



INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

26 MARCH 2024

**RECOMMENDATION:
MEMBERS ARE RECOMMENDED TO APPROVE THE
PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL
AUDIT PLAN FOR 2024/25**

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2024/25

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The mission of Internal Audit is “to enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight”. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) encompass the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF). These Standards note that a professional, independent, and objective internal audit service is one of the key elements of good governance, as recognised throughout the UK public sector.
- 1.2 The SIAS Board reviewed the SIAS Internal Audit Strategy in 2022, and this strategy outlines how SIAS will achieve the mission of Internal Audit and ensure ongoing compliance with the PSIAS. The following report follows the key principles within the Strategy related to Audit Planning and Resourcing, with the Strategy document itself being available to Members upon request.
- 1.3 The PSIAS set out how SIAS must approach audit planning. The specific standards that SIAS must adhere to are as follows:

Standard	Description
2010	A risk-based plan, setting out audit priorities consistent with the goals of the organisation.
2010	Linked to annual opinion need and Internal Audit Charter
2010.A1	Based on documented risk assessment, updated at least yearly and consulting Senior Management and Members
2010.A2	Reflect expectations of Senior Management, Members, and other stakeholders
2020	Communicated to Senior Management for review and to Members for approval
2030	Ensure internal audit’s resources are fit and effectively used
2030	Must explain how resource adequacy assessed, and set out results of any limits

- 1.4 The Council’s Internal Audit Plan sets out the programme of internal audit work for the year ahead, and forms part of the Council’s wider assurance framework. It supports the requirement to produce an audit opinion on the overall internal control environment of the Council, as well as a judgement on the robustness of risk management and governance arrangements, contained in the Chief Audit Executive’s Annual Opinion Report.
- 1.5 The Shared Internal Audit Service’s (SIAS) Audit Charter was presented to the June 2023 meeting of this Committee, and it shows how the Council and SIAS work together to provide a modern and effective internal audit service. This approach complies with the requirements of the United Kingdom Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which came into effect on 1 April 2013 and revised on 1 April 2017. An updated version of the SIAS Audit Charter will be brought to the June 2024 Audit Committee meeting for Member approval.

1.6 Section 2 of this report details how SIAS complies with these requirements.

2. Audit Planning Process

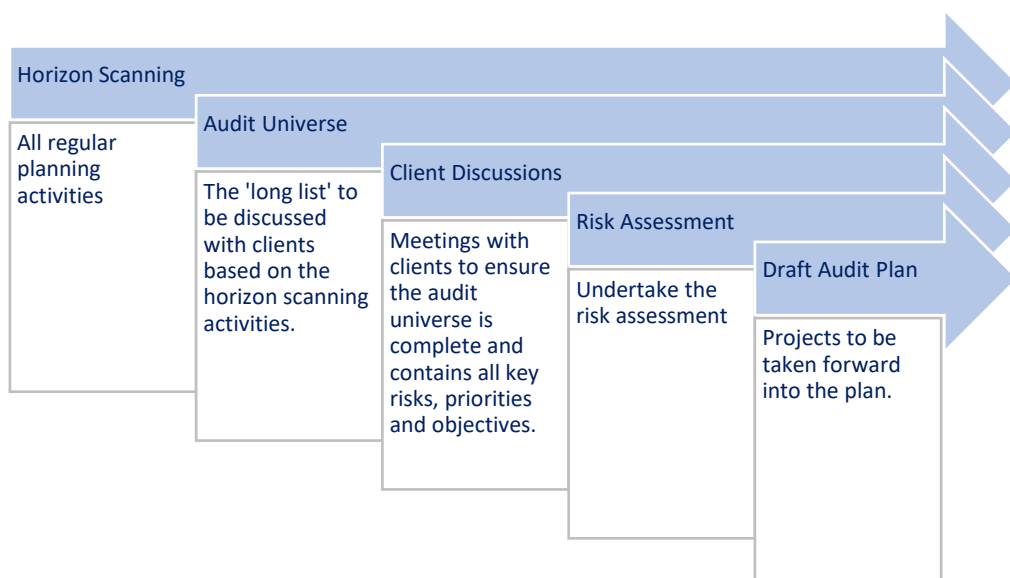
Planning Principles

2.1 SIAS audit planning is underpinned by the following principles:

- a) Focus of assurance effort on the Council's obligations, outcomes and objectives, critical business processes and projects and principal risks. This approach ensures coverage of both strategic and key operational issues.
- b) Maintenance of an up-to-date awareness of the impact of the external and internal environment on the Council's control arrangements.
- c) Use of a risk assessment methodology to determine priorities for audit coverage based, as far as possible, on management's view of risk.
- d) Dialogue and consultation with key stakeholders to ensure an appropriate balance of assurance needs. This approach includes recognition that in a resource-constrained environment, all needs cannot be met.
- e) Identification of responsibilities where services are delivered in partnership.
- f) In-built flexibility to ensure that new risks and issues are accommodated as they emerge.
- g) Capacity to deliver key commitments including governance work.
- h) Capacity to respond to management requests for assistance with special investigations, consultancy, and other forms of advice.

Approach to Planning

2.2 SIAS has developed an approach to annual planning that ensures ongoing compliance with the requirements of the PSIAS, SIAS applies the following methodology at its partners:



Horizon Scanning and Audit Universe

- 2.3 SIAS conducts horizon scanning to ensure that it is aware of the key issues and risks locally and nationally as well as the corporate and service objectives of the Council. To do this, SIAS undertakes the following activities:



- 2.4 Following the horizon scanning work, SIAS creates an Audit Universe based on all auditable areas and entities. The Audit Universe forms the basis of discussions with senior managers.

Client Discussions

- 2.5 SIAS undertook detailed discussions with senior managers and other key officers within the Council to confirm auditable areas and elicit high level detail of the scope of audits. This process incorporates the gathering of information to inform the risk assessment phase of audit planning.

Risk Assessment

- 2.6 The overarching risk that SIAS bases planning against is the risk that audit work completed does not provide sufficient coverage and significance for SIAS to provide a robust annual assurance opinion. Therefore, SIAS risk assesses each auditable area to ensure that their resources are directed appropriately.
- 2.7 The risk assessment behind the development of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan was correlated to the Council's plans and associated monitoring through risk assessments, KPI's and project progress.

- 2.8 SIAS also include considerations of financial materiality, corporate significance, vulnerability and change and management concerns, as part of the risk assessment, including alternative sources of assurance through the Three Lines (of Defence) model.

Draft Audit Plan

- 2.9 The results of the discussions with senior managers provides a draft Internal Audit Plan. SIAS has presented this draft plan to the Leadership Team to seek their views on the assessments completed and to provide any further updates or comments. The outcome is now presented to Members as part of this report for their approval of the Draft Internal Audit Plan 2024/25.

The Planning Context

- 2.10 The context within which local authorities provide their services remains challenging:
- Demand for services is still rising, driven by a range of factors including the growing and ageing population, and challenges in the healthcare system. Combined with the cost of living, local authorities will have to continue to be more innovative and commercially minded.
 - Macro-economic uncertainty continues, driven by factors such as inflation, interest rates, energy costs and a range of geo-political tensions. Resulting cost pressures and government funding make financial planning a key component of local government finance.
 - Cyber and data security remains a consistent threat to organisations and there are a growing number of local authorities that have been subjected to successful cyber-attacks. Continued vigilance and risk management remain key to protecting local authority assets and services.
 - Local authorities are facing significant challenges in relation to talent management, both in terms of recruitment and retaining staff meaning ability to remain resilient and deliver high quality services may continue to be an increasing concern.
 - Many local authorities have declared a Climate & Ecological Emergency and made public commitments relating to carbon reduction and becoming Net Zero.
- 2.11 The resultant efficiency and transformation programme that councils are in the process of implementing and developing continues to profoundly alter each organisation's nature. Such developments are accompanied by potentially significant governance, risk management and internal control change.

2.12 The challenge of giving value in this context, means that Internal Audit needs to:

- Meet its core responsibilities, which are to provide appropriate assurance to Members and senior management on the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control arrangements in delivering the achievement of Council objectives.
- Identify and focus its effort on areas of significance and risk, assisting the organisation in managing change effectively, and ensuring that core controls remain effective.
- Give assurance which covers the control environment in relation to new developments, using leading edge audit approaches such as use of technology to achieve ‘whole population testing’ and new insights over sampling or ‘continuous assurance’ where appropriate.
- Retain flexibility in the audit plan and ensure the plan remains current and relevant as the financial year progresses, this is particularly key given the current challenges and risks and the impact this has had on audit activity.

Internal Audit Plan 2024/25

2.13 The draft plan for 2024/25 is included at Appendix A and contains a high-level proposed outline scope for each audit; Appendix B details the likely start months. The number of days commissioned in 2024/25 is 300 days.

2.14 The table overleaf shows the estimated allocation of the total annual number of commissioned audit days for the year.

	2024/25 Days	%
Key Financial Systems	64	21%
Operational Services	62	20%
IT Audits	12	4%
Corporate Services / Themes	94	32%
Carry forward work 2023/24	8	3%
Contingency and other	5	2%
Strategic Support*	55	18%
Total allocated days	300	100%

* This includes supporting the Audit Committee, monitoring delivery of the internal audit plan, SIAS service development and implementing the new Global Internal Audit Standards

2.15 Any significant audit plan changes agreed between Management and SIAS will be brought before this committee for noting through the usual plan

update reporting cycle. The cancellation of any audits will require approval from the Strategic Director (CFO).

- 2.16 Members will note the inclusion of a provision for the completion of projects that relate to 2023/24. The structure of Internal Audit's programme of work is such that full completion of every aspect of the work in an annual plan is not always possible; especially given the high dependence on client officers during a period where there are competing demands on their time, e.g. year-end closure procedures.
- 2.17 Members should also note provision for implementing the updated Global Internal Audit Standards during 2024/25. Currently in draft form, the new Standards are expected to address key aspects of internal auditing such as:
- Purpose of Internal Auditing e.g. what internal audit is and how it should operate.
 - Ethics and Professionalism e.g. conduct and professional performance.
 - Governing the Internal Audit Function e.g. direction and responsibilities for audit committees and senior leaders.
 - Managing the Internal Audit Function e.g. principles for planning, resourcing, and performance.
 - Performing Internal Audit Services e.g. conducting day to day internal audit work.

Changes which have an impact on the role of Audit Committee Members will be highlighted once the Standards have been finalised.

- 2.18 The nature of assurance work is such that enough activity must have been completed in the financial year for the Chief Audit Executive to give an overall opinion on the Authority's internal control environment. In general, the tasks associated with the total completion of the plan, which includes the finalisation of all reports and negotiation of the appropriate level of agreed mitigations, is not something that adversely affects delivery of the overall opinion. The impact of any outstanding work is monitored closely during the final quarter by SIAS in conjunction with the Strategic Director (CFO).

Resources

- 2.19 The Standard 2030 requires SIAS to consider our resources, how these will be effectively used and any limitations of the adequacy of resources.
- 2.20 Achievement of our role and objectives is predicated on the matching of audit needs to available resources through our work allocation processes. This is accomplished through the delivery of internal audit activities by a range of suitably qualified and experienced team members working flexibly in

a matrix structure to maximise the value to all our partners and clients. SIAS resources are calculated based on the chargeability of each member of the team and the structure was designed to ensure sufficient chargeability to deliver all plans.

- 2.21 SIAS will utilise our internal audit delivery partner to provide service resilience and access to specialist skills not currently available within the service, or which are not economically viable to recruit and retain on a permanent basis.
- 2.22 SIAS staff are provided training and development across the year to support service delivery at our partners. In addition, SIAS provides funding for professional qualifications and currently has team members studying towards their professional qualifications.
- 2.23 The service will be adequately resourced to deliver the number of planned internal audit days commissioned by Stevenage Borough Council. There are currently no limitations on the adequacy of resources in place to deliver the Stevenage Borough Council Internal Audit Plan 2024/25.

3. Performance Management

Update Reporting

- 3.1 SIAS is required to report its work to a Member Body so that the Council has an opportunity to review and monitor an essential component of corporate governance and gain assurance that its internal audit provision is fulfilling its statutory obligations. Progress against the agreed plan for 2024/25 and any proposed changes will be reported to this Committee three times in the 2024/25 civic year.
- 3.2 SIAS will report on the implementation of agreed critical and high priority recommendations as part of the update reporting process.

Performance Indicators

- 3.3 Annual performance indicators were approved at the SIAS Board and are reviewed annually by the Board. Details of the targets set for 2024/25 are shown in the table below. Actual performance against target will be included in the update reports to this Committee.

Performance Indicator	Performance Target	Reporting
1. Planned Days – percentage of actual billable days against planned chargeable days completed (excludes unused contingency)	95%	Update Report

2. Planned Projects – percentage of actual completed projects to draft report stage against planned completed projects by 31st March 2025	90%	Update Report
3. Planned Projects – percentage of actual completed projects to final report stage against planned completed projects by the production of the Annual Report	100%	Update Report
4. Client Satisfaction - percentage of client satisfaction questionnaires returned at 'satisfactory' level	100%	Update Report
5. Number of High and Critical Priority Audit Recommendations agreed as a percentage	95%	Update Report
6. Annual Plan – prepared in time to present to the last Audit Committee meeting of the financial year. If there is no meeting, then the Plan should be prepared for the first meeting of the financial year	Yes	Annual
7. Chief Audit Executive's Annual Assurance Opinion and Report – presented at the first Audit Committee meeting of the financial year	Yes	Annual

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

Audit	Proposed Outline Scope	Proposed Days
COVERAGE OF KEY FINANCIAL SYSTEMS		
Business Rates (shared with EHC).	An audit covering risks linked to raising liability, billing (including reliefs and discounts), collection, and recovery.	64
Council Tax (shared with EHC).	An audit covering risks linked to raising liability, billing (including reliefs and discounts), collection, and recovery.	
Housing Benefits (shared with EHC).	An audit covering risks linked to claim submission, assessment, changes in circumstances and payment.	
Creditors.	An audit covering risks linked to systems access, order & invoice processing, supplier set up & amendment, payment runs & reconciliations.	
Debtors.	An audit covering risks linked to raising invoices & amendments, payments received, debt recovery and reconciliations.	
Treasury Management.	An audit covering risks linked to cashflow management, investments, borrowing and reconciliations.	
Payroll (risk and control mapping refresh).	A short review of the existing map for any changes and exceptions.	
Housing Rents.	An audit covering risks linked to raising rental charges, collection, recovery, refunds and write offs.	
Cash & Banking (risk and control mapping refresh).	A short review of the existing map for any changes and exceptions.	
COVERAGE OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES		
Trade Waste Collection.	An audit covering risks linked to agreements, collection arrangements, invoicing and payments.	10
Property Compliance Checks.	An audit covering risks linked to statutory compliance at Council properties.	12

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

Audit	Proposed Outline Scope	Proposed Days
Estates (asset utilisation).	An audit covering risks linked to management plans, records, acquisitions & disposals, leases and condition surveys.	10
Housing Register & Allocations.	An audit covering risks linked to the housing registration, property offer and the allocation process.	10
Vehicle Workshop.	An audit covering risks linked to fleet maintenance, associated record keeping, licences and purchasing.	10
Follow up of Limited Assurance Reports from 2023/24.	Provision for following up Limited Assurance audits from 2023/24 (two at the time of writing) to help ensure matters arising have been addressed.	10
COVERAGE OF CORPORATE SERVICES/THEMES		
Review of Audit Committee.	A review of the Council's Audit Committee effectiveness and benchmarking against recognised good practice.	10
Confidential Reporting Procedures.	An audit covering risks linked to policies & procedures, case management and outcomes.	10
Contract Management.	An audit covering risks linked to policies & procedures, contract registration, performance monitoring and remedy.	12
Climate Data & Reporting.	An audit covering risks linked to the underlying data used for reporting against climate related commitments.	10
Embedded Project Assurance.	A provision for real time contributions to nominated key projects during 2024/25.	12
Risk Management (risk & control mapping refresh).	A short review of the existing assurance map for any changes and exceptions.	2
Freedom of Information.	An audit covering risks linked to policies & procedures, monitoring & reporting, and training & awareness.	10
Commercialisation.	An audit covering risks linked to objective setting & action planning, risk appetite, monitoring & reporting, and strategy alignment.	12
Corporate Governance (risk & control mapping).	Mapping the various sources of assurance, the associated control framework and identifying any gaps.	10

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

Audit	Proposed Outline Scope	Proposed Days
On Demand Grant Audits.	Provision for auditing external funding arrangements where the funding body attaches associated conditions e.g. Homes England.	6
COVERAGE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY		
Data Breach Incidents & Response (shared with EHC).	An audit covering risks linked to data processing notices, breach prevention and incident management.	6
IT Hardware Acquisition, Movement & Disposal (shared with EHC).	An audit covering risks linked to controlling movement of IT assets.	6
CONTINGENCY		
Contingency.	To provide for adequate response to risks emerging during the financial year.	5
STRATEGIC SUPPORT		
Head of Internal Audit Opinion 2023/24.	To prepare and agree the Head of Internal Audit Opinion and Annual Report for 2023/24.	3
Audit Committee and Recommendation Follow Up.	To provide services linked to the preparation and agreement of Audit Committee reports, meeting with the Audit Committee Chair prior to each Audit Committee (as required) and presentation of reports / participation at Audit Committee. Follow up of any Critical and High priority recommendations.	10
Client Liaison, Adhoc Advice and Consultancy.	This involves meetings and updates with the Council's Audit Champion and other key officers. Also a provision for adhoc internal audit advice and consultancy.	10
Plan and Progress Monitoring.	To produce and monitor performance and billing information, work allocation and scheduling.	12

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

Audit	Proposed Outline Scope	Proposed Days
SIAS Development and Global Internal Audit Standards implementation.	Included to reflect the Council's contribution to developing and maintaining the shared service / partnership through its service planning activity and assurance mapping objectives (10 days). A provision for implementing the new Global Internal Audit Standards (5 days).	15
2025/26 Audit Planning.	To provide services in relation to preparation and agreement of the 2025/26 Audit Plan.	5
2023/24 Projects Requiring Completion.	Additional time, if required, for the completion of 2023/24 audit work carried forward into the 2024/25 year. Any unused days will be returned to contingency for use on emerging risks and audits or allocated to audits in the reserve list.	8
TOTAL		300
<p>Reserve/substitute list (if required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff Welfare & Wellbeing (drivers e.g. health, support, security, environment, purpose) - Counter Fraud Strategy (objectives, work plan, training & awareness) - Social Media (presence, reputation management, regulatory compliance) - Business Continuity Planning (impact analysis and recovery response) - Building Security (entry control, fire prevention & detection, incident response, lone working) - Contracts Register (unidentified spend data analytics) 		

APPENDIX B – STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL PROPOSED AUDIT START DATES

Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept
2023/24 Projects requiring Completion	Housing Register & Allocations	Trade Waste Collection	Estates (asset utilisation)	Confidential Reporting Procedures	Commercialisation
	Vehicle Workshop	Data Breach Incidents & Response	Follow Up (1)	Climate Data & Reporting	Contract Management
	Review of Audit Committee	Freedom of Information		Property Compliance Checks (1)	

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
IT Hardware	Council Tax	Business Rates	Creditors	Treasury Management	IT Hardware
Cash & Banking	Debtors	Housing Benefits	Payroll	Corporate Governance	Cash & Banking
	Housing Rents	Risk Management	Follow Up (2)	Property Compliance Checks (2)	

At this stage, the above is an indicative spread of audits as not all services have specified a preferred start date.