

Report to Audit Committee

Internal Audit Charter 2024/25

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Abdul Jabbar MBE, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Finance and Low Carbon

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26 March 2024

Reason for Decision

To advise Audit Committee Members of the proposed Internal Audit Charter for 2024/25.

Executive Summary

The work of Internal Audit at Oldham Council has been governed by the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) from 1 April 2013 (updated March 2017). The Standards comprise a definition of Internal Auditing, a Code of Ethics for Internal Auditors working in the Public Sector and the Standards themselves. The Standards are mandatory for all Internal Auditors working in the UK public sector.

The 2024/25 Internal Audit Charter is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

Recommendations

Members of the Audit Committee are requested to approve the Internal Audit Charter, effective from 1 April 2024.

Internal Audit Charter 2024/25

1 Background

1.1 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require every Local Authority to undertake an effective system of Internal Audit to evaluate the effectiveness of the Authority's risk management, control and governance processes. This should be carried out with regard to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and guidance.

1.2 Local Authority Internal Audit functions should comply with the 2013 Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (Revised 2017). These Standards (PSIAS) comprise a definition of Internal Auditing, a Code of Ethics for Internal Auditors working in the Public Sector and the Standards themselves. The Standards are mandatory for all Internal Auditors working in the UK public sector; the objectives of the PSIAS are to:

- define the nature of Internal Auditing within the UK public sector;
- set basic principles for carrying out Internal Audit in the UK public sector;
- establish a framework for providing Internal Audit services, which add value to the organisation, leading to improved organisational processes and operations; and
- establish the basis for the evaluation of Internal Audit performance and drive improvement.

1.3 The Standards require an independent external assessment of the Council's Internal Audit service every five years. Oldham Council's first external assessment was undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in September 2017. The external assessor concluded that Oldham Council's Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Service conformed to the requirements of the PSIAS. The second PSIAS independent external assessment, again conducted by CIPFA was undertaken in March 2023, and again the external assessor found Oldham Council's Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Service to be fully in conformance with the PSIAS, including the Internal Audit Charter.

1.6 As part of his annual review during 2023/2024, the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud, has reviewed the Internal Audit Charter to ensure it is in line with the latest guidance. The proposed 2024/25 Internal Audit Charter is attached as Appendix 1.

1.7 The 2024/25 Internal Audit Charter has been updated and revised to accommodate the recent changes in staffing and structures within the Finance Directorate. Principally at paragraph 7.3 where reference to the former Assistant Director of Governance and Strategic Financial Management has been replaced with reference to "another senior officer" having direct oversight of any area of audit focus where the Head of Internal Audit is conflicted.

2. Options/Alternatives

2.1 Members may either approve the proposed Internal Audit Charter 2024/25 or propose an alternative approach.

3. Preferred Option

3.1 That Members approve the proposed Internal Audit Charter 2024/25.

- 4. **Consultation**
- 4.1 N/A
- 5 **Financial Implications**
- 5.1 N/A
- 6. **Legal Services Comments**
- 6.1 N/A
- 7 **Cooperative Agenda**
- 7.1 N/A
- 8 **Human Resources Comments**
- 8.1 N/A
- 9. **Risk Assessments**
- 9.1 The risk assessment is based on the work completed.
- 10 **IT Implications**
- 10.1 N/A
- 11 **Property Implications**
- 11.1 N/A
- 12 **Procurement Implications**
- 12.1 N/A
- 13 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**
- 13.1 N/A
- 14 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
- 14.1. N/A
- 15 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed**
- 15.1 N/A.
- 16 **Key Decision**
- 16.1 N/A
- 17 **Key Decision Reference**
- 17.1 N/A

18 **Background Papers**

18.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act.

- File Ref: Background papers are provided at Appendix 1
- Officer Name: John Miller
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19 **Appendices**

19.1 **Appendix 1:** Oldham Council Internal Audit Charter 2024/25.

Oldham Council Internal Audit Function

Internal Audit Charter 2024/25

Internal Audit and Counter Fraud
Civic Centre
West Street
Oldham
OL1 1 UH

Internal Audit Charter 2024/25

Section	Internal Audit Charter Contents
1	Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015
2	Definition of Internal Audit
3	Mission of Internal Audit
4	Professionalism
5	Authority and Rights of Access
6	Organisation
7	Independence and Objectivity
8	Scope of Responsibility
9	Internal Audit Resources
10	Internal Audit Plan
11	Reporting and Monitoring
12	Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit
13	Annual Opinion of the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud
14	Internal Audit Charter Review

Internal Audit Charter 2024/25

1 April 2024

1 Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015

- 1.1 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require every Local Authority to undertake an effective system of Internal Audit to evaluate the effectiveness of the Authority's risk management, control and governance processes. This should be carried out with regard to public sector Internal Audit standards and guidance. Local Authority Internal Audit functions should comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).
- 1.2 PSIAS (also referred to, in this document, as "the Standards") define Internal Auditing as "*....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.*"
- 1.3 The Standards state that the Internal Audit plan should include and/or be aligned to the strategic statement of how the service will be delivered in accordance with the Internal Audit Charter, which is illustrated by the following process flow diagram:



- 1.4 The purpose of the Internal Audit Charter is to:
 - define the mission, purpose, authority and responsibility of Internal Audit;
 - establish the position of Internal Audit within the Council, its reporting lines and resources;
 - authorise access to records, personnel and physical property relevant to the performance of the audit work; and
 - define the scope of Internal Audit activities.

2 Definition of Internal Audit

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 Each local government organisation is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. Internal audit's core assurance work plays a vital part in objectively testing these arrangements and providing assurance that they are in place and operating properly.
- 2.3 Internal Audit may also undertake consulting services at the request of the organisation, subject to there being no impact on the core assurance work described above, and the availability of skills and resources. Consulting, or advisory, services requested and/or agreed with the Service Management may include, but are not limited to:
 - Advising management on control improvements
 - Facilitating workshops
 - Co-ordinating or participating in process review groups

- Research and data analysis
- Providing Training
- Facilitating risk assessments

2.4 The PSIAS require that the Internal Audit Charter defines the terms 'board' and 'senior management' in relation to the work of Internal Audit. For the purposes of Internal Audit work, at Oldham Council:

- the 'Board' refers to the Council's Audit Committee which has delegated responsibility for overseeing the work of Internal Audit; "Senior Management" is defined as the Chief Executive and members of the Council's Senior Leadership Team; and
- the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud reports to the Director of Finance (Chief Financial Officer), to support their requirements under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

3. Mission of Internal Audit

3.1 Section 3 of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) sets out the mission of Internal Audit:

To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight.

3.2 The mission of Internal Audit is, therefore, to provide an independent, risk based, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the Council's operations. The primary objective of Internal Audit is to review, appraise and report upon the adequacy of internal controls across the entire council.

4. Professionalism

4.1 The Internal Audit Service will govern itself by adherence to the PSIAS. This guidance constitutes principles and fundamental requirements for the professional practice of Internal Auditing and for evaluating the effectiveness of the Internal Audit activity's performance.

4.2 The Service, and individual staff, will be governed by the Code of Ethics of the relevant professional bodies of which they are a member, and all codes and policies operated by Oldham Council.

5. Authority and Rights of Access

5.1 The Internal Audit Service, with strict accountability for confidentiality and safeguarding records and information, is authorised full, free, and unrestricted access to any and all of Oldham Council's records, physical properties, and personnel pertinent to carrying out any engagement. All employees are required to assist the Internal Audit Service in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. The Internal Audit Service will also have free and unrestricted access to senior officers, Members and the Audit Committee.

5.2 Managers must also ensure that Internal Audit is provided with all the information and explanations that it requires in the course of its work.

6. Organisation

- 6.1 The Internal Audit Section is part of the Finance Department within the Chief Executive's Portfolio. The Head of Audit and Counter Fraud reports to the Director of Finance and also reports regularly to the Audit Committee.
- 6.2 The Head of Audit and Counter Fraud may also, where necessary, and with reference to Section 7 below, report directly to the Chief Executive (or their Assistants or Deputies), the Council's Monitoring Officer, or the Chair of the Audit Committee, on any matter where this is deemed necessary to ensure appropriate audit independence and objectivity.

7. Independence and Objectivity

- 7.1 The Internal Audit Service will remain free from interference by any element in the organisation, including on matters of audit selection, scope, procedures, frequency, timing, or report content to permit maintenance of a necessary independent and objective mental attitude.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 Where any potential conflict of interest, or threat to independence or objectivity is identified in respect of any audit assignment, this will be addressed by re-allocation of the audit assignment, or management or supervision of the assignment, so as to remove the conflict or threat to independence. Including bypassing the Head of Internal Audit in favour another senior officer having direct oversight of any area of audit focus where the Head of Internal Audit themselves is conflicted.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 The Head of Audit and Counter fraud will confirm the organisational independence of the Internal Audit activity to the Audit Committee, at least annually.

8. Scope of Responsibility

8.1 The scope of Internal Auditing encompasses, but is not limited to, the examination and evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management, and internal process as well as the quality of performance in carrying out assigned responsibilities to achieve the organisation's stated goals and objectives. This includes:

- Evaluating the reliability and integrity of information and the means used to identify, measure, classify, and report such information.
- Evaluating the systems established to ensure compliance with those policies, plans, procedures, laws, and regulations which could have a significant impact on the organisation.
- Evaluating the means of safeguarding assets and, as appropriate, verifying the existence of such assets.
- Evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency with which resources are employed.
- Evaluating operations or programmes to ascertain whether results are consistent with established objectives and goals and whether the operations or programmes are being carried out as planned.
- Monitoring and evaluating governance processes.
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the organisation's risk management processes.
- Performing consulting and advisory services related to governance, risk management and control as appropriate for the organisation.
- Reporting periodically on the purpose of Internal Audit activity, authority, responsibility, and performance relative to its plan.
- Reporting significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by the Audit Committee.
- Evaluating specific operations at the request of the Audit Committee or management, as appropriate.
- Involvement in the investigation of any allegations of fraud in accordance with the Council's Fraud Response Plan.

9. Internal Audit Resources

9.1 At Oldham Council, the Head of Internal Audit and Counter Fraud is responsible for ensuring that Internal Audit resources are appropriately organised, trained and deployed to deliver an effective Internal Audit service to the Council. In particular, his role is to ensure that Internal Audit resources:

- are appropriately qualified and experienced, and that they possess the appropriate skills, knowledge and competences to ensure due professional care;
- have sufficient knowledge of systems and ensure they have access to appropriate computer assisted audit techniques to perform their work, including data matching and analysis techniques; and
- are recruited, supported and trained in line with the Council's established standards and processes.

9.2 The Head of Audit and Counter Fraud ensures that the Annual Audit Plan sets out the resources that are available, and how they will be deployed to ensure that the Plan is delivered. Specialist resources may be commissioned from other providers.

9.3 The Head of Audit and Counter Fraud will report to the Council's Audit Committee if he believes there are insufficient resources available to deliver the Plan and if the level of agreed resources will impact adversely on the provision of the Annual Internal Audit Opinion.

9.4 The Head of Audit and Counter Fraud concludes that there are sufficient Internal Audit resources to deliver an effective Internal Audit service to the Council in 2024/25.

10. Internal Audit Plan

10.1 At least annually, the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud will submit to senior management and the Audit Committee an Internal Audit plan for review and approval. The Head of Audit and Counter Fraud will communicate the impact of any resource limitations or significant interim changes to senior management and the Audit Committee.

10.2 The Internal Audit Plan will be developed based on a prioritisation of the audit universe using a risk-based methodology, including input of senior management and the Audit Committee. Any significant deviation from the approved Internal Audit plan will be communicated to senior management and the Audit Committee through periodic activity reports.

10.3 The Internal Audit Plan includes a strategic statement on Internal Audit, setting out how the overall service and how specific types of audits will be delivered. The Audit Charter sets out whether the Service has sufficient resources to deliver an effective Internal Audit service to the Council (this is set out in section 9.4 above).

11. Reporting and Monitoring

11.1 A written report will be prepared and issued by the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud, or designee, following the conclusion of each Internal Audit engagement and will be distributed as appropriate. Internal Audit results will also be communicated in summary to the Audit Committee.

11.2 The Internal Audit report will include management's response and corrective action taken or to be taken in regard to the specific findings and recommendations.

11.3 The Internal Audit team will be responsible for appropriate follow-up on engagement findings and recommendations. All significant findings will remain open until cleared.

12. Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit

12.1 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 and PSIAS require that the body charged with governance, which for Oldham Council is the Audit Committee, should undertake an annual review of the effectiveness of its system of Internal Audit.

12.2 The Head of Internal Audit and Counter Fraud conducts an annual review of the Internal Audit service against criteria set out in the PSIAS. The outcome of this internal assessment is reported to the Audit Committee annually.

12.3 The PSIAS also requires an external assessment of Internal Audit every five years. In line with PSIAS, an external assessment of the Internal Audit service was conducted during 2017/18, and during 2022/23. Both assessments were carried out by CIPFA and concluded that the Council's Internal Audit and Counter fraud Service conforms to the requirements of the PSIAS.

13. Annual Opinion of the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud

- 13.1 In addition to periodic assessments, the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud will report annually to senior management and the Audit Committee on the Internal Audit team's mission, purpose, authority, and responsibility, as well as performance. Reporting will also include significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by senior management and the Audit Committee.
- 13.2 The Audit Annual Opinion Report by the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud provides an overview of the work and performance of Internal Audit throughout each year. This Opinion is supported during the year by regular reports to the Audit Committee, which provide an ongoing view of the effectiveness of the overall internal control environment and also provide Members with an opportunity to challenge the Internal Audit process and relevant officers in relation to specific issues identified within each Directorate/Service area.

14. Internal Audit Charter Review

- 14.1 The Internal Audit Charter will be reviewed by the Head of Audit and Counter Fraud annually, to ensure that it supports and links to the Council's corporate priorities. The Charter should be reported to Audit Committee at least every two years. The previous Charter was last reported to, and agreed by, the Audit Committee on 28 March 2023, as such this document is generally reviewed annually by the Authority.