audit Charter is subject to approval by the Audit & Governance Committee of Oxfordshire County Council on an annual basis, in line with PSIAS requirements.

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## Definition of Internal Audit

Oxfordshire County Council has adopted the PSIAS definition of internal auditing as follows:

*"Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisations 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".*

## ***Mission of Internal Audit***

The mission of Internal Audit is to enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight.

## ***Core Principles***

To achieve Internal Audit's mission the following core principles for the professional practice of Internal Auditing are present and applied by Internal Audit:

- Demonstrates integrity.
- Demonstrates competence and due professional care.
- Is objective and free from undue influence (independent).
- Aligns with the strategies, objectives, and risks of Oxfordshire County Council.
- Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced.
- Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement.
- Communicates effectively.
- Provides risk-based assurance.
- Is insightful, proactive, and future-focused.
- Promotes organisational improvement.

## ***Code of Ethics***

Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit has adopted the PSIAS Code of Ethics:

### Integrity

- The integrity of internal auditors establishes trust and thus provides the basis for reliance on their judgement

### Objectivity

- Internal Auditors exhibit the highest level of professional objectivity in gathering, evaluating and communicating information about the activity or process being examined. Internal Auditors make a balanced assessment of all the relevant circumstances and are not unduly influenced by their own interests or by others in forming judgements.

### Confidentiality

- Internal Auditors respect the value and ownership of information they receive and do not disclose information without appropriate authority unless there is a legal obligation to do so.

## Competency

- Internal auditors apply the knowledge, skills and experience needed in the performance of internal auditing services.

Internal Audit will also have a regard to the Committee on Standards of Public Life's Seven Principles of Public Life as contained within Oxfordshire County Councils Constitution and Officer's Code of Conduct

- Selflessness
  - Integrity
  - Objectivity
  - Accountability
  - Openness
  - Honesty
  - Leadership
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## **Statutory Requirement**

Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires that authorities "make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall ensure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs." In Oxfordshire County Council, that officer is the Director of Finance.

Specific requirements are detailed in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, in that a relevant body must undertake an adequate and effective internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with the proper practices in relation to internal control. Any officer or member of a relevant body must, if the body requires:

- a. make available such documents and records as appear to that body to be necessary for the purposes of the audit; and
- b. supply the body with such information and explanation as that body considers necessary for that purpose.

In accordance with these regulations, internal audit staff should have access to any financial or non-financial records maintained by the council, or its partners in delivering council services, that are relevant to the audit activity being performed.

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## **Definition of the Chief Audit Executive (CAE)**

Chief Audit Executive describes a person in a senior position responsible for effectively managing the internal audit activity in accordance with the internal audit charter and the mandatory elements of the International Professional Practices Framework. Within



Oxfordshire County Council the Chief Internal Auditor is the designated 'Chief Audit Executive'

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## Definition of the Board

The PSIAS lays out the role of a Board in relation to specific standards. In a local authority the role of the Board may be satisfied by an Audit Committee. In Oxfordshire Council the Audit & Governance Committee, for the purposes of the key duties laid out in the PSIAS, is the Board.

The key duties of the Board (Audit & Governance Committee) as laid out in the PSIAS are as follows:

- Approve the Internal Audit charter
- Receive the risk based Internal Audit plan including the Internal Audit resource plan
- Receive communications from the Chief Internal Auditor on internal audit's performance relative to its plan and other matters
- Receive an annual confirmation from the Chief Internal Auditor with regard to the organisational independence of the internal audit activity
- Receive the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme from the Chief Internal Auditor.
- Make appropriate enquiries of the management and the Chief Internal Auditor to determine whether there are inappropriate scope or resource limitations.

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## Definition of Senior Management

The PSIAS anticipates the role of Senior Management includes the following:

- Input to the risk based Internal Audit plan
- Receive periodic reports from the Chief Internal Auditor on internal audit activity, that includes follow up reports
- Receive the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme from the Chief Internal Auditor

Within Oxfordshire Council 'Senior Management' is defined as the Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance)

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## Professionalism

Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit will govern itself by adherence to The Institute of Internal Auditors' mandatory guidance including the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (Standards). This mandatory guidance constitutes principles of the fundamental requirements for the professional practice of internal

auditing and for evaluating the effectiveness of the internal audit activity's performance.

Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit maintains an Audit Procedures Manual which is consistent with PSIAS requirements. These procedures are applied for all audit engagements.

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## **Authority**

Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit, with strict accountability for confidentiality and safeguarding records and information, is authorised full, free, and unrestricted access to any and all of the organisation's records, physical properties, and personnel pertinent to carrying out any engagement. All employees are required to assist the internal audit activity in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. The internal audit activity will also have free and unrestricted access to, and communicate and interact directly with, the Audit & Governance Committee.

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## **Organisation**

The Chief Internal Auditor will report functionally to the Audit & Governance Committee, for example approving the charter and internal audit plan, and administratively to the Director of Finance & Assistant Director of Finance, such as approving the internal audit activity's HR administration and budgets.

The Chief Internal Auditor will communicate and interact directly with the Audit & Governance Committee, including in executive sessions and between meetings as appropriate.

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## **Independence and objectivity**

The internal audit activity within Oxfordshire County Council will remain free from interference by any element in the organisation, including matters of audit selection, scope, procedures, frequency, timing, or report content to permit maintenance of a necessary independent and objective mental attitude.

Internal auditors will have no direct operational responsibility or authority over any of the activities audited within Oxfordshire County Council. Accordingly, they will not implement internal controls, develop procedures, install systems, prepare records, or engage in any other activity that may impair internal auditor's judgment.

Internal Audit will ensure through the planning and resourcing process that any potential conflicts of interest are recognised and addressed through internal audit staff not undertaking an audit for at least two years in an area where they have had previous

operational roles and/or undertaken consulting activity and that responsibilities for audit assignments are rotated periodically within the internal audit team.

Internal auditors must exhibit the highest level of professional objectivity in gathering, evaluating, and communicating information about the activity or process being examined. Internal auditors must make a balanced assessment of all the relevant circumstances and not be unduly influenced by their own interests or by others in forming judgments. Internal auditors will disclose any impairment of independence or objectivity, in fact or appearance, to the appropriate parties.

The Chief Internal Auditor will confirm to the Audit & Governance Committee, at least annually, the organisational independence of the internal audit activity.

The Chief Internal Auditor will disclose to the Audit & Governance Committee any interference and related implications in determining the scope of internal auditing, performing work, and communicating results.

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## **Responsibility- Scope & Objectives**

Internal audit is an assurance service that provides an independent and objective opinion to the council on the entire control environment comprising risk management, performance, control and governance by evaluating the effectiveness in achieving the organisation's objectives. Internal Audit objectively examine, evaluate and report on the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources.

Internal Audit Services is accountable to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) for the terms of reference, scope and coverage of its audit activities. In addition there is a responsibility to those charged with corporate governance being the council (through the Audit & Governance Committee and Audit Working Group) and the Head of Paid Service to give an annual opinion on the whole system of internal control and to support the Monitoring Officer in respect of matters of standards/ legality.

The council's external auditor relies on Internal Audit to undertake a continuous programme of audits of key corporate controls. Also, due priority needs to be given to the key strategic risks of the council including the requirements of the Section 151 Officer. Audit work is included to ensure an opinion can be given on the whole of the control environment. These priorities constitute most of the Annual Plan the balance being risks identified by Internal Audit. The Chief Internal Auditor collates an annual report on the effectiveness of the council's internal control environment.

Internal audit may perform consulting and advisory services related to governance, risk management and control as appropriate for the organisation. It may also evaluate specific operations at the request of the Audit & Governance Committee or management, as appropriate.

Based on its activity, Internal audit is responsible for reporting significant risk exposures and control issues identified to the Audit & Governance Committee and to

Senior Management, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested.

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## **Internal audit plan**

At least annually, the Chief Internal Auditor will submit to the Audit and Governance Committee an internal audit plan for review and approval. The Chief Internal Auditor will communicate the impact of resource limitations and significant interim changes to senior management and the Audit & Governance Committee.

The internal audit plan will be developed based on a prioritisation of the audit universe using a risk-based methodology, including input of senior management, including the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Directors, Deputy Directors and Finance Business Partners. It will be developed in accordance with the Internal Audit Charter and will link to the strategic objectives and priorities of Oxfordshire County Council. Prior to submission to the Audit & Governance Committee for approval, the plan may be discussed with appropriate senior management. Any significant deviation from the approved internal audit plan will be communicated through the periodic activity reporting process.

The audit plan is dynamic in nature and will be reviewed and realigned on a regular basis to take account of new, emerging and changing risks and priorities. It will be based on a risk assessment that covers financial materiality and business risks as well as any suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety that has come to the attention of the Chief Internal Auditor.

Internal Audit will consult with the Council's external auditor and with other relevant inspection/assurance and review bodies, as required, in order to co-ordinate effort, ensure adequate coverage and minimise any duplication.

As part of the planning process, the Chief Internal Auditor will identify other potential sources of assurance and will include in the risk based plan the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.

For each audit assignment, Internal Auditors will develop and document a plan including the objectives of the review, the scope, and timing and resource allocations. In planning the assignment, auditors will consider, in conjunction with the auditees, the objectives of the activity being reviewed, significant risks to the activity and the adequacy and effectiveness of the activity's governance, risk management and control processes.

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## **Reporting and monitoring**

A written report will be prepared and issued by the Chief Internal Auditor or designee following the conclusion of each internal audit engagement and will be distributed as appropriate. Internal audit results will also be communicated to the Audit & Governance Committee. The internal audit report will include an opinion on the adequacy of controls in the area that has been audited.

The draft report will be discussed with the auditees and management actions agreed for the weaknesses identified, along with timescales for implementation. The final report will be issued to the relevant Director, Director of Finance and other officers in line with directorate protocols.

The internal audit activity will be responsible for appropriate follow-up on engagement findings and monitoring and reporting on the implementation of management actions.

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## **Arrangements for appropriate resourcing**

Internal Audit must be appropriately staffed in terms of numbers, grades, qualification levels and experience, having regard to its objectives and to the standards. All Internal Auditors will hold a professional qualification or be training towards a professional qualification.

In the event that the risk assessment, carried out to prepare the annual plan, identifies a need for more audit work than there are resources available, the Chief Internal Auditor will identify the shortfall and advise the Director of Finance followed by the Audit & Governance Committee as required to assess the associated risks or to recommend additional resources are identified.

The audit plan will remain flexible to address unplanned work including responding to specific control issues highlighted by senior management during the year.

Internal audit work is prioritised according to risk, through the judgement of the Chief Internal Auditor, informed by the Council's risk registers and in consultation with senior management and External Audit.

All internal auditors have a personal responsibility to undertake a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) to maintain and develop their competence. This is fulfilled through the requirements set by professional bodies and through the Council's appraisal and development programme.

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# Fraud and Corruption

The County Council is one of the largest business organisations in Oxfordshire. In administering its responsibilities; the Council has a duty to prevent fraud and corruption, whether it is attempted by someone outside or within the Council such as another organisation, a resident, an employee or Councillor. The Council is committed to an effective Anti-Fraud and Corruption culture, Internal Audit fully considers the risk of fraud and corruption when undertaking its activities by promoting high ethical standards and encouraging the prevention and detection of fraudulent activities.

The Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy, sets out responsibilities in this area.

Internal Audit – Counter Fraud Team within Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for developing and implementing the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and monitoring the investigation of any reported issues. To ensure that all suspected or reported irregularities are dealt with promptly and in accordance with this strategy and that action is identified to improve controls and reduce the risk of recurrence. Internal Audit - Counter Fraud Team maintains the fraud log for Oxfordshire County Council. Internal Audit – Counter Fraud Team undertakes investigations into potential financial irregularities. In some circumstances this may be delegated to the service itself following an assessment of risk and financial impact.

Internal Audit – Counter Fraud Team also facilitates Oxfordshire County Council's participation in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) in which data from the Council's main systems are matched with data supplied from other Local Authorities and external agencies to detect potentially fraudulent activity.

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## Definition of Assurance Services

The PSIAS defines assurance services as follows: *"An objective examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an independent assessment on governance, risk management and control processes for the organisation."*

Internal Audit provide this assurance across all parts of the Council reviewing the Council's "control environment" comprising risk management, control and governance, this enables the Chief Internal Auditor to provide an annual opinion on the effectiveness of these arrangements. This opinion supports the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

## Definition of Consulting Services

The PSIAS defines consulting services as follows: *“Advisory and related client service activities, the nature and scope of which are agreed with the client, are intended to add value and improve an organisation’s governance, risk management and control processes without the internal auditor assuming management responsibility. Examples include counsel, advice, facilitation and training.”*

The PSIAS requires that approval must be sought from the Audit & Governance Committee for any significant additional consulting services not already included in the audit plan, prior to accepting the engagement. Within Oxfordshire County Council significant is defined as any single assignment equivalent to 5% of annual planned days; these will be brought to the Audit & Governance Committee for approval.

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## Quality assurance and improvement programme

The internal audit activity will maintain a quality assurance and improvement programme that covers all aspects of the internal audit activity and evaluates the activity’s conformance with the Standards and application of the Code of Ethics. As such, the programme assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal audit activity and identifies opportunities for improvement.

The Chief Internal Auditor will communicate to senior management and the Audit & Governance Committee on the internal audit activity’s quality assurance and improvement programme, including results of ongoing monitoring at least annually, internal assessments upon completion and external assessments conducted at least every five years. Disclosure will include:

- The scope and frequency of both internal and external assessments.
- The qualifications and independence of the assessor(s) or assessment team, including potential conflicts of interest.
- Conclusions of assessors.
- Corrective action plans.

The results of the quality assurance and improvement programme and progress against any improvement plans must also be included in the annual report.

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### Signed by:

Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor  
Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources  
Councilor Roz Smith, Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee  
Date approved: 17 July 2024 (Audit & Governance Committee)  
Date of next review: July 2025



# **Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit - Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme**

## **Introduction**

Internal Audit's Quality Assurance and Improvement Program (QAIP) is designed to provide reasonable assurance to the various stakeholders of Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit Service that Internal Audit:

- Performs its work in accordance with its Charter, which is consistent with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, Definition of Internal Auditing and Code of Ethics;
- Operates in an efficient and effective manner;
- Is adding value and continually improving the service it provides.
- The Chief Internal Auditor is ultimately responsible for maintaining the QAIP, which covers all types of Internal Audit activities. The QAIP must include both internal and external assessments. Internal assessments are both ongoing and periodical and external assessments must be undertaken at least once every five years.

## **Internal Assessments**

Internal Assessment is made up of both ongoing reviews and periodic reviews.

### **Ongoing Reviews**

Ongoing assessments are conducted through:

- Supervision of audit engagements
- Regular, documented review of work papers during engagements by appropriate Internal Audit staff
- Applying relevant audit policies and procedures, including those set out in the Oxfordshire County Council Internal Audit Manual, to ensure applicable audit planning, fieldwork and reporting quality standards are met
- Review of all audit reports and agreed management actions by the Chief Internal Auditor prior to formal circulation.
- Feedback from Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires (CSQs) on individual audit assignments



- Established key performance indicators (KPIs) designed to improve Internal Audit's effectiveness and efficiency. These are signed off each year by the Audit & Governance Committee.
- In assigning audit work to an individual auditor consideration is given to their level of skills, experience and competence and an appropriate level of supervision exercised
- Feedback from CSQs, performance against KPIs and reviews of working papers and audit reports will form part of the discussion during regular meetings / 12:3:2 appraisal/121 discussions.

### Periodic Reviews

Periodic assessments are designed to assess conformance with Internal Audit's Charter, the Standards, Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the efficiency and effectiveness of internal audit in meeting the needs of its various stakeholders. Periodic assessments will be conducted through:

- Chief Internal Auditor / Audit Manager file reviews to ensure performance in accordance with Internal Audit's Quality Procedures Manual.
- Review of internal audit Key Performance Indicators by the Chief Internal Auditor on a monthly basis, including elapsed time between start of audit and exit meeting, elapsed time between exit meeting and issue of draft report, elapsed time between receipt of management responses to draft report and issue of final report, % of planned activity completed and % of management actions implemented.
- Quarterly activity and performance reporting to the Audit and Governance Committee and Section 151 officer.
- Annual self-review of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Any resultant action plans will be monitored by the Chief Internal Auditor on a quarterly basis.
- Independent annual review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit by the Council's Monitoring Officer, with results reported to and reviewed by the Audit and Governance Committee.

## **External Assessment**

External assessments will appraise and express an opinion about Internal Audit's conformance with the Standards, Definition of Internal Auditing and Code of Ethics and include recommendations for improvement, as appropriate.

An external assessment will be conducted every 5 years by a qualified, independent assessor from outside the Council. The assessment will be in the form of a full external assessment, or a self-assessment with independent external validation. The format of the external assessment will be discussed with the Audit & Governance Committee.

## Reporting

Internal Assessments – Quarterly activity and performance reporting to the Audit and Governance Committee and Section 151 officer.

External Assessments – results of external assessments will be reported to the Audit & Governance Committee and Section 151 officer at the earliest opportunity following receipt of the external assessor’s report. The external assessment report will be accompanied by a written action plan in response to significant findings and recommendations contained in the report.

Follow Up - the Chief Internal Auditor will implement appropriate follow-up actions to ensure that action plans developed are implemented in a reasonable timeframe.

## Opportunities for improvement – 2024/25

Opportunity for improvement	Lead Officer	Target Date
<p><b>Data analytics</b> - to be embedded into the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud assurance activities.</p> <p>This opportunity for improvement was included within the QAIP for 2023/24. During 2023/24 we developed a documented Data Analytics Strategy for Internal Audit &amp; Counter Fraud. The Counter Fraud Intelligence and Data Officer now works across the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud teams. Several audits were undertaken using data analytics and full population testing approach.</p> <p>This needs to be a continued focus, building awareness and application across the team. Members of the team are undertaking specific training, for example PowerBi.</p>	<p>Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor / Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager.</p> <p>Nick Stokes, Intelligence &amp; Data Officer to support</p>	<p>Improvements to assurance activities continue to be embedded throughout 2024/25.</p>
<p><b>Internal Audit Standards</b> – New Global Internal Audit Standards will become effective from 9 January 2025.</p>	<p>Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor / Katherine Kitashima, Audit Manager.</p>	<p>New standards implemented across team by April 2025.</p>

<p>As a result the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards are being reviewed. New material and guidance will start to be issued from September 2024, to be implemented by April 2025. We will need to review our processes within the team and make updates to the Internal Audit Charter, audit manual, etc.</p>		
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**Signed by:**

Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources

Date approved: July 2024

Date of next review: July 2025