

Audit Committee

14 April 2025

Part 1 - Public

Delegated



Cabinet Member	Kim Tanner – Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing
Responsible Officer	Sharon Shelton – Director of Finance and Transformation
Report Author	Richard Benjamin – Chief Audit Executive

Internal Audit and Counter Plan 2025/26

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks Member approval of the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Plan for the year 2025/26.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 The provision of Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Services provides assurance on council procedures and policies.

3 Recommendation

- 3.1 Members are asked to **CONSIDER** and subject to any amendments required to **APPROVE** the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Plan for the year 2025/26.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The professional standards for Internal Audit require the Chief Audit Executive to establish a risk-based plan to determine the priorities of the Internal Audit activity, consistent with the organisation's goals. A risk-based Internal Audit Plan has been prepared for the 2025/26 financial year to fulfil this requirement. The Plan as a whole must enable the Chief Audit Executive to provide an overall opinion on risk management, governance, and control at the end of the financial year.
- 4.2 The Internal Audit Plan includes the work plan of the Fraud Team. Consequently, the Plan is a combined Internal Audit and Fraud Plan.

5 Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Plan 2025/26

- 5.1 A copy of the proposed Internal Audit and Fraud Plan is attached at **[Annex 1]** of this report. This is intended to provide Members with a clear picture of how the Council will make use of its Internal Audit and Fraud service, reflecting on all work to be undertaken.
- 5.2 The Plan has been developed using a risk-based approach. Significant risk areas and priorities have been identified through a risk assessment which included a review of the Strategic and Service risk registers, analysis of the wider environment, use of our own organisational knowledge and discussions with Directors and Heads of Service, both individually and collectively as part of Management Teams.
- 5.3 Relevant links to the Strategic Risk Register are shown within the Plan itself. Members will note that not all audits are linked to a specific risk; some are intended to provide assurance over core areas (for example financial audits), and some are included as the Council is undertaking change programmes. In line with the nature and scope of Internal Audit as set out in the Internal Audit Charter, it is important that, overall, the Plan balances all these assurance and consultancy needs.
- 5.4 Whilst the Plan is drawn up annually, it is important that the Plan is able to be flexible and respond to key risks; we have therefore prioritised and scheduled audits for the first 6 months of 2025/26. The remaining identified reviews will be kept under consideration and discussed with Directors as part of the 6 monthly liaison and planning meetings. Additions to the Plan will be made at such time for the remaining 6 months of the year. The plan may be amended at any time to respond to emerging risks, with the approval of the Audit Committee.
- 5.5 The Counter Fraud Plan has been aligned to the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Strategy. The Strategy focuses on pillars of activity that local authorities should concentrate on to further develop and enhance their counter fraud response.
- 5.6 The audit reviews under consideration, and detailed activities from the Counter Fraud Plan are contained in pages 2 and 3 of Annex 1.
- 5.7 The proposed Plan has been reviewed and endorsed by Management Team.
- 5.8 Based on the current staffing levels and assumptions, there is sufficient resource to deliver the 2025/26 Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Plan.

6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 6.1 An adequate and effective Internal Audit function provides the Council with assurance on the proper, economic, efficient, and effective use of Council resources

in the delivery of services, as well as helping to identify fraud and error that could have an adverse effect on the finances of the Council.

- 6.2 Fraud prevention and detection is an area subject to central government focus with initiatives such as the National Fraud Initiative and Local Government Counter Fraud and Corruption Initiative. The message coming from these initiatives is that effective fraud prevention and detection releases resources and minimises losses to the Council through fraud.

7 Risk Assessment

- 7.1 The Internal Audit and Fraud Plan is intended to ensure that the work of the Internal Audit and Fraud Team is effectively directed. For this very reason, the process for preparing the Plan is itself informed by an assessment of the risks and audit needs of the Council. Members' endorsement of the Internal Audit and Fraud Plan for the year 2025/26 ensures that the status of the Plan is maintained.

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations place a statutory requirement on local authorities to undertake an adequate and effective Internal Audit of systems of risk management, governance, and control processes.
- 8.2 The Council also has a legal duty under s151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations to ensure that there are appropriate systems in place to prevent and detect fraud.
- 8.3 The Local Government Act 1972 provides the Council with the ability to investigate and prosecute offences committed against them.

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Plan 2025/26