

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>18 JUNE 2026</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2025-26</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>HEAD OF THE REGIONAL INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>ANDREW WATHAN HEAD OF REGIONAL INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	The proposals in this report are in accordance with the policy framework and budget.
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This report provides the Head of Internal Audit’s Annual Opinion on the Council’s control environment in relation to governance, risk management and internal control. It also informs the Governance and Audit Committee of the work and performance of Internal Audit for the 2025-26 financial year. This information is provided to comply with the Global Internal Audit Standards.</li> <li>• Appendix A contains the Annual Internal Audit Report 2025-26 which details Internal Audit’s performance, opinions and recommendations made during the year which assist in forming the Head of Internal Audit’s Annual Opinion on the Council’s overall control environment.</li> <li>• From the work undertaken during 2025-26 and considering other sources of assurance, the Head of Internal Audit’s annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council’s framework of governance, risk management and control for 2025-26 is of <i>Reasonable Assurance</i>.</li> <li>• However, the overall opinion for the risk management element was <i>Limited Assurance</i> due to the findings identified in both the internal audit report and the external audit report.</li> <li>• Those audits that provided an audit opinion during 2025-26 are listed in Annex 1, the detailed position against the audit plan is at Annex 2, and Annex 3 is the recommendation monitoring position statement.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>95% of assurance opinions issued were <i>Substantial or Reasonable</i>.</b></li> <li>• <b>92% of the plan was achieved against a target of 80%</b></li> <li>• <b>The Internal Audit team achieved an overall satisfaction rate of 95% from the questionnaires returned from auditees following completion of an audit. The questionnaire is at Annex 4.</b></li> <li>• <b>The Internal Audit service was fully compliant with the Global Internal Audit Standards.</b></li> </ul>
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## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Opinion on the Council's control environment in relation to governance, risk management and internal control and to inform the Committee of the work and performance of Internal Audit for the 2025-26 financial year.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Global Internal Audit Standards require the Head of Internal Audit to provide an Annual Report to support the Annual Governance Statement. The report should:
- Include an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework governance, risk management and internal control;
  - Present a summary of the audit work undertaken;
  - Draw attention to any issues that may impact on the level of assurance provided;
  - Provide a summary of the performance for the service;
  - Comment on conformance with the Global Internal Audit Standards.
- 2.2 In accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards, the Head of Internal Audit is responsible for developing a risk-based annual audit plan which takes into account the Council's risk management framework. Within the Standards there is also a requirement for the Head of Internal Audit to review and adjust the plan, as necessary, in response to changes in the Council's business, risks, operations, programmes, systems, controls and resources. The Head of Internal Audit must also ensure that Internal Audit resources are appropriate, sufficient and effectively deployed to achieve the approved plan.
- 2.3 The Internal Audit Plan for 2025-26 was submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee for consideration and approval on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025. The approved plan was flexible to be able to respond to changing circumstances and events that may occur during the year. The assurance gained from the audit work undertaken during the year assists the Head of Internal Audit in providing an overall annual opinion.
- 2.4 There were no significant changes to the agreed plan.

### 3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The Annual Internal Audit Report is presented at **Appendix A** which summarises the reviews undertaken during 2025-26, the recommendations made and any control issues identified. A total of 42 reviews were completed with an audit opinion and a total of 200 recommendations made (9 High, 106 Medium, 85 Low). A breakdown is included at **Annex 1 of Appendix A**. The annual report also discusses the performance of the internal audit service during the year and highlights individual staff development and training that has taken place.
- 3.2 Progress against the 2025-26 Risk Based Plan is attached at **Annex 2**. This details the status of each planned review. A summary is in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Status of Planned Audits 2025/26**

Status of Audits Assignments	Number	Percentage Completed (%)
Complete with audit opinion	41	87%
Draft with audit opinion	1	2%
Audit in progress and carried forward	2	-
Audit not started; considered for 2026/27 Plan	3	-
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>89%</b>
Complete with no audit opinion	12	
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>92%</b>

- 3.3 Table 1 shows 92% of the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan was achieved against a target of 80%.
- 3.4 Table 1 also illustrates the status of the 59 audit assignments included in the audit plan. 12 audit reviews listed have no audit opinion, these are routine internal audit work, for example advice and guidance, external audit liaison, fraud and irregularity work, audit planning and recommendation monitoring.
- 3.5 Of the remaining 47 audit assignments, 42 were concluded during 2025/26 with an audit opinion. 3 audits were not started during the year and have been included in the 2026/27 audit plan and 2 audits were ongoing and have been carried forward.
- 3.6 Based on the testing of the effectiveness of the internal control environment, an audit opinion of *Substantial Assurance* has been given to 14 audit reviews (33%) and an opinion of *Reasonable* to 26 audit reviews (62%). The remaining 2 audit reviews (5%) have been given an audit opinion of *Limited Assurance*, that is only limited assurance can be placed on the current systems of internal control. There were no 'No Assurance' opinions. Table 2 below illustrates the number of opinion / assurance audits issued in previous years.

**Table 2 – Number of Audit Opinion Reviews Completed**

Opinion	2023/24		2024/25		2025/26	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Substantial	10	24%	10	23%	14	33%

Reasonable	25	61%	29	68%	26	62%
Limited	6	15%	4	9%	2	5%
No Assurance	0	0	0	0	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>

- 3.7 Recommendations have been made for improvements and a follow up audit for *Limited Assurance* opinions will be undertaken to ensure controls have been improved to mitigate the risks identified. To ensure that appropriate action is taken on agreed management action plans, all high and medium priority recommendations are routinely followed up to assess the implementation progress. **Annex 3** provides a summary of the status of all high and medium priority audit recommendations made.
- 3.8 95% of client satisfaction questionnaires were returned following the finalisation of the audit reports which contained positive comments about the process; the Internal Audit team achieved an overall satisfaction rate of 95%.
- 3.9 Taking into account the results of the internal audit reviews completed during 2025-26, the recommendations made and considering other sources of assurance, such as Head Teacher and Chair of Governor Assurance Statements, the Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control for 2025-26 is of:

**“Reasonable Assurance.”**

No significant cross-cutting control issues have been identified that would impact on the Council's overall control environment and the weaknesses identified are service specific.

- 3.10 In providing this annual audit opinion, it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The most that internal audit can provide is a reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in governance and control processes. The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during our internal audit work in the 2025-26 financial year and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist, or of all the improvements that may be required.
- 3.11 A specific audit of Corporate Risk Management resulted in a *Limited Assurance* audit opinion. In addition, Audit Wales also identified areas for improvement during their review. Senior Managers have given assurance that action will be taken to address the issues identified.
- 3.12 The Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report 2025-26 has been prepared in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards which replaced the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards from April 2025. The Internal Audit team complies with a combination of the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Application Note, Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 The goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

#### **6. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 6.1 There are no climate change or nature implications arising from this report.

#### **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 There are no safeguarding or corporate parent implications arising from this report.

#### **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however effective audit planning and monitoring are key contributors in ensuring that the Council's assets and interests are properly accounted for and safeguarded.

#### **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 The Governance and Audit Committee is requested to consider and note the Annual Internal Audit Report for the 2025-26 financial year including the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control.

#### **Background documents**

None