

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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| COMMITTEE | Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee |
| DATE | 20 February 2025 |
| EXEMPT | No |
| CONFIDENTIAL | No |
| REPORT TITLE | Internal Audit Charter |
| REPORT NUMBER | IA/25/003 |
| DIRECTOR | N/A |
| REPORT AUTHOR | Jamie Dale, Chief Internal Auditor |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE | 2.1 |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement for continuing use of the current Internal Audit Charter.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee approve the attached Internal Audit Charter. Minor changes, noted in red, have been suggested to the previous Internal Audit Charter to reflect ongoing developments of the Service and reflect the incoming new standards. It is anticipated that the Charter presented to Committee in 2026 will reflect further changes to fully comply with the new standards; the implications of which are still being worked through across the Public Sector.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require that Internal Audit sections have an Internal Audit Charter which includes specific requirements contained within the Standards. The Standards require that the organisation's Board (for the Council, the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee) approves the Internal Audit Charter.

- 3.2 The Standards define the Charter as follows:

"The internal audit charter is a formal document that defines the internal audit activity's purpose, authority, and responsibility. The internal audit charter establishes the internal audit activity's position within the organisation, including the nature of the chief audit executive's functional reporting relationship with the board; authorises access to records,

personnel, and physical properties relevant to the performance of engagements; and defines the scope of internal audit activities. Final approval of the internal audit charter resides with the board”.

3.3 In relation to the public sector, it must:

- Define the terms ‘board’ and ‘senior management’ for the purposes of internal audit activity.
- Cover the arrangements for appropriate resourcing.
- Define the role of internal audit in any fraud-related work.
- Include arrangements for avoiding conflicts of interest if internal audit undertakes non-audit activities.

3.4 The current Internal Audit Charter was approved by the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee in February 2024. There is a requirement that the Internal Audit Charter be reviewed annually. Such a review was completed by the Chief internal Auditor.

3.5 The Internal Audit Charter, which is attached as an appendix to this report, is based on the requirements of the PSIAS, the main requirements of which are:

- Relationships between the chief audit executive (Chief Internal Auditor), Chief Financial Officer, Chief Executive, the Audit Committee, and other key officers are defined, including the reporting aspects of the role.
- The purpose, authority and responsibility of Internal Audit must be formally defined in the Charter which must be consistent with the Definition of Internal Audit, the Code of Ethics, and the Standards.
- Mandate, including scope and types of services to be provided, and the Council’s responsibilities and expectations regarding management’s support of the internal audit function
- The nature of assurance services provided to the organisation must be defined.
- The mandatory nature of the *Definition of Internal Auditing*, the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards* must be recognised in the internal audit charter.

3.6 Other important considerations include establishing Internal Audit’s independence and ensuring that it is free from interference in determining the scope of internal auditing, performing work, and communicating results. This includes the reporting of any impairment to that independence (either in fact or appearance), scope limitations, and restrictions on access to records, etc to appropriate parties.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

7.1 The Internal Audit process considers risks involved in the areas subject to review. Any risk implications identified through the Internal Audit process are detailed in the resultant Internal Audit reports. Recommendations are made to address the identified risks and Internal Audit follows up progress with implementing those that are agreed with management. Where planned progress is not maintained, there is a risk that sufficient work will not have been completed by the end of the financial year for Internal Audit to complete its annual opinion on the Council's control environment.

8. OUTCOMES

8.1 The proposals in this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.

8.2 However, Internal Audit plays a key role in providing assurance over, and helping to improve, the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control. These arrangements, put in place by the Council, help ensure that the Council achieves its strategic objectives in a well-managed and controlled environment.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

| Assessment | Outcome |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Impact Assessment | An assessment is not required because the reason for this report is to report Internal Audit's progress to Committee. As a result, there will be no differential impact, because of the proposals in this report, on people with protected characteristics. |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment | Not required |

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are no relevant background papers related directly to this report.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A – Aberdeen City Council Internal Audit Charter.

12. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Appendix A

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

INTRODUCTION

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require that an Internal Audit Charter be in place to detail the purpose, authority, and responsibility of Internal Audit. The Charter should also establish Internal Audit's position **and mandate** within the organisation, including the Chief Internal Auditor's functional reporting relationship with the "Board", authorise Internal Audit's access to records, personnel, and physical properties relevant to the performance of its activity, and define the scope of such activity.

It is a requirement of PSIAS that the Charter be approved by the "Board". Within Aberdeen City Council, the Board is the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee. **This facilitation of the relationship by the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee does not prevent the Chief Internal Auditor reporting directly to Full Council as required.**

Where Internal Audit is a statutory function, this Charter, as approved by the "Board", provides Internal Audit with their mandate across the Council; encompassing all aspects of their required licence operate and to fulfil their duty.

DEFINITION OF INTERNAL AUDITING

PSIAS defines Internal Auditing as follows:

"Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes".

ROLE

Internal Audit's primary role is to provide independent and objective assurance on the Council's risk management, control, and governance processes. This involves a continuous rolling review and appraisal of the internal controls of the Council involving the examination and evaluation of the adequacy of the systems of risk management, control, and governance, making recommendations for improvement where appropriate. Reports are produced relating to each audit assignment and these are provided to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee, except where they relate to the Pension Fund, in which case the report is provided to the Pensions Committee. Along with other evidence, these reports are used in forming an annual opinion on the adequacy of risk management, control, and governance processes.

Internal Audit is also responsible for carrying out ad-hoc investigations into potential irregularities involving cash, stores, equipment, or other property of the Council, and

for providing advice as and when required in relation to control and compliance issues. Overall responsibility for Counter Fraud however rests within the Chief Officer – Finance and the Council’s Counter Fraud Team.

PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS

Internal Audit will govern itself by adherence to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit 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.

Internal Audit will also encourage and promote an ethics-based culture alongside personal adherence to the ethical expectations of the Council. The Chief Internal Auditor will ensure application the Seven Principles of Public Life (the ‘Nolan Principles’) alongside all other relevant ethical frameworks in fulfilling their role.

AUTHORITY

Internal Audit, with strict accountability for confidentiality and safeguarding records and information, has authority, through the Council’s Financial Regulations, to:

- (a) Enter at all reasonable times any Council premises or land.
- (b) Have access to all records, documents and correspondence relating to any financial and other transactions of the Council.
- (c) Require and receive such explanations as are necessary concerning any matter under examination.
- (d) Require any employee of the Council to produce cash, stores, equipment, or any other Council property under their control.

The Chief Internal Auditor has free and unfettered access to the Council’s Chief Executive, and Convener of the Board. The Chief Internal Auditor has the right to report direct to Council in any instance where they deem it inappropriate to report direct to the Chief Officer – Governance, Chief Executive, or Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee.

ORGANISATION

The Chief Internal Auditor will report functionally to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee and administratively (i.e., day to day operations) to the Chief Officer – Governance.

In this context functional reporting means the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee will:

- (a) Approve the Internal Audit Charter, including the overall mandate.
- (b) Be consulted on and approve the annual Internal Audit Plan.
- (c) Receive reports from the Chief Internal Auditor on the results of Internal Audit activity or other matters the Chief Internal Auditor determines necessary.
- (d) Make enquiries of management to ensure that Internal Audit is adequately resourced to meet assurance and other key responsibilities.

- (e) Make enquiries of management to ensure that Internal Audit is operating in an independent manner and that it is receiving the necessary co-operation from Council management in undertaking its duties.

The Chief Internal Auditor's annual review will be undertaken by the Director of Business Services in Aberdeenshire Council.

INDEPENDENCE AND OBJECTIVITY

To satisfy the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, Internal Audit must be independent and objective.

Internal Audit will remain free from interference by any element in the organisation in the matter of audit selection (including scope, procedures, frequency, and timing), and content of reports thereon to permit maintenance of a necessary independent and objective mental attitude. Notwithstanding this, Internal Audit will consult with management regarding the scope, timing, and outcome of each assignment.

Internal auditors will have no direct operational responsibility or authority over any of the activities audited. Accordingly, they will not implement internal controls, develop procedures, install systems, prepare records, or engage in any other activity that may impair an internal auditor's judgment. However, Internal Audit may be consulted on the implementation of new systems to ensure that, as far as possible, all considerations are considered during their implementation. Such involvement shall not preclude Internal Audit from reviewing that area and reporting thereon.

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 Audit staff will complete an annual declaration confirming compliance with rules on independence, any conflicts of interest, and the offer and / or acceptance of inducements. Where Internal Audit staff have had operational responsibility for any activity whilst working in a previous or seconded role, they will not be involved in the audit of that area for at least one year following the end of any such responsibility.

The Chief Internal Auditor will confirm to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee, at least annually, the organisational independence of the Internal Audit function.

RESPONSIBILITY

It shall be the responsibility of Internal Audit to complete sufficient assurance work to support the annual opinion detailed in Internal Audit's Annual Report. All work shall be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. All Internal Audit staff will complete an annual declaration confirming that they have read and understood these requirements.

It shall be the responsibility of Council management to ensure that adequate and appropriate systems of internal control are in operation which help ensure that the Council's objectives are fulfilled in a manner which complies with the Council's policies and procedures and in accordance with the law. Council management will ensure that access is provided to records, personnel and assets of the Council as required by Internal Audit, and that responses are provided to Internal Audit as required by the Council's Financial Regulations.

The CIPFA *Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government* states that the chief financial officer (Chief Officer – Finance) must:

- (a) ensure an effective internal audit function is resourced and maintained
- (b) ensure that the authority has put in place effective arrangements for internal audit of the control environment
- (c) support the authority's internal audit arrangements, and
- (d) ensure that the audit committee receives the necessary advice and information, so that both functions can operate effectively.

The Council's Financial Regulations require that Chief Officers immediately notify the Chief Officer – Finance and Chief Officer – Governance of any circumstances which may suggest an irregularity affecting the finances, property, services, or policy of the Council and that the Chief Officer – Finance or Chief Officer – Governance may investigate such incidents as they consider appropriate. The Council's Counter Fraud Policy extends this requirement for reporting to the Chief Internal Auditor.

Internal Audit will consider the outcome of such investigations in its future work programme and in forming its opinion on the control environment of the Council.

INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

On an annual basis, the Chief Internal Auditor will consult with senior management in developing an Internal Audit plan for submission to the Council's Corporate Management Team (in terms of PSIAS "senior management") and Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee for review, comment, and approval by the latter. The Internal Audit plan will consist of a work schedule as well as budget and resource requirements for the period covered by the plan.

The Internal Audit plan will be developed based on a prioritisation of the audit universe using a risk-based methodology, including input from the Council's Corporate Management Team and Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee. Any significant deviation from the Internal Audit plan will be communicated to the Council's Corporate Management Team and Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee through periodic activity reports.

The Chief Internal Auditor will ensure appropriate arrangements for resourcing the Service to deliver the planned work, **including a resourcing strategy on practical approaches outwith additional funding to support the delivery of the role, for example support from other local authorities or central bodies.** Any issues with regards to resourcing will be discussed with the Chief Officer – Governance as appropriate. **The incurrence of any expenses in relation to the Chief Internal Auditor's duties will also be discussed with the Chief Officer – Governance.**

REPORTING AND MONITORING

A written report will be prepared and issued by the Chief Internal Auditor or designee following the conclusion of each audit and this shall be distributed as appropriate. Internal Audit results will be reported to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee and, where they relate to Health and Social Care Integration (Adult Social Care), the Aberdeen City Integration Joint Board Risk, Audit and Performance Committee. Reports relating to the Pension Fund will be reported to the Pensions Committee. Where reports relate to consultancy requested by management for operational purposes, the results will be reported to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee where they relate to governance or control issues.

The Internal Audit report will include management's response and corrective action taken or to be taken regarding the specific findings and recommendations. Management's response will include a timetable for anticipated completion of action to be taken and an explanation for any corrective action that will not be implemented.

Internal Audit will monitor action taken by management to implement agreed recommendations and will provide this information to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee / Pensions Committee.

PERIODIC ASSESSMENT

The Chief Internal Auditor will periodically report to the Council's Corporate Management Team and Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee on Internal Audit's purpose, authority, and responsibility, as well as performance relative to its plan. Reporting will also include significant risk exposures and control issues, including ; risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by the Council's Corporate Management Team and Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee.

In addition, the Chief Internal Auditor will communicate to the Council's Corporate Management Team and Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee regarding Internal Audit's quality assurance and improvement programme, including results of ongoing internal assessments and external assessments which must be conducted at least every five years.

Approved by the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee on TBC.