

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S  
REPORT TO**

**Audit and Standards Committee**  
**15 July 2024**

**Report Title:** Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24

**Submitted by:** Chief Internal Auditor

**Portfolios:** Finance, Town Centres and Growth

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To consider the annual report of the Internal Audit activity for the financial year 2023/24 enclosed as Appendix A.			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
<b>That Committee:</b>			
1. Consider the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2023/24.			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
In accordance with the Internal Audit Charter objective to report progress against the plan to the Audit and Standards Committee on a quarterly basis and to provide an annual opinion on the Authority's control environment.			

**1. Background**

- 1.1** The primary purpose of an Internal Audit service is to provide an independent, objective assurance and consulting service to the organisation; and through the efficient delivery of this service seeks to add value and improve the organisation's operations and controls to effectively deliver the council's Strategic Priorities. Internal Audit assists the organisation to accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluating and improving the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. Internal Audit is an independent appraisal function within the Borough Council under the control of the Service Director for Finance (and Section 151 Officer).

- 1.2 Internal Audit also provide a service to management by giving assurance that there are adequate internal controls in operation, ensuring the proper economic, efficient and effective use of resources, to include the security of assets and data and to assist management in preventing and detecting fraud. This is achieved by the completion of routine system and regularity audits and under a wider remit by value for money and special audits.
- 1.3 2023/24 was the fourth year that a full internal audit service was planned to be delivered by Stoke-on-Trent City Council including undertaking the role of Chief Internal Auditor as defined by the PSIAS (Public Sector Internal Audit Standards).
- 1.4 During 2023/24, the service continued to utilise specialist external IT audit from Information Security Advice Limited.
- 1.5 As required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, an Internal Audit Charter is required in respect of delivering the Internal Audit Service. The internal audit charter is a formal document that defines internal audit's purpose, authority and responsibility. The charter establishes Internal Audit's position within the organisation, including the nature of the Chief Internal Auditor's functional reporting relationship with the Audit Committee; authorises access to records, personnel and physical properties relevant to the performance of engagements; and defines the scope of Internal Audit's activities. It provides a framework for the conduct of the service. The latest version of the Charter has been approved by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team and the Audit and Standards Committee in April 2023.

## 2. Issues

- 2.1 The Audit and Standards Committee approved the original Audit Plan for 2023/24 on the 17th April 2023. The plan accounted for 276 audit days.
- 2.2 Of the planned work identified in the 2023/24 Audit Plan, 52.4% of the work was completed within the year and 47.4% was in progress and carried forward for completion in 2024/25. Since then a further 33.3% has been completed.
- 2.3 A total of 36 recommendations have been made during 2023/24, 22 (61%) of which have already been implemented. The remaining 14 recommendations are in progress (8 recommendations) or are not yet due (6 recommendations). In addition, 29 recommendations were raised after the end of March, all of which are not yet due.
- 2.4 The work of Internal Audit shows the Council to have an adequate, effective and reliable **Satisfactory** framework of internal control, which provides reasonable assurance regarding the effective and efficient achievement of the Council's objectives

### **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 That the report, including the annual internal audit opinion for 2023/24, is noted.

### **4. Reasons**

- 4.1 The Internal Audit year-end report also builds upon the assurance given by the section in support of the Annual Governance Statement on internal control. The planning and delivery of a robust audit plan ensures that an annual opinion and overall level of assurance can be provided by the Chief Internal Auditor to those charged with governance, thereby complying with constitutional requirements and sector standards. This opinion is one of the elements of the assurance framework which is reported in the annual governance statement.

### **5. Options Considered**

- 5.1 Not applicable.

### **6. Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, state that “A relevant authority [the Council] 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.” (para 5(1)).
- 6.2 Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that every local authority should make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs’. CIPFA has defined ‘proper administration’ in that it should include ‘compliance with the statutory requirements for accounting and internal audit’.
- 6.3 The activities of Internal Audit are planned in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations which place a duty upon the Chief Internal Auditor to report to members on a regular basis. By acting upon recommendations within internal audit reports, the council is demonstrating its commitment to maintain an adequate and effective system of internal control, as required by these regulations. Satisfactory delivery of the audit plan assists the Executive Director Resources & Support Services (and Section 151 Officer), in discharging her duties under section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **7. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 There are no equality impact issues identified from this proposal.

## 8. Financial and Resource Implications

8.1 The work undertaken during 2023/24 was provided through a service agreement by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The financial implications resulting from the recommendations made within audit reports is highlighted within individual reports wherever possible. It is the responsibility of managers receiving audit reports to take account of these financial implications, and to take the appropriate action.

## 9. Major Risks & Mitigation

9.1 The key risk to be considered in noting the attached report is that the independent and objective assurance provided by Internal Audit is, or is perceived to be, compromised. The consequence of which is that opportunities to improve the Authority's system of internal controls, governance framework and the delivery of its objectives are not identified or acted upon. This risk is managed through a combination of the governance and reporting frameworks within which Internal Audit operates and the overview carried out by this Committee. No risks have been identified that are not within acceptable tolerances and the independence of the internal audit function is confirmed.

## 10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1 Not applicable.



## 11. Key Decision Information

11.1 Not applicable.

## 12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

12.1 Approval of the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24 (Audit and Standards Committee April 2023).

**13. List of Appendices**

**13.1** Appendix A – Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24.

**14. Background Papers**

**14.1** Internal Audit Plan 2023/24.