

INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER FOR READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Charter describes for the Council the purpose, authority and responsibilities of the Internal Audit function in accordance with the Institute of Internal Auditor's Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS).
- 1.2 The GIAS require that the Charter must be reviewed periodically and presented to "senior management" and "the board" for approval. For the purposes of this charter "senior management" will be the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the board will be the Audit & Governance Committee.
- 1.3 The Charter will be reviewed annually and approved by CMT and the Audit & Governance Committee. The Chief Auditor (fulfils the role of Chief Audit Executive) is responsible for applying this Charter and keeping it up to date.

2. INTERNAL AUDIT PURPOSE

- 2.1 The Purpose Statement is intended to assist internal auditors and internal audit stakeholders in understanding and articulating the value of internal auditing.
- 2.2 Internal auditing strengthens the organisation's ability to create, protect, and sustain value by providing the Audit & Governance Committee and CMT with independent, risk-based, and objective assurance, advice, insight, and foresight.
- 2.3 Internal auditing enhances the organisation's:
 - Successful achievement of its objectives.
 - Governance, risk management, and control processes.
 - Decision-making and oversight.
 - Reputation and credibility with its stakeholders.
 - Ability to serve the public interest.
- 2.4 Internal auditing is most effective when:
 - It is performed by competent professionals in conformance with the Global Internal Audit Standards, which are set in the public interest.
 - The internal audit function is independently positioned with direct accountability to the Audit & Governance Committee.
 - Internal auditors are free from undue influence and committed to making objective assessments
 - Internal Audit supports the whole Council to deliver economic, efficient, effective and equality services and achieve the Council's vision, priorities and values.

3. INTERNAL AUDIT MANDATE

- 3.1 Internal Audit is a statutory service in the context of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended). Under these Regulations, the “Council” ‘must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which:
- a) facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and the achievement of its aims and objectives.
 - b) ensures that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective; and
 - c) includes effective arrangements for the management of risk.
- 3.2 The Council ‘must, each financial year (a) conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control’ and ‘(b) prepare an annual governance statement.’
- 3.3 In addition, the Council ‘must maintain an effective internal audit function to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance’, described below.
- 3.4 This statutory role is recognised and endorsed within the Council’s Financial Regulations. In addition, the Council’s S151 Officer has a statutory duty under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to establish a clear framework for the proper administration of the authority’s financial affairs. To perform that duty the Section 151 Officer relies, amongst other things, upon the work of Internal Audit in reviewing the operation of systems of internal control and financial management.
- 3.5 Annually, the Chief Auditor is required to provide to the Audit & Governance Committee an overall opinion on the Council’s internal control environment, risk management arrangements and governance framework to support the Annual Governance Statement.
- 3.6 Internal Audit is not responsible for control systems. Responsibility for effective internal control and risk management rests with the management of the Council.
- 3.7 Internal Audit activity must be free from interference in determining the scope of activity, performing work and communicating results. Any such impairments are required to be reported to the Audit & Governance Committee.
- 3.8 The scope of Internal Audit includes the entire control environment and therefore all of the Council’s operations, resources, services and responsibilities in relation to other bodies. In order to identify audit coverage, activities are prioritised based on risk, using a combination of Internal Audit and management risk assessment (as set out within Council risk registers). Consultation also takes place with key stakeholders and horizon scanning is undertaken to ensure that audit activity is proactive and future focussed.

- 3.9 Internal audit activity will include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the organisation's risk management arrangements and risk exposures relating to:
- Achievement of the organisation's strategic objectives.
 - Reliability and integrity of financial and operational information.
 - Efficiency and effectiveness of operations and activities.
 - Safeguarding of assets; and
 - Compliance with laws, regulations, policies, procedures and contracts.

4. **INDEPENDENCE**

- 4.1 Independence for internal audit services in the Global Internal Audit Standards is defined as the freedom from conditions that impair the internal audit function's ability to carry out its responsibilities in an unbiased manner.
- 4.2 Internal Audit will remain sufficiently independent of the activities it reviews to enable auditors to carry out their work objectively, make impartial and effective professional judgements, and identify and report concerns without undue influence. Internal auditors will not undertake operational or managerial responsibilities for areas subject to audit, and any potential threats to independence or objectivity will be identified, managed and, where necessary, reported in line with professional standards.
- 4.3 Where the Chief Auditor has direct line management responsibility for the Insurance and Corporate Investigations Team, appropriate safeguards will be put in place to protect Internal Audit's independence. In such cases, alternative and independent sources of assurance will be established for any internal audit reviews of these functions, with the results reported directly to the Section 151 Officer, ensuring transparency, objectivity and compliance with professional auditing standards.
- 4.4 Internal Audit is involved in the determination of its priorities in consultation with those charged with governance. The Chief Auditor has direct access to, and freedom to report in their own name and without fear or favour to, all officers and Members and particularly those charged with governance. This independence is further safeguarded by ensuring that the Chief Auditor formal appraisal/performance review is not inappropriately influenced by those subject to audit. This should be achieved by ensuring that both the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Audit Committee have the opportunity to contribute to this performance review.
- 4.5 All Internal Audit staff are required to make an annual declaration of interest to ensure that objectivity is not impaired and that any potential conflicts of interest are appropriately managed.

5. **REPORTING LINES**

- 5.1 Internal Audit sits within Finance, part of the Directorate of Resources. The Chief Auditor reports directly to the Director of Finance (S151 Officer). Regardless of line management arrangements, the Chief Auditor has free and unfettered access to report to the S151 Officer; the Monitoring Officer; the Chief Executive; the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee; the Leader of the Council and the Council's External Auditor.
- 5.2 The Chief Auditor meets with the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee quarterly, or more frequently, if needed, and will arrange to speak with the Chief Executive as and when required.
- 5.3 The Audit and Governance Committee will receive reports on a quarterly basis, as agreed with the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee, on the results of audit activity and details of Internal Audit performance, including progress on delivering the audit plan.

6. **FRAUD AND CORRUPTION**

- 6.1 Managing the risk of fraud and corruption is the responsibility of management. Internal Audit will, however, be alert in all its work to risks and exposures that could allow fraud or corruption and will support the Corporate Investigations Team to investigate allegations of fraud and corruption in line with the Council's Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Strategy.
- 6.2 The Chief Auditor should be informed of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or irregularity in order to consider the adequacy of the relevant controls and evaluate the implication for their opinion on the control environment.
- 6.3 Internal Audit will promote an anti-fraud and anti-corruption culture within the Council to aid the prevention and detection of fraud.

7. **CONSULTANCY WORK**

- 7.1 Internal Audit may also provide consultancy services, generally advisory in nature, at the request of the organisation. In such circumstances, appropriate arrangements will be put in place to safeguard the independence of Internal Audit and, where this work is not already included within the approved audit plan and may affect the level of assurance work undertaken, this will be reported to the Audit & Governance Committee.

8. RESOURCES

- 8.1 The work of Internal Audit is driven by the annual Internal Audit Plan, which is approved each year by the Audit & Governance Committee. The Chief Auditor is responsible for ensuring that Internal Audit resources are sufficient to meet its responsibilities and achieve its objectives.
- 8.2 Internal Audit must be appropriately staffed in terms of numbers, grades, qualifications and experience, having regard to its objectives and to professional standards. Internal Auditors need to be properly trained to fulfil their responsibilities and should maintain their professional competence through an appropriate ongoing development programme.
- 8.3 The Chief Auditor is responsible for appointing Internal Audit staff and will ensure that appointments are made in order to achieve the appropriate mix of qualifications, experience and audit skills. The Chief Auditor may engage the use of external resources where it is considered appropriate, including the use of specialist providers.

9. DUE PROFESSIONAL CARE

- 9.1 The work of Internal Audit will be performed with due professional care and in accordance with the IIA's Global Internal Audit Standards (2025), the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015), as amended 2020 and with any other relevant statutory obligations and regulations.
- 9.2 In carrying out their work, Internal Auditors must exercise due professional care by considering:
- The extent of work needed to achieve the required objectives.
 - The relative complexity, materiality or significance of matters to which assurance procedures should be applied.
 - The adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes.
 - The probability of significant errors, fraud or non-compliance; and
 - The cost of assurance in proportion to the potential benefits.
- 9.3 Internal Auditors will also have due regard to the Seven Principles of Public Life Selflessness; Integrity, Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty; and Leadership.
- 9.4 The Chief Auditor will control the work of Internal Audit at each level of operation to ensure that a continuously effective level of performance – compliant with the IIA's Global Internal Audit Standards, is maintained.
- 9.5 A Quality Assurance Improvement Programme (QAIP) is in place which is designed to provide reasonable assurance to its key stakeholders that Internal Audit:
- Performs its work in accordance with its Charter/Mandate.
 - Operates in an effective and efficient manner; and,
 - Is adding value and continually improving the service that it provides.

- 9.6 The QAIP requires an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of Internal Audit to be conducted. Instances of non-conformance with the IIA's Global Internal Audit Standards, including the impact of any such non-conformance, must be disclosed to the Audit Committee. Any significant deviations must be considered for inclusion in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.
- 9.7 An external assessment is required every five years by a qualified and independent assessor, for Reading this will be due in 2027/28. Approval of the external assessment plan and outcomes of the resulting report will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee.

10. **COMMITMENT TO ADHERENCE TO THE GLOBAL INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS**

- 10.1 The internal audit service will adhere to the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors' International Professional Practices Framework, which are the Global Internal Audit Standards and Topical Requirements. The Chief Auditor will report annually to the Audit & Governance Committee and senior management regarding the internal audit's conformance with the Standards.