



INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN REPORT 2025/26

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE
25 MARCH 2025

RECOMMENDATION

Members are recommended to approve the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26

Members are requested to note the SIAS Internal Audit Strategy and provide any comments prior to approval by the SIAS Board

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2025/26

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The purpose of internal audit is to strengthen the Council’s ability to create, protect, and sustain value by providing Members and management with independent, risk-based, and objective assurance, advice, insight, and foresight.
- 1.2 The International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) organises the authoritative body of knowledge for the professional practice of internal auditing. The IPPF includes Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS), Topical Requirements (designed to enhance the consistency and quality of internal audit services related to specific audit subjects) and Global Guidance. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which encompassed the mandatory elements of the IPPF, have been replaced by the Application Note Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector. Taken together, the GIAS and the Application Note will form the basis of UK public sector internal audit effective from 1 April 2025. The Note states 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.
- 1.3 The SIAS Board reviewed the SIAS Internal Audit Strategy in 2024, and this strategy outlines how SIAS will achieve the purpose of internal audit and ensure ongoing compliance with the GIAS (UK public sector). The following report follows the key principles related to Audit Planning and Resourcing, with the Internal Audit Strategy itself attached as an appendix. The GIAS (UK public sector) includes setting out how SIAS must approach internal audit planning. The specific requirements that SIAS must adhere to are set out below:

Standard	Description
Domain III 6.3	Board and Senior Management Support It is an essential condition for Senior Management and the Audit Committee to approve the internal audit plan.
Domain III 8.1	Board Interaction The Chief Audit Executive (CAE) must provide the Audit Committee with the information needed to conduct its oversight responsibilities. This includes the internal audit plan and subsequent significant revisions.
Domain III 8.2	Resources The CAE, Audit Committee and Senior Management must collaborate to ensure that internal audit has sufficient resources to fulfil the internal audit mandate and achieve the internal audit plan. This should be at least annually, and cover numbers and capability, as well as the impact and remedy of insufficient resources on the internal audit mandate and plan (if applicable).
Domain III 8.3	Quality Amongst the essential conditions in this standard is a requirement for the Audit Committee to review and approve

	<p>the internal audit functions performance objectives at least annually. This includes its conformance with the Standards, laws and regulations, ability to meet the internal audit mandate, and progress towards completion of the internal audit plan.</p>
<p>Domain IV 9.3</p>	<p>Methodologies</p> <p>The CAE must establish methodologies to guide the internal audit function in a systemic and disciplined manner to implement the internal audit strategy, develop the internal audit plan, and conform with the Standards.</p>
<p>Domain IV 9.4</p>	<p>Internal Audit Plan</p> <p>The CAE must create an internal audit plan that supports the achievement of the council’s objectives.</p> <p>The CAE must base the internal audit plan on a documented assessment of the organisation’s strategies, objectives, and risks. The assessment must be informed by input from the Audit Committee and Senior Management as well as the chief audit executive’s understanding of the organisation’s governance, risk management, and control processes. The assessment must be performed at least annually.</p> <p>The internal audit plan must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the internal audit mandate and the full range of agreed to internal audit services. • Specify internal audit services that support the evaluation and improvement of the council’s governance, risk management, and control processes. • Consider coverage of information technology governance, fraud risk, the effectiveness of the council’s compliance and ethics programs and other high-risk areas. • Identify the necessary human, financial, and technological resources necessary to complete the plan. • Be dynamic and updated timely in response to changes in the council’s business, risk operations, programs systems, controls, and organisational culture. <p>The CAE must review and revise the internal audit plan as necessary and communicate timely to the Audit Committee and Senior Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of any resource limitations on internal audit coverage. • The rationale for not including an assurance engagement in a high-risk area or activity in the plan. • Conflicting demands for services between major stakeholders, such as high priority requests based upon emerging risks and requests to replace planned assurance engagements with advisory engagements.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations on scope or restrictions on access to information. <p>The CAE must discuss the internal audit plan, including significant interim changes, with the Audit Committee and Senior Management. The plan and significant changes to the plan must be approved by the Audit Committee.</p>
Domain IV 10.1 to 10.3	<p>Financial, Human and Technological Resources Management</p> <p>The CAE must ensure that financial, human, and technological resources are appropriate, sufficient, and effectively deployed to achieve the approved internal audit plan.</p> <p>The CAE must communicate with the Audit Committee and Senior Management regarding the appropriateness and sufficiency of the internal audit function’s resources. If the function lacks appropriate and sufficient resources to achieve the internal audit plan, the CAE must determine how to obtain the resources or communicate timely to the Audit Committee and Senior Management the impact of the limitations.</p>
Domain V 13.2	<p>Engagement Risk Assessment</p> <p>To develop an adequate understanding, internal auditors must identify and gather reliable, relevant, and sufficient information regarding the risk assessment supporting the internal audit plan.</p>

- 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 overall audit opinion or conclusion on the 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 2024 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 conforms with the requirements of the GIAS (UK public sector). An updated version of the SIAS Internal Audit Charter will be brought to the June 2025 Audit Committee meeting for Member approval.
- 1.6 Section 2 of this report details how SIAS complies with these requirements.

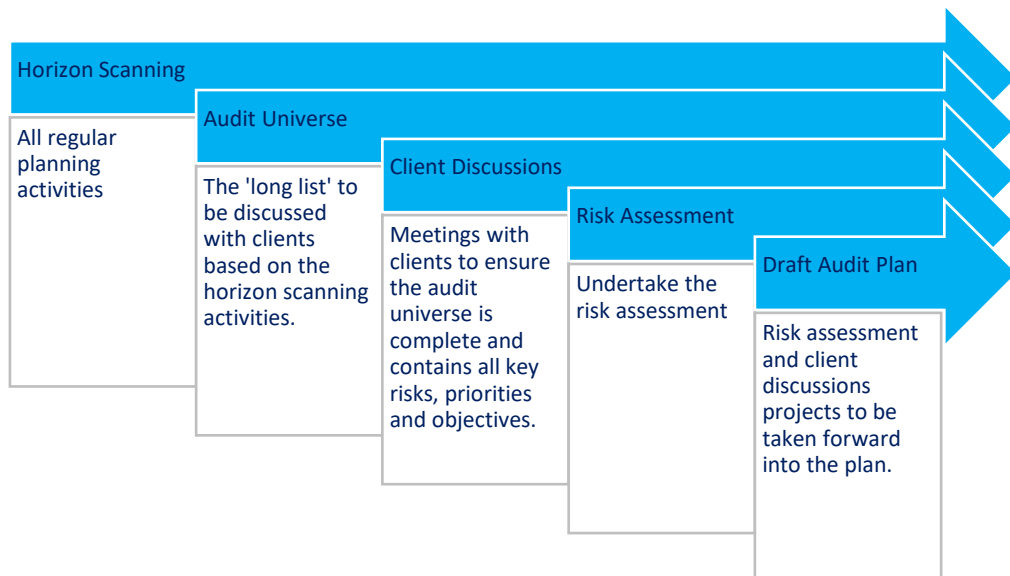
2. Audit Planning Process

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 conformance with the requirements of the GIAS (UK public sector). 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 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 following steps to assist in the prioritisation of proposed internal audit projects:

Risk Assessment

Senior Managers and SIAS agree the level of risk associated with an identified auditable area and prioritise this accordingly.

Assurance Mapping / Other sources of Assurance

The results of assurance mapping are consulted and discussed with Senior Managers to determine whether assurance in the auditable area is obtained

from other assurance providers e.g., external audit or the Health and Safety Executive. This approach ensures that provision of assurance is not duplicated.

Significance

Senior Managers assess how significant the auditable area is in terms of the achievement of corporate or service objectives and priorities.

Timings

Senior Managers identify when an audit should be undertaken to add most value.

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 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan was strongly correlated to the Council's Delivery Plan and associated Council 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 assurance mapping and the Three Lines (of Defence) model.

Draft Audit Plan

- 2.9 The results of the risk assessment and discussions with Senior Managers provides a draft Internal Audit Plan. SIAS has presented this draft plan to the Senior 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 2025/26.

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

significant cost pressures and limited government funding make financial planning a key component of managing local government finance challenges.

- 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 human resources and talent management, both in terms of vacancy management, 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 2025/26

- 2.13 The draft plan for 2025/26 is included at Appendix A and contains a high-level proposed outline scope for each audit. The number of days commissioned in 2025/26 is confirmed as 300 days.
- 2.14 The table shows the estimated allocation of the total annual number of purchased audit days for the year.

Coverage	2025/26 Days	%
Key Financial Systems	74	25
Corporate Themes	54	18
Operational Areas	94	31
IT Audits	6	2
Grants Certification	6	2
Strategic Support*	51	17
Contingency	5	2
Completion of 2024/25 Projects	10	3
Total allocated days	300	100%

* This covers supporting the Audit Committee, monitoring delivery of the audit plan, client liaison and planning for 2026/27

- 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 postponement or cancellation of any audits will require approval from the Strategic Director & S151 Officer. It should be noted that the Internal Audit Plan is intended to be dynamic and responsive to changing risks and matters arising during the year.
- 2.16 Members will note the inclusion of a provision for the completion of projects that relate to 2024/25. 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 local government faces significant resourcing risks.
- 2.17 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, governance, and risk management framework. 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 & S151 Officer.

Resources

- 2.18 Standard 8.2 and 10.1 to 10.3 requires SIAS to ensure that financial, human, and technological resources are appropriate, sufficient, and effectively deployed to achieve the approved internal audit plan, as well as any limitations of the adequacy of resources.
- 2.19 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.
- 2.20 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.
- 2.21 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 five team members studying towards their professional qualifications.
- 2.22 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 2025/26.
- 2.23 The SIAS Internal Audit Strategy is set out at Appendix D.

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 2025/26 and any proposed changes will be reported to this Committee four times in the 2025/26 civic year.
- 3.2 SIAS will report on the implementation of agreed critical, high, and medium 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 2025/26 are shown in the table below. Actual performance against target will be included in the regular update reports to this Committee.

Performance Indicator	Performance Target	Reporting Frequency
1. Public Sector Internal Audit Standards – the service conforms with the standards	Yes	Annually
2. Internal Audit Annual Plan Report – approved by the March Audit Committee or the first meeting of the financial year should a March committee not meet	Yes	Annually
3. Annual Internal Audit Plan Delivery – the percentage of the Annual Internal Audit Plan delivered (measured in audit days)	95%	Quarterly
4. Project Delivery – Percentage of audit plan projects delivered to draft report stage by 31 March 2026	90%	Quarterly
Percentage of audit plan projects delivered to final report stage as reported within the CAE Annual Assurance and Opinion report.	100%	Quarterly
5. Client Satisfaction* – percentage of client satisfaction questionnaires returned at ‘satisfactory overall’ level (minimum of 39/65 overall)	90%	Quarterly
6. Chief Audit Executive’s Annual Assurance Opinion and Report – presented at the first Audit Committee meeting of the financial year	Yes	Annually

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

Coverage of Key Financial Systems (74 days)

<u>Audit Title</u>	<u>Purpose of the Audit</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Delivery Quarter</u>	<u>Audit Sponsor</u>
Business Rates	An in-depth audit covering one or more aspects of business rates administration e.g. determining liability, the application of discounts / exemptions, billing arrangements, the collection of payments, recovering outstanding debt and approving refunds. A joint audit reflecting the shared service with East Herts Council.	6	3	Strategic Director & S151 Officer
Council Tax	An in-depth audit covering one or more aspects of council tax administration e.g. determining liability, the application of discounts / exemptions, billing arrangements, the collection of payments, recovering outstanding debt and approving refunds. A joint audit reflecting the shared service with East Herts Council.	6	3	Strategic Director & S151 Officer
Housing Benefits	An in-depth audit covering one or more aspects of Housing Benefits administration e.g. claims verification and processing, payment arrangements, fraud prevention and detection. A joint audit reflecting the shared service with East Herts Council.	6	3	Strategic Director & S151 Officer
Accounts Receivable	An audit covering the invoicing of customers for works, goods, or services. The collection and recovery of outstanding sums. Denial of service when payment is not forthcoming.	8	4	Assistant Director - Finance
Accounts Payable	An audit covering the payment of invoices received. Use of purchase orders, supplier	8	4	Assistant Director – Finance

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

	onboarding, receipt and verification of invoices, payment arrangements and credit notes.			
Treasury Management	An audit covering governance and reporting, cash flow and risk management, record keeping and completion of reconciliations.	6	3	Assistant Director – Finance
Insurance	An audit covering insurance provision, claim management, self-insurance, and renewal arrangements.	6	1	Assistant Director – Finance
Payroll	An in-depth audit covering one or more aspects of Payroll administration, e.g. verification of starters and leavers, verifying that additions / amendments / deductions from pay are appropriate, payments to employees are correct.	10	4	Head of Human Resources
Cash & Banking	An in-depth audit covering one or more aspects of income received e.g. payment card security, cash handling arrangements and interfaces with the financial management information system.	8	3	Assistant Director – Finance
Housing Rents	An in-depth audit covering one or more aspects of housing rents administration e.g. determining liability, the application of housing benefits, the collection of rent payments, recovering outstanding debt and approving refunds.	10	4	Assistant Director – Housing & Neighbourhoods

Coverage of Corporate Themes (60 days)

<u>Audit Title</u>	<u>Purpose of the Audit</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Delivery Quarter</u>	<u>Audit Sponsor</u>
Review of Audit Committee	Annual independent assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's Audit Committee,	6	1	Assistant Director - Finance

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

	reviewing the operation and management of its meetings and benchmarking its performance against recognised good practice.			
Transformation / Change Management	A provision for supporting the council's change management activity, checking that governance arrangements are appropriate and budgeted financial benefits have been realised.	6	3	Assistant Director – Digital & Transformation
Risk Management	An audit covering associated policy and procedures, risk registration, ownership, risk ranking and mitigation measures.	6	3	Strategic Director
Corporate Governance	An audit covering compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance, and associated policies and procedures.	6	4	Strategic Director
On Demand Grant Certification	Provision for auditing grant claims in accordance with the providers terms and conditions. Such requests are typically made on an adhoc basis.	6	1-4	Various
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	An advisory project to conduct an EDI maturity assessment that encompasses one or more themes e.g. Tone from the top, Governance, Compliance and Strategy, Policies, procedures, training / awareness, and development. To include reliance upon alternative assurance	6	2	Head of Human Resources
Social Media / Communications	An in-depth audit covering policies & procedures in place, identification of business need, vetting of communication channels, roles & responsibilities, procedural compliance, and monitoring.	8	2	Assistant Director – Digital & Transformation
Procurement Act	An in-depth audit covering associated policy, embedding changes resulting from the Act, and compliance.	8	1	Assistant Director - Finance

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

Ombudsman Referrals	An audit covering referrals received from the Ombudsman, that these are responded to within required timescales and where complaints or Ombudsman judgements are upheld, the Council undertakes appropriate actions to improve systems	8	2	Strategic Director
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Coverage of Operational Areas (94 days)

<u>Audit Title</u>	<u>Purpose of the Audit</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Quarter</u>	<u>Audit Sponsor</u>
Housing Repairs	An in-depth audit covering the procurement of repairs to the Council's housing stock, including ordering, variations, invoice approval and verifying completion of works.	12	2	Assistant Director Building Safety & Housing Property Services
Building Safety Compliance Checks x2	Reviews of building safety compliance e.g. fire, water.	12	2&4	Assistant Director Building Safety & Housing Property Services
Recycling	An audit of processes and procedures for handling and transferring recyclable materials, including reliance upon alternative assurance such as the Environment Agency.	10	2	Assistant Director - SDS
Parks & Open Spaces	An in-depth audit covering one or more elements of managing the districts parks and open spaces e.g. grounds maintenance contract, health & safety, and environment management.	10	1-2	Various
Follow Up Audit Provision (x2)	Provision for up to follow up 2 Limited Assurance audits from prior years.	10	1-4	Various
Housing Register & Allocations	An in-depth audit of the system for registering housing need and allocating available housing stock.	10	2	Assistant Director – Housing & Neighbourhoods

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

Building Security	An in-depth review of security arrangements at Council buildings and key infrastructure.	10	1	Various
Damp & Mould	An in-depth review of the system for addressing damp and mould within the housing stock, demonstrating compliance with regulations, signposting customers to appropriate guidance.	10	2	Assistant Director Building Safety & Housing Property Services
Garages	An audit covering one or more aspects of garage lettings e.g. collection of rental payments.	10	1	Assistant Director – Housing & Neighbourhoods

Coverage of Information Technology (6 days)

<u>Audit Title</u>	<u>Purpose of the Audit</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Quarter</u>	<u>Audit Sponsor</u>
Cyber Security - Reliance on Alternative Assurance	A review of assurance provided by third parties, relating to cyber security risks.	6	2	Assistant Director, Chief Technology Officer, and Senior Information Risk Owner

Contingency (5 days)

Available time for ad hoc work as required.

Strategic Support (51 days)

<u>Title</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Days</u>
Chief Audit Executive Annual Opinion Report	To prepare the Chief Audit Executive Opinion 2024/25.	3

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

Audit Committee	To provide services linked with the preparation, agreement, and presentation of Audit Governance Committee reports, as well as any training requirements.	12
Performance Monitoring	Audit Plan monitoring against agreed KPIs.	12
Client Liaison	Meetings with the S151 Officer, preparation and attendance at the Risk Management and Corporate Governance Groups, and other groups or meetings as required.	8
Audit Planning 2026/27	Provision of services to prepare, agree and report the 2026/27 Annual Audit Plan.	6
SIAS Development	Included to reflect the Council's contribution to developing the shared service.	10

2024/25 Carry Forward (10 days)

Available time for completion of 2024/25 audits which did not commence or complete as scheduled.

Reserve List

<u>Title</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
Civil Contingencies	An audit covering one or more aspects of the council's responsibilities as a category 1 responder e.g. emergency planning/scenario assessment and local alignment with the National Risk Register.
Bribery Act 2010	An audit covering the main provisions of the Bribery Act and the actions that must be taken to mitigate related risks, including the six principles.
Grant Funding Administration	An audit to provide assurance that the management control framework over grant administration is effective and being executed appropriately.
Contract Management	An audit of the Active Communities Leisure Management Contract monitoring arrangements.
Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation	The English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024 set out Government's intention for all areas of the country to be covered by an elected Mayor and all two-tier areas like Hertfordshire, to be reorganised into single tier unitary authorities. The Local Government Minister wrote to all County and District councils in February 2025, including those from Hertfordshire, formally inviting the submission of

APPENDIX A – PROPOSED STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

	<p>initial proposals for local government reorganisation by 21 March, followed by full proposals by 28 November 2025.</p> <p>The Leaders and senior officers of all councils in Hertfordshire are seeking to build a shared evidence base to inform decision making, proposals and structures. The ultimate decision on any proposals will be for the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government.</p> <p>While time may not be required in the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan for assurance activities related to devolution and local government reorganisation, this entry on the reserve list provides the opportunity to elevate the topic into the plan should it be needed and permits consideration as part of future audit plans.</p>
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APPENDIX B – RISK REGISTER / COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN MAPPING TO INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Council Corporate Plan and Corporate Risks - Risk Register	Internal Audit Coverage 2021/22 – 2024/25	Internal Audit Coverage 2025/26	Assurance Mapping and Other Assurance
Insufficient capital funding available to invest in the Council's non-housing property portfolio	Capital Programme Delivery Asset Management Commercial Property		Corporate Landlord Review Asset management system to be used for Reporting
The Council does not have sufficient resources to fund its medium and long term service plans	Revenues Accounts Payable/Receivable Payroll Treasury Management Asset Management Grants Housing Rents	Revenues Accounts Payable/Receivable Payroll Treasury Management Asset Management Grants Housing Rents	Savings realisation checks Member oversight
Failure to proactively maintain the Council's non-housing property portfolio	Planned & Response Maintenance of the Council's Estate	Garages	Auditing of contractors Corporate Landlord function Corporate Compliance Group
Failure to meet the new requirements of the Building Safety Act/Fire Safety Act	Landlord Health & Safety Compliance Compliance Checks Facilities Management	Compliance Checks	Performance scorecard Corporate Compliance Group
The Council fails to retain, attract, and recruit the right people and right skills at all levels	Corporate Capacity Sickness Absence Management Ways of Working	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	Performance targets Transition plans
Stevenage is unable to meet the government's net zero target for the town of Stevenage by 2050	Climate Data & Reporting Decarbonisation Grant Audit	Recycling Parks & Open Spaces	Update report to SLT, Cabinet, and E&E Select Committee Climate Action Plan Tracker EELGA-RCCF Sustainable Procurement Group
The Council fails to achieve its commercial ambitions within desired timescales or at the scale hoped for	Commercialisation Commercial Property		Review of contract management arrangements
A failure to ensure resilience, quality and best value are being provided by suppliers and contractors	Contract Management Tendering Supply Chain Interruption	Procurement Act	Review of CSOs and Procurement Strategy to Cabinet
The delivery of homes through the Wholly Owned Company, creates a financial risk surrounding estimated	Housing Development Wholly Owned Company House Building & Acquisitions		Housing Development Working Group Performance Indicators

APPENDIX B – RISK REGISTER / COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN MAPPING TO INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

build costs and projected sales income materialising as forecast, as well as risks in relation to the servicing of debt			
Not having transferred all Council telephone lines over to digital by the time analogue lines are switched off	Digital Exclusion		Testing switching arrangements
COVID-19/flu or other illnesses this winter are significant and protracted	Pandemic Response Sickness Absence Management		Update of Pandemic Flu Plan
A risk of theft & fraud	Council Tax Discounts & Exemptions Malicious Software Confidential Reporting Procedures	Building Security	Anti-Fraud training and guidance
Failure to maintain adequate and effective health & safety management arrangements	Health & Safety Facilities Management		Corporate high risks monitor External audits for frontline services
Changes to legislation and new local authority responsibilities could negatively affect the medium to long term viability of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan	Housing Regulator Reporting Housing Rents	Housing Rents Housing Register & Allocations	Review of HRA Business Plan Review of MTFS
Failure of ICT services because of a cyber-attack	Cyber Security Framework Malicious Software	Cyber Security - Reliance on Alternative Assurance	Cyber Treatment Plan Cyber security policies Cyber Assessment Framework
The loss, inappropriate acquisition, or disclosure of sensitive personal or commercial data and/or breach of data subject rights	Data Breaches Information Governance	Social Media	Technical Design Authority and Corporate Governance Group
Insufficient capital funding for Stevenage regeneration	Capital Programme Delivery Asset Management		Regeneration Monitor Capital Funding Plan
Construction projects associated with the regeneration programme taking longer to complete than anticipated	Contract Management Housing Development		Performance & Monitoring Report Development Board
The repairs service will not be able to carry out repairs in a timely manner. There is also a risk of legal action by residents	Landlord Health & Safety Compliance Compliance Checks	Damp & Mould Housing Response Maintenance	Cabinet Strategic H & S Group
There are adequate plans, resources, trained responders, and arrangements in place to respond effectively to the range of risks identified on the National Risk Register	Risk Management Facilities Management	Risk Management	Updated Emergency Plan Range of actions due by June.

APPENDIX B – RISK REGISTER / COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN MAPPING TO INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Failure to meet the new requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Bill	Housing Regulator Reporting		Cabinet Forward Plan item Improvement Programme
Increased demand on Council services, reduced income for the Council and increased arrears	Accounts Receivable Housing Rent Arrears	Housing Rents Council Tax	Oversight of Arrears Action Plan Social Inclusion Partnership Welfare Steering Group
The Transformation Programme may not meet its aims and ambitions		Transformation/Change Management	Transformation Board

The Corporate Risk Register and Council Corporate Plan are closely connected. The version used above was the most recent in place (January 2025) at the time of internal audit planning and is subject to regular review and update that means both the projects, risks and risk scores will have changed over time.

We note not all risks have internal audit coverage against them. The Council has a large volume of identified risks, and our audit plan is constrained. We will monitor these risks and flexibly adapt our audit plan as appropriate and if required to cover these risks. We also note management's own actions seek to mitigate these risks.

APPENDIX C – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Assurance mapping

An assurance map is a structured way of identifying and presenting the sources of assurance over how risks are being managed. It is an essential element of mature risk management practices. An assurance map identifies the many sources of assurance that the Leadership team and FAR Committee rely on in their oversight role and can also include information on the frequency and quality of the assurance provided.

The key benefit for the organisation is the effective and efficient use of resources to provide assurance. An assurance map is also a practical tool for chief audit executives (CAEs) to use on two levels; demonstrating the depth/gaps in assurance and to plan audit activity.

The new Global Internal Audit Standards (Standard 9.5 Co-ordination and Reliance) requires the CAE to co-ordinate with internal and external assurance providers and consider relying on their work. Co-ordination minimises duplication of work, highlights gaps in coverage of key risks and enhances the overall value of all assurance providers. The way to achieve this requirement is with an assurance map.

Control Risk (Self) Assessment (CRSA / CRA)

Control risk (self)-assessment is a process or method by which management and staff work with internal audit to identify and evaluate operational risks and the effectiveness of controls. The objective is to provide reasonable assurance that all business objectives will be met. CRA is an empowering and iterative process that integrates risk management practices and culture into the way staff undertake their jobs.

Data analytics / Data analysis

Data analytics is a multidisciplinary field that employs a wide range of analysis techniques, including maths, statistics, and computer science, to draw insights from data sets. Data analytics is a broad term that includes everything from simply analysing data to theorising ways of collecting data and creating the frameworks needed to store it. Data analysis is a subcategory of data analytics that deals specifically with extracting meaning from data.

The top benefits of using data analytics and data-led audits include greater levels of assurance, greater audit coverage and enhanced efficiency. The top barriers to fully embracing data analytics include lack of skills, lack of resources and lack of time to implement.

APPENDIX C – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Health Check

It is a focused review that addresses specific areas of interest or concern and provides actionable insights and recommendations. The health check helps to identify and address critical gaps in processes and controls. They can also be 'light touch' reviews to establish and confirm the operation of controls and processes, providing a 'high-level' assurance without the depth of a full, evidence-based internal audit.

Maturity assessment

Used to develop a 'snapshot' view of how an organisation is progressing against a measurable scale in the embedding of a change or transformation.

Project (Embedded) Assurance

A typical approach to project management reviews is for the internal audit to join a project board/steering group or team with the inclusion of time in the audit plan for meetings. This often involves a considerable time commitment. There are advantages and disadvantages with this approach:

Advantages

1. It enables internal audit to be at the heart of what is happening and have the opportunity to communicate issues as soon as they are identified. In a fast-moving project this may be the only opportunity.
2. If done well it raises the standing of internal audit within the business as a trusted advisor.
3. You can help ensure appropriate controls are installed and risks are being adequately mitigated, based on a timely appreciation of changing variables as highlighted by the management of the project.

Disadvantages

1. Internal audit involvement can compromise independence. This could apply when internal audit assesses programme/project management or audit the process or activity that was the basis of the project.
2. Internal audit attendance can also be interpreted as 'audit approval' or audit sign-off'. The implication being that everything is satisfactory and on course.
3. Project board/steering group meetings often include detailed discussion about the adequacy of risk responses and the nature of specific controls to justify the presence of internal audit, but this can slow down, even delay progress. Internal audit may not need to be part of project board meetings to provide advice through their consultancy role.

APPENDIX C – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Internal audit involvement should have a specific assurance or advisory purpose that is discussed, documented, and agreed with senior management (as part of the terms of reference). Internal audit should not be part of the management sign-off process or be part of the decision making.

An alternative approach would be for the internal auditor to schedule attendance at one or two selected meetings during the audit of a project to consider specific issues such as the management of risk, validation of progress and to observe that appropriate information is being received, scrutinised, and challenged.

SIAS - Internal Audit Strategy 2025/26

Introduction

1. The Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) is a shared service created by eight Hertfordshire Councils with the purpose of providing internal audit services to each of the partner Councils, as well as a small number of external customers.
2. This document sets out our Internal Audit Strategy (IAS) for the next 12 months. The strategy includes how the service will support and promote good governance, this underpinned by our Internal Audit Charter (IAC) which describes the purpose, authority, responsibility, and position of the Internal Audit Service within our partner organisations.
3. Internal Audit is a statutory service in the context of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, which state:

‘A relevant authority must 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’.

4. SIAS operate in accordance with the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), which includes the Global Internal Audit Standards (UK public sector) (GIAS (UK public sector)), Topical Guidance and Global Guidance. The GIAS (UK public sector) is comprised of five domains, covering:
 - The purpose of internal auditing,
 - Ethics and professionalism,
 - Governing the internal audit function,
 - Managing the internal audit function, and
 - Performing internal audit services.
5. The GIAS (UK public sector) contains a Purpose Statement as follows:

‘Internal auditing strengthens an organisation’s ability to create, protect and sustain value by providing the board and management with independent, risk-based and objective assurance, advice, insight and foresight.’

6. Our partners response to internal audit activity should have the following benefits as outlined in the Purpose Statement:

‘Internal auditing enhances the organisations:

- *Successful achievement of its objectives.*
- *Governance, risk management and internal control processes.*
- *Decision-making and oversight.*
- *Reputation and credibility with its stakeholders.*
- *Ability to serve the public interest.’*

APPENDIX D – SIAS Internal Audit Strategy

Our Mission

7. As a shared service, SIAS aims to:

‘Be a high-quality shared service that seeks to embrace best professional practice, shared learning, develops our workforce, and delivers services in a financially sustainable way.’

8. In delivering this mission statement SIAS will:

- Produce and deliver an Annual Risk Based Internal Audit Plan which complies with the GIAS (UK public sector) and CIPFA Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government.
- Provide the statutory Chief Audit Executive’s Annual Opinion on each partner’s internal control, risk management framework and corporate governance arrangements.
- Provide progress reports to the Audit Committees / Boards which highlight any significant risk and control deficiencies or potential areas for improvement in the organisation’s governance, risk, and control arrangements; and
- Support and suitably challenge key assumptions and judgments taken by management, through IA’s assurance and advisory services, to ensure they are appropriate and in accordance with relevant legislation, policies and procedures, guidance, and professional standards.
- Continue to progress our grow your own strategy to support the development of high-quality internal audit staff.
- Progress our external business strategy in order build a sustainable and resilient service for the future.

9. To fulfil our aspirations and demonstrate our professionalism, SIAS must conform with the requirements of the GIAS (UK public sector).

Our core values

10. Our core values which underpin the delivery of our mission

Quality: Our overarching value is to successfully blend the elements of quality as fitness for purpose (satisfying needs flexibly and responsively), excellence (achieving the highest standards), transformation (learning, innovation, and continuous improvement), professionalism (conformance with professional standards) and value for money (cost effectiveness). Quality is also about leadership, responsibility and accountability throughout the team and the ability to establish a culture of continuous learning that will challenge us to be our best and inspire and motivate all.

Customer Focus: We put service excellence and customer care at the heart of our internal audit and consultancy work, seeking to provide a service that inspires

APPENDIX D – SIAS Internal Audit Strategy

confidence and trust and meets customer expectations. We are always professional and courteous, take ownership for getting things right and support the service, our colleagues, and our partners / clients to meet their objectives.

Learning and Development: Our staff are our biggest asset; therefore, we support our staff to become professionally qualified, and build knowledge and skills to support their career development, maintain compliance with professional standards and delivery a high-quality service to our partners.

Responsible: We promote a culture of diversity and inclusion in relation to our approaches to recruitment, progression, and reward, within our ways of working, service development and internal audit delivery approach, and in our mutual respect for the people comprising our team.

Accountability: We take ownership of and are accountable for our work, are open to challenging ourselves and will raise concerns and provide solutions to improve the service.

Agile Working: We work with our clients to build trust; develop common understanding and take collective action to improve organisational priorities and outcomes; and be a trusted advisor to strategic management and the Audit Committees / Boards.

Growth: We maximise income generation through the continuous exploration of opportunities.

Our priorities

11. SIAS must continue to deliver a good quality, efficient, resilient and cost-effective service that achieves its annual key performance indicators. Its focus must include the nuts and bolts of sound internal control, risk management and governance frameworks.
12. It is vital though that SIAS continues to remain agile, relevant and timely, while evolving in response to changing stakeholder needs and business objectives. Key areas of focus for SIAS include:
 - Enhancing the business impact of internal auditing and ensuring sufficient focus on business-critical risks,
 - Recruitment, retention, and progression of our grow your own strategy,
 - Building meaningful relationships with key stakeholders,
 - Co-ordination with other assurance providers and the outcomes of their work,
 - Building agility into audit approaches, and
 - Expanding the use of data analytics and assurance mapping amongst other assurance techniques.

Our role and delivery objectives

APPENDIX D – SIAS Internal Audit Strategy

13. The full regulatory context and scope of internal audit and the Shared Internal Audit Service is set out within our partners Internal Audit Charter, approved annually by their respective Audit Committees.
14. Our core internal audit objective is to deliver sufficient, relevant internal audit and consultancy work to support the statutory annual assurance opinion on each of our partners internal control, risk management and corporate governance frameworks. The annual assurance opinion forms a significant part of our partners statutory Annual Governance Statements.
15. Delivery of the internal audit objectives outlined below support the core objective and ensure conformance with professional standards:
 - To develop and deliver dynamic and risk-based Internal Audit Plans that evidence the links to our partners objectives, risks and priorities.
 - To document our internal audit planning process alongside our Internal Audit Plans for Audit Committee approval. The planning process comprises our Planning Principles, Approach to Planning and Planning Context (internal audit environment and local government context and challenges).
 - To ensure that outcomes of assurance activities are reported in a clear and concise manner for all stakeholders, as well as seeking to identify root causes of the issues identified.
 - To support our partners in monitoring the implementation of high and medium priority internal audit recommendations, and other key findings from external inspectors or other assurance providers (e.g., Shared Anti-Fraud Service).
 - To support key transformation and change projects within our partner Council's through assurance and advisory services that provide real time insight into improvement opportunities and good governance.
 - To promote a culture of shared learning on good governance, risk management and internal control, through the sharing of good practice / emerging risks, completion of joint reviews and shared workshops.
 - To work with our partners to ensure that audit methodologies and approaches can adapt to the challenges of new ways of working and still maintain robust independent assurance.
 - To embrace and embed emerging internal audit techniques to ensure that our work can provide appropriate insight and support management in meeting statutory or best practice requirements.
 - To implement and maintain a Quality Assurance and Improvement Program (QAIP) covering planned quality activities to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal audit activity followed by the completion of actions to address opportunities for improvement.

APPENDIX D – SIAS Internal Audit Strategy

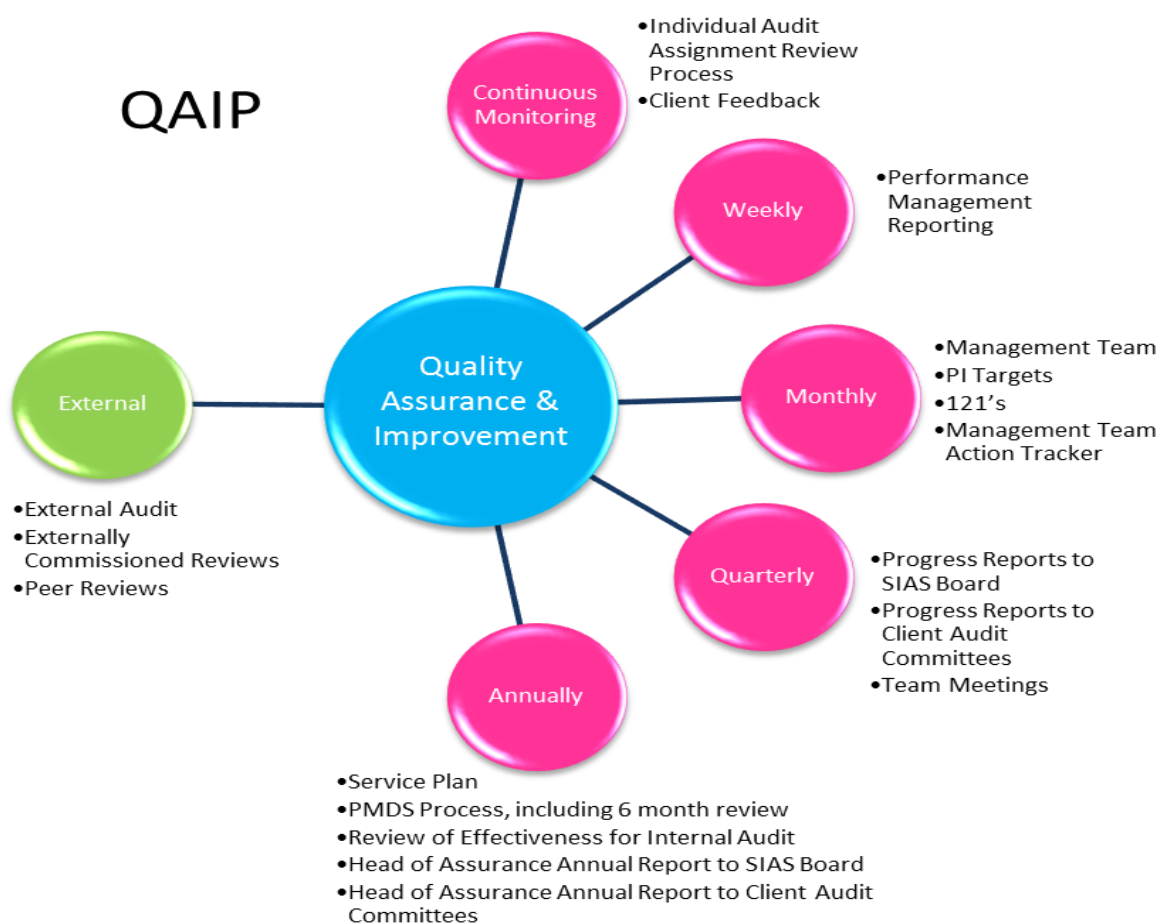
Resources

16. Achievement of our role and objectives is predicated on the matching of audit needs to available human 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.
17. 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.
18. The service will be adequately resourced to deliver the number of planned internal audit days commissioned through our partners internal audit plans and the requirements of our external clients.
19. Our structure is comprised of 17.2 FTE's; these being aligned to the 3,066 internal audit days that SIAS is commissioned to deliver.
20. Our internal resources are as follows:
 - 0.4 FTE Head of Assurance
 - 1 FTE Head of Shared Service / Client Audit Manager
 - 3.2 FTE Client Audit Managers
 - 1 FTE Assistant Client Audit Manager
 - 2.6 FTE Senior Auditors
 - 5 FTE Auditors
 - 3 FTE Trainee Auditors
 - 1 FTE Business Support & Development Officer
21. Our equivalent available resource from our delivery partner is as follows:
 - BDO (equivalent of 1.75 FTE)
22. The financial resource management of SIAS is described in the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan presented annually to the SIAS Board, and includes funding for training, professional development, conferences, and other learning opportunities. This is integral to our 'grow your own' strategy. The SIAS Budget also contains funding for audit software and software licenses (technology) and the SIAS Reserve Strategy includes the potential for investment in further internal audit software, based on business need and subject to approval by the Board. These documents should be consulted for further detail.

Measuring quality and performance

23. The GIAS (UK public sector) require SIAS to implement and maintain an ongoing QAIP (see diagram below) based on an annual self-assessment against the standards, supplemented at least every five years by a full independent external assessment.

APPENDIX D – SIAS Internal Audit Strategy



24. The QAIP includes the continuous reporting of key performance indicators (KPIs) and other measures focusing on delivery of internal audit plans for our partners and clients, service quality, productivity, efficiency, conformance with professional standards, value, and good governance. These are summarised in the table below:

Performance Indicator	Performance Target / Reporting
Annual Internal Audit Plan Delivery – the percentage of the Annual Internal Audit Plan delivered (excludes contingency)	95%
Project Delivery – the number of projects delivered to draft report stage against projects in the approved Annual Internal Audit Plan	90%
Project Completion – delivery of all planned projects to final report stage prior to the publication of the CAE annual assurance statement and opinion.	100%

APPENDIX D – SIAS Internal Audit Strategy

Client Satisfaction - percentage of client satisfaction questionnaires returned at 'satisfactory' level.	90%
Internal Audit Annual Plan Report	Approved by the March Audit Committee or the first meeting of the financial year should a March committee not meet.
Chief Audit Executive's Annual Report (incl. Annual Assurance Opinion)	Presented to the first meeting of each Audit Committee in the new financial year.
Implementation of critical, high, and medium priority (where relevant to partner) recommendations	Presented as part of regular internal audit progress updates to Audit Committee
Conformance with GIAS (UK public sector) – annual self-assessment or five-yearly external assessment; including areas of non-conformance.	Reported annually as part of the Chief Audit Executive's Annual Report.

25. The SIAS teams' individual performance is assessed through regular supervision and performance development and management meetings, as well as the outcomes of quality reviews and customer feedback for each internal audit assignment. Client satisfaction survey responses are reviewed, and improvement actions implemented as necessary.
26. Our co-sourced delivery partners performance is monitored through contractual KPIs and contract management meetings. We will also continue to explore performance measures used both within local government and other sectors.
27. Membership of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors Local Authority Heads of Internal Audit Forum, the Home Counties Chief Internal Auditors' Group, Audit Together (strategic alliance of similar shared services) and the Local Authority Chief Auditors' Network are crucial for sharing experiences, keeping up to date with technical and professional developments, benchmarking good practices and ensuring consistency of approach with our peers in the sector.