

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Audit & Accounts Committee

7 June 2024

TITLE:	Internal Audit Annual Audit Plan 2024/25
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Chris Wood - Portfolio Holder for Finance
CONTACT OFFICER:	John Leak - Head of Audit
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached

Appendix 1 - High Peak BC / Staffordshire Moorlands DC Internal Audit - Audit Plan 2024/25

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Council to “undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance”. In accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Audit Manager should establish a risk based audit plan to determine the priorities of the internal audit activity, consistent with the Council’s goals. The audit plan must be based on a documented risk assessment undertaken at least annually.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee approve the Council’s annual Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards state that the Audit Plan must be based on a documented risk assessment undertaken at least annually and it needs to be flexible in response to changes in the Council’s business, risks, operations, programs, systems and controls. Furthermore, the Standard states that the Head of Audit must communicate the internal audit activity’s plans and resource requirements to senior management and the Audit Committee for review and approval. The Head of Audit must also communicate the impact of resource limitations. This report seeks to address these requirements.

- 3.2 Following a period of reduced resources due to staff departures, an Audit Apprentice and an Auditor have recently been recruited. The Audit Plan has therefore been created based on available resources which take into account the future training and development needs of the service. The 2024/25 Audit Plan will aim to cover the Council's key risks and systems and will have to be flexible to reflect the changing risks and priorities of the Council.
- 3.3 The annual audit plan for 2024/25 has been created and is attached as **Appendix 1**. This involved a review of the risk scores in accordance with the Audit Service's established risk assessment methodology to ensure that the most recent changes affecting risk are taken into account. The Internal Audit Plan is a joint Alliance plan designed to make the best use of Alliance resources and to reflect the nature of Council services.
- 3.4 Should any amendments to the audit plan be necessary during the year, these will be reported to Councillors at future Audit & Accounts Committee meetings.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The assurance provided by the work of Internal Audit informs the Annual Governance Statement and therefore helps to confirm effective use of financial and other resources to ensure value for money.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 Approve the 2024/25 Audit Plan (*Recommended*). The Council will have an achievable risk based internal audit plan which is designed to provide assurance that the control environment is effective in achieving the Council's objectives and is in accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, and therefore the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 5.2 Do not approve the 2024/25 Audit Plan (*Not Recommended*). The Council will not be complying with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requirement to "undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance".

ANDREW P STOKES
Chief Executive

**Web Links and
Background Papers**
None

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6. Detail

6.1 The audit plan must be based on a documented risk assessment undertaken at least annually, in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. However the audit plan needs to be flexible to be able to reflect the changing risks and priorities of the Council so the entire scope of audits will receive ongoing consideration and attention to ensure that appropriate audit coverage is achieved.

6.2 The Audit Plan has been developed using a comprehensive risk assessment framework which is designed to assess all areas of the Council's services and thereby examine and evaluate the whole system of internal controls (both financial and non-financial) established by management. This risk assessment allows the Audit Plan to be focused, concentrating resources on the areas of greatest need and where there will be the best use of audit resources. The work is designed to appraise and review :

- the completeness, reliability and integrity of information, both financial and operational;
- the systems established to ensure compliance with policies, plans, procedures, laws and regulations, i.e. rules established by the management of the Council, or externally;
- the means of safeguarding assets;
- the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are employed, and whether operations are being carried out as planned and objectives and goals are being met.

6.3 The risk based planning methodology utilised to prepare the audit plan assesses each system on eight risk elements :

- Monetary / financial value;
- Volume of transactions;
- System factors – stability / type of processing application / complexity of regulations and / or processing;
- Managerial and control environment / previous assurance;
- Incidence / risk of fraud;
- Sensitivity;
- Corporate risks; and
- Time since previous audit.

This approach is linked to a mapping exercise whereby strategic risks are mapped to the Audit Plan to ensure they are adequately considered during the audit lifecycle.

6.4 Following a period of reduced resources due to staff departures, an Audit Apprentice and an Auditor have recently been recruited. The Audit Plan has therefore been created based on available resources which take into account the future training and development needs of the service. The 2024/25 Audit Plan will aim to cover the Council's key risks and systems and will have to be flexible to reflect the changing risks and priorities of the Council.

- 6.5 The annual audit plan for 2024/25 has therefore been created and is attached as **Appendix 1**. As the Internal Audit service is a joint resource across both Alliance Councils, and all Alliance services are joint, the most efficient method of auditing to take advantage of economies of scale is to undertake audits covering both Alliance Councils. However there will still be occasions when audits only cover one of the Alliance Councils and this is reflected within the Audit Plan. The future audit approach to potential challenges to the internal control environment will need to be adapted as the delivery of Council services continue to be developed.
- 6.6 If required the annual audit plan can be supplemented during 2024/25 utilising available budget(s) with the purchase of a general audit resource or specialist ICT audit resource to focus on technical ICT risks where this is considered appropriate.