

Internal Audit Mid-Term Performance Report 2023/24

Report by Chief Internal Auditor

Report for Decision

1 Recommendations

The Audit Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the progress Internal Audit has made with activity in the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/24 to the end of December 2023;
- b) Confirm that it is satisfied with the performance of the Internal Audit service provision.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform the Audit Committee of the progress Internal Audit has made in the first 9 months of the year to 31 December 2023, towards completing the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/24. It also summarises the statutory obligations for Internal Audit and requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

Internal Audit provides assurance to Management and the Audit Committee on the effectiveness of internal controls and governance within the Council.

The Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/24 that was approved by the Audit Committee on 7 March 2023 sets out the audit coverage for the year utilising the expected available Internal Audit staff resources to enable the Chief Internal Auditor, as the Council's Chief Audit Executive (CAE), to provide the statutory annual internal audit opinion regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control within the Council.

The report provides details of the progress to date by Internal Audit with its programme of work and highlights changes that require approval to reflect the changes in resourcing available throughout the year.

Date 12 January 2024

Report Contact:

Duncan Stainbank Tel No 01620 827353
duncan.stainbank@midlothian.gov.uk

3 Background

- 3.1** As part of Midlothian Council's system of corporate governance, Internal Audit's purpose is to support the Council in its activities designed to achieve its declared objectives and to do so:
- In support of the Council's vision, values and priorities.
 - As a contribution to the Council's corporate management of risk, including assisting Management to improve the risk identification and management process in particular where there is exposure to significant financial, strategic, reputational and operational risk to the achievement of the Council's objectives.
 - As an aid to ensuring that the Council and its elected members, employees and contracted third parties are operating within the law and relevant regulations, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
 - As a contribution towards establishing and maintaining a culture of honesty, integrity, openness, accountability and transparency throughout the Council in all its activities and transactions.
 - As a contribution towards ensuring that financial statements and other published performance information are accurate and reliable.
- 3.2** Internal Audit provides assurance to Management and the Audit Committee on the effectiveness of internal controls, risk management and governance within the Council.
- 3.3** The Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/24 that was approved by the Audit Committee on 7 March 2023 set out the audit coverage for the year utilising anticipated available Internal Audit staff resources to enable the Chief Internal Auditor, as the Council's Chief Audit Executive (CAE), to provide the statutory annual internal audit opinion regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control within the Council.
- 3.4** Internal Audit assurance services are also provided during the year to the Midlothian Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board, and a statutory annual Internal Audit opinion is provided to its respective Management and Board/Audit and Risk Committee to meet its obligations.

4 Mid-Year Results Against Internal Audit Plan 2023/24

- 4.1** The Internal Audit programme of work led by the Principal Internal Auditor takes account of the availability of auditor resources and consultation with Management to consider operational service delivery demands and timing of the Council's transformation programmes.
- 4.2** The Appendix B to this report provides details of the progress by Internal Audit with its programme of work. Those audits which are complete are highlighted in dark shading, those underway to reflect their continuous audit approach are highlighted in light shading, and those scheduled for the final quarter of the year are not shaded.
- 4.3** In addition, 2 audits: Workforce Planning and Property Assets and Property Strategy (shaded in grey) have now been removed from the audit plan as this is not the appropriate time to complete these audits given current risk and other external assurance.

- 4.4** The Internal Audit plan had, in addition to regularly required review processes, 13 audits scheduled for completion in 2023/24. 2 assignments are being substituted for other risk work which has been identified during the year. The team has completed 5 assignments (39%), 2 further assignments will be complete for the March Audit Committee (15%). 6 further assignments (46%) are scheduled with current team capacity to be substantially complete prior to the annual governance reports in June 2024. Substantial completion of the plan will allow for an appropriate assessment of the Councils governance, risk and control environment.
- 4.5** The continuous audit approach, in accordance with the Internal Audit Strategy approved by Audit Committee on 7 March 2023, enables Internal Audit to provide added value advice on internal controls and governance and 'critical friend' consultancy services. For example, Capital Planning and Asset Management Board, and Information Management Group.

5 Continued Reporting on the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24

- 5.1** The Internal Audit work will continue to be reported to the Corporate Management Team and to the Audit Committee. The Internal Audit reports will include: an Executive Summary of the audit objective, findings, good practice, recommendations (where appropriate) and audit opinion of assurance for each Final Internal Audit Report issued to relevant Management; a summary of Internal Audit Assurance Work in Progress; and an outline of Internal Audit Consultancy and Other Work carried out in accordance with the approved Internal Audit Charter.
- 5.2** Internal Audit's compliance with its Strategy and delivery of its risk-based Annual Plan will be communicated within the Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report which will also provide the statutory annual Internal Audit opinion based on audit findings over the year.

6 The Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014

- 6.1** The Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 which came into force on 10 October 2014 require a local authority to operate a professional and objective internal auditing service. This service must be provided in accordance with recognised standards and practices in relation to internal auditing. Recognised standards and practices are those set out in the *Public Sector Internal Audit Standards: Applying the IIA International Standards to the UK Public Sector (PSIAS)*. The standards require internal audit to have suitable operational independence from the authority.
- 6.2** The regulations require a local authority to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of internal auditing activity from time to time in accordance with recognised internal auditing standards and practices.

7 Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and Quality Assurance & Improvement Plan (QAIP)

7.1 The Internal Audit function follows the professional standards as set out in Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) effective April 2013 (updated April 2017) which includes:

- Definition of Internal Auditing;
- Code of Ethics;
- Attribute Standards (responsibility, independence, proficiency, quality);
- Professional Standards (managing activity, nature of work, engagement planning, performing the engagement, communicating results, monitoring progress, risk management).

7.2 The PSIAS requires the Chief Audit Executive (CAE), the Council's Chief Internal Auditor, to carry out an annual internal self-assessment against the PSIAS, develop a quality assurance and improvement plan (QAIP) based on the outcome, and report the results of the QAIP to senior management and elected members.

7.3 An annual internal self-assessment against the PSIAS of the Internal Audit function will be completed prior to the end of 2023/24. The results and any associated improvement actions will continue to be reported to the Corporate Management Team and the Audit Committee within the Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report. This will enable the Council to meet the requirements of the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 to consider the findings of assessments as part of the consideration of the system of internal control required by regulation 5.

7.4 The PSIAS also requires the self-assessment to be subject to an External Quality Assessment (EQA) each five years, by appropriately qualified and independent reviewers. This EQA was carried out by Highland Council in March 2018 and the results were outlined in the Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report 2017/18 reported to the Audit Committee in June 2018. The schedule for the second cycle of EQAs, with other participating Scottish Councils as peer reviewers, indicates that Midlothian will be reviewed by East Renfrewshire Council in 2024.

8 Report Implications (Resource, Digital, Risk and Equalities)

8.1 Resource

The Internal Audit function reports directly to the Chief Executive (operationally) and the Audit Committee (functionally). There is currently a staff resource of 3.22 FTE, comprising Chief Internal Auditor (0.5 FTE – shared with East Lothian Council), Principal Internal Auditor (0.72 FTE), and Internal Auditor (2.0 FTE). Each member of the Internal Audit team has a professional internal audit or accountancy qualification, and has suitable experience, knowledge, skills and competencies (such as the Code of Ethics set out in PSIAS and the Seven Principles of Public Life) needed to perform the plan.

Budget monitoring of the Service is discussed by the Chief Internal Auditor and the Principal Internal Auditor with the Financial Services Manager on a quarterly basis to address any budgetary pressures.

There is a commitment to provide resource to the Midlothian Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board (MIJB) as part of the Council's commitment to partnership working. Separate plans and reports are presented to MIJB Audit and Risk Committee to fulfil this role.

8.2 Digital

There are no digital implications arising from this report.

8.3 Risk

The PSIAS require Internal Audit to evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's Risk Management arrangements and contribute to improvements in the process.

Key components of the audit planning process include a clear understanding of the Council's functions, associated risks, and potential range and breadth of audit areas for inclusion. During the development of the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/24, at the start of each audit engagement, and during the re-assessment of the plan, to capture potential areas of risk and uncertainty more fully, key stakeholders have been consulted and risk registers have been considered, to ensure the plan is formulated on a risk-based approach.

If Internal Audit staffing levels fall below that assumed for the remaining three-month period or if there is an unexpected and unplanned level of contingency audit work, there is a high level of risk that the remaining elements of the Annual Plan 2023/24 will not be delivered in full. This could only be mitigated by use of external resource. Regular monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that a sufficient range and breadth of assurance audit work will be carried out during 2023/24 to underpin, a 'not limited' statutory Internal Audit opinion to Management and the Audit Committee on the effectiveness of internal controls and governance within the Council.

8.4 Ensuring Equalities

This report does not relate to a new or revised policy, service or budget change, which affects people (the public or staff), so an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is not an applicable consideration.

The Internal Audit work is carried out in accordance with the appropriate legislation and professional standards. The latter includes compliance by those within the Internal Audit function with the Code of Ethics set out in the PSIAS which is appropriate for the profession of Internal Audit founded as it is on trust placed in its independent and objective assurance about risk management, internal control and governance.

8.5 Additional Report Implications (See Appendix A)

APPENDIX A – Additional Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Although this report does not relate directly to the key priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan to which Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment (Reducing the gap in economic circumstances; Reducing the gap in learning outcomes; Reducing the gap in health outcomes; and Reducing the impact of climate change), by providing an independent and objective annual assessment of the adequacy of the entire control environment, Internal Audit supports the Council to achieve its objectives.

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

Midlothian Council is committed to creating a great place to grow supported by the 9 drivers for change. Implementing the 9 drivers for change in practice is applicable to the Council's Internal Audit service provision to assist the Council in achieving its objectives.

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The definition of Internal Auditing within the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) is "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."

Implementation by Management of the actions associated with Internal Audit recommendations, that are designed to improve internal control

and governance arrangements and management of risks, underpins the Council's own continuous improvement arrangements to enhance its effectiveness, thus supporting the delivery of the Council's best value duties.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Internal Audit's purpose is to support the Council in its activities designed to achieve its declared objectives for the benefit of Midlothian's communities and other stakeholders.

The Chief Internal Auditor is accountable to the Audit Committee which, in fulfilling its governance role, acts as a bridge between the Council and other stakeholders.

This report has been presented to the Corporate Management Team to outline the key messages of assurance plans.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The Findings and Recommendations from Internal Audit work during the year, which are designed to maintain and / or enhance internal controls, governance arrangements and risk management, assists the Council in improving its performance and outcomes.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Having robust internal controls, governance arrangements and risk management in place contributes to safeguarding the Council's resources for delivery of services, as part of protecting the public purse. Internal Audit assurance and consultancy activity is designed to improve operations and assist the Council in accomplishing its objectives.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

This report does not relate directly to supporting sustainable development. Good governance, including the provision of an Internal Audit service, is important to enable Midlothian Council to achieve its objectives.