BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

Introduction

The role of internal audit is that of an:

'Independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes'.

The Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. Internal audit plays a vital role in advising the Council that these arrangements are in place and operating effectively.

The Council's response to internal audit activity should lead to the strengthening of the control environment and, therefore, contribute to the achievement of the organisation's objectives.

The aim of internal audit's work programme is to provide independent and objective assurance to management, in relation to the business activities; systems or processes under review that:

- the framework of internal control, risk management and governance is appropriate and operating effectively; and
- risk to the achievement of the Council's objectives is identified, assessed and managed to a defined acceptable level.

The internal audit plan provides the mechanism through which the Head of Audit and Risk Management can ensure the most appropriate use of internal audit resources to provide a clear statement of assurance on risk management, internal control and governance arrangements. It should be noted that under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Council is required each financial year to review the effectiveness of the system of internal control and produce an Annual Governance Statement.

The Head of Audit and Risk Management is required to provide this annual assurance on controls across the whole Council which encompasses a diverse range of activities. Whilst it is not feasible to audit every area and cover each risk every year, this assurance cannot be given without carrying a range of audits across the Council's departments, activities and risks.

Internal Audit focus should be proportionate and appropriately aligned. The plan will remain fluid and subject to on-going review and amendment, in consultation with the relevant Executive Directors and Audit Sponsors, to ensure it continues to reflect the needs of the Council. Amendments to the plan will be discussed and agreed with the S151 officer.

The Internal Audit Team

Delivery of audits is through a hybrid of in-house resource and outsourcing of some general audit work to Wokingham Council internal audit team. In addition, counter

fraud support is provided by Reading Borough Council Corporate Investigation Team. The in-house internal audit service is led by Sally Hendrick, Head of Audit and Risk Management supported by Michele Woodhatch, Internal Audit Contract Manager, one Principal Auditor post which has been vacant for 12 months and two apprentices. There have been significant resource pressures within the service in the last 2 years due to the transition from an outsourced to an in-house delivery model and subsequent issues with recruiting. To address this and as advised by CIPFA during their external assessment, the two internal audit apprentices were recruited in November 2022 and additional days have been purchased from Wokingham's internal audit team.

Conformance with internal auditing standards

The internal audit service is designed to conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). Under the PSIAS there is a requirement for audit services to have an external quality assessment every five years. In March 2022, CIPFA carried out an external assessment against the PSIAS, Local Government Application Note and the International Professional Practices Framework. In considering all sources of evidence the external assessor concluded:

> **It is our opinion that Bracknell Forest Council's Internal Audit Service's self-assessment is accurate and, as such, we conclude that they FULLY CONFORM to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note.**

Between each formal external assessment, the Head of Audit and Risk Management carries out an annual check to confirm continued compliance. internal audit service is designed to conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Conflicts of Interest

We are not aware of any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the team, and which are required to be disclosed under internal auditing standards.

The Council Plan

The Public Sector Internal Audit standards state that:

 "*The chief audit executive must establish risk-based plans to determine the priorities of the internal audit activity, consistent with the organisation's goals*"

The organisation's current goals are set out in the Council Plan 2023 -2027 which was developed to address the challenges facing the Council and deliver the commitments made in the 2023 election manifesto. The 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan has been developed to link to the organisation's current goals as set out in the priorities as set out below.

Engaged and healthy communities	Thriving and connected economy	Green and sustainable environment
Our role is to help create opportunities where people can succeed, be happy and feel safe.	The local economy includes many different aspects, such as businesses, jobs, skills, accommodation, and services.	Our environment includes everything around us, our parks, our cycleways and our road networks.

Council Risk

The Council has a clear framework and approach to risk management. The Strategic Risk Register is currently being revisited by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) to ensure that it accurately reflects the risks to strategic objectives and focuses on uncertainties rather existing issues. In the meantime the risks in the existing risk register as set out below have been used to inform development of the audit plan for 2024/25. We will monitor the Strategic Risk register closely over the course of the year to ensure our plan remains agile to the rapidly changing landscape and is focusing on key risks identified by CMT.

REF.	STRATEGIC RISK
Risk 1	Financial Sustainability
Risk 2	Impact of Pressures on Health System
Risk 3	Local Economy Resilience
Risk 4	Demand Management
Risk 5	Cyber Risks
Risk 6	Climate Change Net Zero
Risk 7	Staffing
Risk 8	Safety Valve

Developing the internal audit plan 2024/25

We have used various sources of information and discussed priorities for internal audit with the following groups:

- Corporate Management Team
- Executive Directors
- Assistant Directors

Based on these conversations with key stakeholders, review of key corporate documents and our understanding of the organisation the Head of Audit and Risk Management has developed an annual audit plan for the coming year.
The Council are reminded that internal audit is only one source of assurance and through the delivery of our plan we will not, and do not seek to cover all risks and processes within the organisation. We will however continue to monitor closely the work of other assurance providers to ensure that duplication is minimised and a suitable breadth of assurance is obtained
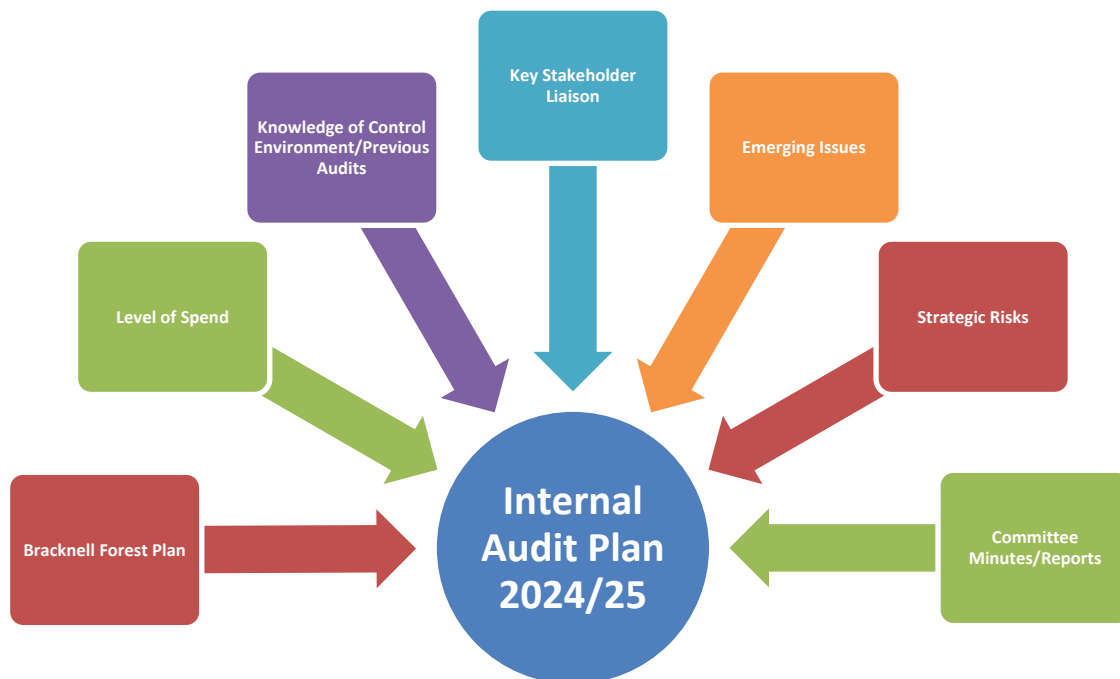
2024/25 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

AUDIT	DAYS BY QUARTER				TOTAL DAYS	TOTAL DAYS DELIVERED	TOTAL DAYS PER PLAN
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	24/25	23/24	23/24
1.GOVERNANCE & GRANTS	3	7	3	23	36	48	38
2.COUNCIL WIDE AUDITS	0	40	22	22	84	78	110
3. DELIVERY INCLUDING IT AUDIT	15	12	22	25	74	20	52
4.RESOURCES	20	0	14	0	34	22	42
5.PLACE, PLANNING, AND REGENERATION	0	0	10	0	10	33	23
6.PEOPLE	37	39	7	36	119	67	157
7.SCHOOLS	32	0	20	0	52	42	44
TOTAL	107	98	98	106	409	310	466
BFWD FROM 23/24 WORK IN PROGRESS					25		
TOTAL 24/25					434		

DETAILED BREAKDOWN

AUDIT	Days	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Sponsor	Priority	Strategic Risk	Council priority
GOVERNANCE Complaints follow up	10	0	0	0	10	Executive Director: Delivery	Very High		
O&S Reviews project management follow up	10	0	0	0	10	Executive Director: Delivery	High		
GRANT CERTIFICATIONS Bus Service Operator	1	0	1	0	0	Director of Place, Planning and Regeneration	Essential	1	
Integrated Transport Block Allocation	3	0	3	0	0	Director of Place, Planning	Essential	1	

AUDIT	Days	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Sponsor	Priority	Strategic Risk	Council priority
						and Regeneration			
Troubled Families	12	3	3	3	3	Executive Director:People	Essential	1,4	
COUNCIL WIDE Updating of Council records from death lists	12	0	0	12	0	Executive Director: Resources	High	1,4	
Monitoring of staffing budgets	12	0	0	0	12	Executive Director: Resources	High	1	
Budgeting follow up	10	0	10	0	0	Executive Director: Resources	Very high	1	
MOSAIC-IT/Finance/CSC	20	0	20	0	0	Executive Director: Resources	High	1	
Audit Contingency	30	0	10	10	10	Executive Director: Resources	Medium		
DELIVERY Debt management in Delivery	15	15	0	0	0	Executive Director:Delivery	Very High	1	
Registration services	10	0	0	10	0	Executive Director:Delivery	Medium	1	
Minor capital works	12	0	0	12	0	Executive Director:Delivery	High	1,6	
Landscaping and Street Cleansing	15	0	0	0	15	Executive Director:Delivery	Medium	1,6	
Change control in IT and digital services	10	0	0	0	10	Executive Director:Delivery	Medium	1	
Life Cycle review of IT hardware	12	0	12	0	0	Executive Director:Delivery	Medium	1	
PLACE PLANNING AND REGENERATION The Look Out	10	0	0	10	0	Executive Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration	Medium		
RESOURCES Supplier payments- follow up	7	0	0	7	0	Executive Director: Resources	High	1	
Establishment costs – follow up	7	0	0	7	0	Executive Director: Resources	High	1	

AUDIT	Days	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Sponsor	Priority	Strategic Risk	Council priority
Council tax and business rates	20	20	0	0	0	Executive Director: Resources	Very High	1	
PEOPLE Debt management-People	20	20	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	High	1	
Timeliness of updating of LAS	12	0	12	0	0	Executive Director:People	High	1,4	
Direct payments fraudit	12	0	0	0	12	Executive Director:People	Medium	1,4	
Blue badges- new processes	12	0	0	0	12	Executive Director:People	Medium	4	
Drug and Alcohol Team	12	0	12	0	0	Executive Director:People	Medium	4	
Waymead	10	10	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	Medium	1,4	
Financial Assessments	12	0	0	0	12	Executive Director:People	High	1	
Larchwood follow up	7	7	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1,4	
Housing benefit and CTR	15	0	15	0	0	Executive Director:People	High	1,4	
Services to schools follow up	7	0	0	7	0	Executive Director:People	High	1,4	
SCHOOL AUDITS School B -desk top follow up	4	0	0	4	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
School T -desk top follow up	4	0	0	4	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
School U -desk top follow up	4	0	0	4	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
School R -desk top follow up	4	0	0	4	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
School S -desk top follow up	4	0	0	4	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
School E -desk top follow up	4	4	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	

AUDIT	Days	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Sponsor	Priority	Strategic Risk	Council priority
School D -desk top follow up	4	4	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
School G -desk top follow up	4	4	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	Very high	1	
Audit following self assessments due- Schools A and F	20	20	0	0	0	Executive Director:People	High	1	
TOTAL	409	107	98	98	106				