

Internal Audit Strategy

This Strategy sets out how the Council's Internal Audit service will be developed and delivered in accordance with the Internal Audit Charter.

The Strategy will be reviewed annually and presented to the Audit and Governance Committee for approval.

Internal Audit Objectives

Internal Audit will provide independent and objective assurance to the organisation, its Members, the Corporate Management Team (CMT)¹ and in particular to the Chief Financial Officer to support the discharging of their responsibilities under S151 of the Local Government Act 1972, relating to the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

It is the Council's intention to provide a best practice, cost effective internal audit service.

Internal Audit's Remit

The internal audit service is an assurance function that primarily provides an independent and objective opinion on the degree to which the internal control environment supports and promotes the achievement of the council's objectives.

Under the direction of a suitably qualified and experienced Head of Internal Audit² the service will:

- Provide management and Members with an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the Council's operations.
- Assist the Audit and Governance Committee³ to reinforce the importance of effective corporate governance and ensure internal control improvements are delivered;
- Drive organisational change to improve processes and service performance;
- Work with other internal stakeholders and customers to review and recommend improvements to internal control and governance arrangements in accordance with regulatory and statutory requirements;

¹ Fulfil the role of senior management - Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

² Fulfils the role of the Chief Audit Executive – Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

³ Fulfils the role of the board – Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

- Work closely with other assurance providers to share information and provide a value for money assurance service, and
- Participate in local and national bodies and working groups to influence agendas and developments within the profession.

Internal Audit must ensure that it is not involved in the design, installation and operation of controls so as to compromise its independence and objectivity. Internal Audit will, however offer advice on the design of new internal controls in accordance with best practice.

Service Delivery

The Service will be delivered by the Council's strategic internal audit partner (currently Mazars) under the direction of the Council's Head of Internal Audit and supported by an in-house Governance Officer. This provides flexibility of resource and mitigates many of the risks associated with delivering a professional internal audit service.

To ensure that the benefits of the Internal Audit service are maximised and shared as best practice, Croydon has established the APEX Audit & Anti-Fraud Partnership to work with other local authorities. This includes appropriate: resource provision, joint working, audit management & strategy and a range of value added services.

Internal Audit Planning

Audit planning will be undertaken on an annual basis and audit coverage will be based on the following:

- Discussions with the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT), Directors and other management;
- The Council's Risk Register;
- The Council's priorities and Corporate Plan;
- Outputs from other assurance providers (e.g. Ofsted or the External Auditor);
- Requirements as agreed in the joint working protocol with External Audit;
- Local and national issues and risks.

The Internal Audit Plan 2024-25 is composed of the following:

- **Risk Based Systems Audit:** Audits of systems, processes or tasks where the internal controls are identified, evaluated and confirmed through risk assessment process. The internal controls depending on the risk assessment are tested to confirm that they operating correctly. The selection of work in this category is driven by Departments' own risk

processes and will increasingly include work in areas where the Council services are delivered in partnership with other organisations.

Internal Audit planning is already significantly based on the Council's risk register and upon risks identified by management. Internal audit will continue to have a significant role in risk management with audit planning being focused by risk and the results of audit work feeding back into the risk management process to form a 'virtuous circle'.

- **Key Financial Systems:** Audits of the Council's key financial systems where External Audit requires annual assurance as part of their external audit work programme.
- **Probity Audit (schools & other establishments):** Audit of a discrete unit. Compliance with legislation, regulation, policies, procedures or best practice are confirmed. For schools this includes assessment against the Schools Financial Value Standard.
- **Computer Audit:** The review of Digital infrastructure and associated systems, software and hardware.
- **Contract Audit:** Audits of the Council's procedures and processes for the letting and monitoring of contracts, including reviews of completed and current contracts.
- **Action Plan Verification:** Testing of reported attainment of key actions or milestones in the various action plans developed to support council renewal.
- **Fraud and Ad Hoc Work:** A contingency of audit days are set aside to cover any fraud and irregularity investigations arising during the year and additional work due to changes or issues arising in-year.

The internal audit plan for 2024-25 covers a period of twelve months. However, Croydon Council and local government as a whole is being subjected to continuous change and financial pressures that may result in changed priorities during the course of the year. Where this happens the Head of Internal Audit may need to flex the internal audit plan; any proposed significant changes to the plan will be reported to the senior management and the Audit and Governance Committee.

Follow-up

Internal Audit will evaluate the Council's progress in implementing audit recommendations against set targets for implementation. Progress will be reported to management and to the Audit and Governance Committee on a regular basis.

Where progress is unsatisfactory or management fails to provide a satisfactory response to follow up requests, Internal Audit will implement the agreed escalation procedure.

Reporting

Internal audit reports the findings of its work in detail to local management at the conclusion of each piece of audit work and in summary to departmental and corporate management on a regular basis. Summary reports are also provided to the Audit and Governance Committee at least four times per year. This includes the Head of Internal Audit's annual report that contributes to the assurances underpinning the Annual Governance Statement of the Council.