

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

AUDIT COMMITTEE

15 JUNE 2015

1. **REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT**

Report of the Treasurer

RECOMMENDED

That the review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit be approved.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT.**

2.1 This report is submitted for member comment and approval.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2011 state at paragraph 6 (3) that “the relevant body shall, at least once in each year, conduct a review of the effectiveness of internal audit”. The regulations go on to say that the findings of this review be considered by a committee of the relevant body, or by the members of the relevant body as a whole, as part of the wider consideration of an organisations’ system of internal control. At the Fire Authority, the Audit Committee performs this role. The definition of internal audit, as described in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, is set out below:

“Internal auditing is 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”.

3.2 In reviewing the effectiveness of internal audit, the following have been taken into consideration:

- The process by which the control environment and key controls have been identified.

- The process by which assurance has been gained over controls.
- The adequacy and effectiveness of the remedial action taken where there are deficits in controls.
- The operation of the Audit Committee and the internal audit function to current codes and standards.
- An assessment against the five principles contained in the new CIPFA document “The Role of the Head of Internal Audit”.

3.3 **The process by which the control environment and key controls have been identified**

The control environment and key controls of the Authority are identified through the risk management system. Risks to the achievement of the Authority’s priorities are identified and mitigated within the control environment through the use of a risk register, which is regularly presented to the Audit Committee.

Internal Audit’s review of the risk management arrangements as part of their 2014/15 planned work concluded that the controls within the system, provided satisfactory assurance that risks material to the achievement of the Authority’s objectives were being adequately managed and controlled.

3.4 **The process by which assurance has been gained over controls**

Assurance is gained through a variety of sources, such as the work of both the Internal and External Auditors (currently Grant Thornton). The Internal Audit function report on a quarterly basis to the Audit Committee and for 2014/15 produced an Annual Internal Audit Report, which gave the following opinion:

“Based on the work undertaken during the year, the implementation by management of the recommendations made and the assurance made available to the authority by other providers as well as directly by Internal Audit, Internal Audit can provide reasonable assurance that the Fire Authority has adequate and effective governance, risk management and internal control processes”.

3.5 **The adequacy and effectiveness of the remedial action taken where there are deficits in controls**

Where deficits in internal control are identified, both internal and external audit will make recommendations that are entered onto an action plan. Management are then responsible for identifying what remedial action will be undertaken, who by and by when. Internal audit will then follow up all key recommendations and report back on any non-compliance to the Audit Committee.

3.6 **The operation of the Audit Committee and the internal audit function to current codes and standards**

Internal Audit

In reviewing the internal audit function, the following have been taken into consideration:

- The Quality and Improvement Programme for internal audit.
- The external auditors comments from their latest Annual External Audit Reports.
- The internal audit self assessment checklist included in the CIPFA Application Note that accompanies the new Public Sector Internal Audit Standards that came into effect from 1 April 2013.
- Ongoing dialogue held with key officers throughout the Authority on the role internal audit plays.
- A discussion with the Audit Services Manager and review of key internal audit documents.

(a) Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme

Sandwell Audit Services have a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme. During the year, the internal audit activity has followed this programme and there have been no significant areas of non-conformance or deviations from the standards as set out in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

(b) The internal audit self assessment checklist included in the CIPFA local government application note that accompanies the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

A review of the self assessment checklist completed by Audit Services taken from the CIPFA local government application note that accompanies the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, has been undertaken, and this indicated that the standards included in the code were being met. A full copy of the completed checklist can be made available upon request.

(c) Ongoing dialogue held with key officers throughout the Authority on the role internal audit plays

At various points throughout the year the work of internal audit has been discussed with key officers and generally they feel that this work and in particular the recommendations they make, add benefit in improving the overall effectiveness of the Authority and help in the achievement of it's objectives.

(d) A discussion with the Audit Services Manager and review of key internal audit documents

Audit Services have continued to provide assistance in a number of key corporate areas to the benefit of the Authority in general, in particular:

- Assistance in the ongoing development and training of the Audit Committee and in hosting the committee's self-assessment exercise and knowledge and skills framework
- Attendance at each committee meeting
- Presenting quarterly progress reports of work to the committee
- Joint working with the external auditors
- The preparation of annual risk based Audit Plans
- The preparation of an Annual Internal Audit report giving a clear opinion on internal control, governance and risk management arrangements
- Having specialist staff in the areas of contracts, fraud and risk management

3.7 Assessment of the five principles contained in CIPFA's "Role of the Head of Internal Audit"

This document includes five principles for the Head of Internal Audit:

- Championing best practice in governance, objectively assessing the adequacy of governance and management of existing risks, commenting on responses to emerging risks and proposed developments.
- Giving an objective and evidence based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control.
- Must be a senior manager with regular and open engagement across the organisation, particularly with the Leadership Team and the Audit Committee.

- Must lead and direct an internal audit service that is resourced to be fit for purpose.
- Must be professionally qualified and suitably experienced*.

Underpinning each of these five principles is a series of governance requirements, core responsibilities and personal skills and professional standards. As part of this review the current arrangements have been assessed against these requirements and found to be in compliance.

The Council's Head of Internal Audit's background and experience

The Head of Audit is a qualified accountant (FCCA) and also has the following experience:

- Executive Board member, and Treasurer for the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN)
- Former Chair and a current member of the Organising Committee for the CIPFA in the Midlands Audit Training Seminars (CATS)
- Governor and Chair of the Audit Committee at a sixth form college
- A regular speaker on internal audit matters for a number of organisations, including CIPFA and the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (CIIA)
- Articles on internal audit issues published by the CIIA.

The post is a shared role as part of an arrangement with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, and the current Head of Audit acts in this role for the following organisations:

- West Midlands Fire Service
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- West Midlands Pension Fund
- Wolverhampton Homes
- Sandwell Leisure Trust

4. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters contained in this report will not lead to and/or do not relate to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Accounts & Audit Regulations 2011 state at paragraph 6 (3) that “the relevant body shall, at least once in each year, conduct a review of the effectiveness of internal audit”. The regulations go on to say that the findings of this review be considered by a committee of the relevant body, or by the members of the relevant body as whole, as part of the wider consideration of an organisations’ system of internal control. At the Fire Authority, the Audit Committee performs this role.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

CIPFA’s – The Role of the Head of Internal Audit
Audit Committee – Self assessment of good practice and effectiveness
Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and accompanying CIPFA local government application note.

Mike Griffiths
Treasurer