

THE 2025/26 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor S Colella (at time report prepared)
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Bob Watson, S151 Officer
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Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Good Governance & Risk Management underpins all the Strategic Purposes.
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 **The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee approves the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan subject to any agreed amendments.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The aims and objectives of the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service are to:
- examine, evaluate and report on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control, governance and risk management across the council and recommend arrangements to address weaknesses as appropriate;
 - examine, evaluate and report on arrangements to ensure compliance with legislation and the council's objectives, policies and procedures;
 - examine, evaluate and report on procedures to check that the council's assets and interests are adequately protected and effectively managed;
 - undertake independent investigations into allegations of fraud and irregularity in accordance with council policies and procedures and relevant legislation; and

- advise upon the control and risk implications of new systems or other organisation changes, e.g. transformation.

2.2 Formulation of the Annual Plan

WASS operates an Internal Audit Charter which sets out the standards to which it operates for this Council. The Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26, which is included at Appendix 1, is a risk-based plan which considers the adequacy of the Council's risk management, governance, performance management, other assurance processes as well as organisational objectives and priorities. It has been based upon the risk priorities per the Corporate and Service risk registers, as reported to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. Large spend budget areas have also been considered, along with direct association to the Council Plan. The Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 has been formed in discussion with the s151 Officer, considered by the Senior Leadership Team, and is brought before Committee in draft form. All services and areas of potential audit have been considered and discussed; this was achieved by developing a new 'long list' of potential audit areas. The intention is to have a high level of coverage over the next 3 years. The annual plan has been formulated with the aim of supporting the Council to meet its strategic objectives. It is brought before the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in draft format as the involvement of the Committee is considered an important facet of good corporate governance, contributing to the internal control assurance given in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

Internal Audit recognises that there are other review functions which may provide other sources of assurance, both internally and externally, (e.g. ICT Public Service Network, Cyber Essentials, External Audit assurance testing) over aspects of the Council's operations. Where possible internal audit will seek to place reliance on such work thus increasing the coverage without adding additional costs.

To try to reduce duplication of effort internal audit understands the importance of working with the External Auditors. The audit plan is available to the external auditors for information.

Bringing a plan of work before the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee allows Members to have a positive input and make suggestions as to where they feel audit resources may be required under direction of the s151 Officer and within the finite resource available. Due to the continuing changing environment that exists in Local Government the plan must be seen as a framework for internal audit work for the forthcoming year. There is a need for improved flexibility in the plan due to a constantly changing risk profile. To ensure flexibility there is the possibility

that the plan will be updated during the year to address such challenges and any emerging risks. A regular review will take place to ensure the audit plan remains risk focussed, and any required changes can be considered. This is in line with the requirements of the Internal Audit Standards. Any changes will be submitted to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee for consideration and approval, in line with its role as Gatekeeper.

2.3 Resource Allocation

The Internal Audit Plan has been based upon a resource allocation of 250 chargeable days, an allocation which has been agreed with the Council's s151 Officer. A summary of the days as well as the detailed plan provision has been included at Appendix 1. Although all areas have been considered an assessment has been made whether to include in the plan based on the overall risk and governance profile. The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service is confident that, with this resource allocation, he can provide management, external audit and those charged with governance with the assurances and coverage that they require over the system of internal control, annual governance statement and statement of accounts.

The Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 is set out at Appendix 1.

2.4 Monitoring and reporting

Operational progress against the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 will be closely monitored by the Head of Internal Audit and will be reported to the Shared Service's Client Officer Group (which comprises the s151 officers from partner organisations), and, to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on a quarterly basis.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 The Council is required under Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2018 to "maintain in accordance with proper practices an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control".

To aid compliance with the regulation, the Institute of Internal Auditors Internal Audit Standards details that "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”.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 5.1 Good governance along with risk management underpin all the Corporate strategic purposes. This report provides an independent assurance over certain aspects of the Council’s operations.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 The actions proposed do not have a direct impact on climate change implications.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 There are no implications arising out of this report.

Operational Implications

- 6.2 There are no new operational implications arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Insufficiently complete the planned programme of audit work within the financial year leading to an inability to produce an annual opinion; and,
- a continuous provision of an internal audit service is not maintained.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 ~ Internal Audit Plan 2025/26