

ADOPTION OF INTERNAL AUDIT HIGH RISK RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY OF ASSURANCE 1 JULY TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2012

Submitted by: **Audit Manager**

Portfolio: **Finance and Budget Management**

Ward(s) affected: **All**

Purpose of the Report

To report on any outstanding high risk recommendations to the Audit and Risk Committee on a quarterly basis and where necessary to request Members' approval to the Executive Directors requested actions in respect of the recommendations and proposed target dates.

To provide Members with an assurance opinion on internal controls over Council Services.

Recommendation

That the action of your officers and levels of assurance be noted.

Reasons

High risk recommendations are those agreed with management that are key controls in providing assurance as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the system, service or process under review. By agreeing to prolong target dates Members are accepting the risk of not implementing the control. Delayed implementation of such controls should be challenged to identify reasons behind this and solutions to the delay. Delays may be a result of external or internal influences, lack of resources or inertia. Such delays in the implementation of recommendations will affect the assurance opinion provided on each Service.

1. Background

- 1.1 High risk recommendations are those where action is considered imperative to ensure that the authority is not exposed to high risks and to do this it needs to be implemented within 1 month of the recommendation being agreed with managers.
- 1.2 Recommendations are reported to committee on an exception basis, i.e. reports where high risk recommendations have been followed up with Managers on more than two occasions are brought to the attention of Members. In addition the Chair and Vice Chair receive exception reports quarterly where high risk recommendations have been followed up with Managers after the initial implementation date has expired.
- 1.3 With the production of the Annual Governance Statement in conjunction with the Statement of Accounts the follow up and implementation of recommendations is increasingly important, since they provide both officers and Members with assurance as to the effectiveness of key internal control.
- 1.4 Assurance is provided on an annual basis as part of the Annual Report on the Internal Audit Service. It is now also provided to each Executive Director on a monthly basis, based on the number of recommendations that have been implemented, and where the target date has been changed more than twice on either medium or high risk recommendations.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 In the second quarter there was just one high risk recommendation due for review, this has now received five target date changes and has been presented to the committee in Appendix B.
- 2.2 A copy of the Assurance Summary for September 2012 can be found at Appendix A.
- 2.3 Three Directorates are showing Substantial Assurance at the end of the second quarter, whilst Operational Services have an Assurance Opinion of Little. This assurance level is due to a high percentage of recommendations that were still outstanding at the end of the quarter. It is pleasing to report that out of the 25 recommendations that were outstanding at the end of September 2012, 20 of these have now been actioned. The 5 remaining recommendations are all categorised as low risk.

3. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 3.1 Reasons for each Director proposal are specific to the actions required.

4. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The systems, services and processes reviewed by Internal Audit link to and support the four priority themes of the Council, by reviewing these Audit is making the best use of the Council's resources and improving efficiency and this is further reinforced by managers as they implement the recommendations made.

5. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 5.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011 require the Council to 'maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with the proper internal audit practices'.

6. **Equality Impact Assessment**

There are no differential equality impact issues identified from this proposal.

7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 The majority of recommendations are met within existing resources; where additional resources are required these will form part of a separate report.

8. **Major Risks**

- 8.1 The role of Internal Audit is to provide management with an objective assessment of whether systems and controls are working properly. High Risk Recommendations identify areas where action is required in order to avoid exposure to risk. If managers fail to act upon fundamental audit recommendations assurance cannot be given on the adequacy of the systems of internal control.

9. **Key Decision Information**

Not applicable

10. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

10.1 Where fundamental recommendations show a target date change; this identifies the number of times the recommendation has been referred back to Executive Management Team and to members for consideration of the risks prior to agreeing an extended implementation date or other action.

11. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - Audit Recommendations Summary of Assurance for September 2012
Appendix B – Outstanding High Risk Recommendations

12. **Background Papers**

Internal Audit PI and Assurances file