

**Bridgend and Vale Internal Audit Service: Head of Internal Audit's Outturn Report April to August 15
Bridgend County Borough Council.**

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the work completed by the Bridgend and Vale Internal Audit Shared Service for the period April to August 2015 and provides the Head of Audit's current opinion on the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control. Therefore, based on our work carried out for the five months of this year, my overall opinion is that the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control is considered to be reasonable.

Introduction

The aim of the Shared Service is to help both Councils meet high standards of service delivery. Internal Audit is an assurance function that primarily provides an independent and objective opinion to the organisation on the control environment comprising risk management, internal control and governance by evaluating its effectiveness in achieving the organisation's objectives. It objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic and effective use of resources. The Shared Service supports the Audit Committees in discharging their responsibilities for:

- Advising on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management, internal control and governance processes in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2015.
- Supporting the Director of Resources with her delegated responsibility for ensuring arrangements for the provision of an adequate and effective internal audit.
- Monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of the Internal Audit Shared Service and Director's / Heads of Service responsibilities for ensuring an adequate control environment.

- Supporting the Director of Resources in discharging her statutory responsibilities under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- Ensuring that the Council's External Auditor in relation to our work on the main financial systems audits can place reliance on this.

Definition of Internal Audit

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. (Source:- Public Sector Internal Audit Standards).

Statutory Framework

Internal Audit is a statutory requirement for local authorities. There are two principal pieces of legislation that impact upon internal audit in local authorities; these are:-

- Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires every authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to ensure that one of the officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs.
- Section 5 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2015 states that "a relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.

All principal local authorities subject to the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2015 must make provision for internal audit in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Audit Committee

It is important to ensure that the Council has a sufficiently independent and effective Audit Committee that follows best practice. Audit Committees are a key component of corporate governance. They are a key source of assurance about the Council's arrangements for managing risk, maintaining an effective control environment, and reporting on financial and non-financial performance. In addition, Internal Audit provides a key source of assurance to the Committee as to whether controls are operating effectively.

External Audit

The Council's External Auditor examines the work of Internal Audit on an annual basis in order to place reliance on this work when undertaking their audit work on the Council's Financial Statement of Accounts. The Council's External Auditor, KPMG will be responsible for auditing the Council's Statement of Accounts for the Financial Year 2014/2015. The Council's External Auditors will then change to the Wales Audit Office for 2015/16 onwards.

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS)

The Standards the Internal Audit Shared Service works to are the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. These standards set out:

- The definition of internal auditing;
- Code of ethics.

- International standards for the professional practice of internal auditing. These standards cover the following areas:
 - Purpose, authority and responsibility.
 - Independence and objectivity;
 - Proficiency and due professional care;
 - Quality assurance and improvement programme;
 - Managing the internal audit activity;
 - Nature of work;
 - Engagement planning;
 - Performing the engagement;
 - Communicating results;
 - Monitoring progress;
 - Communicating the acceptance of risks.

The PSIAS apply to all internal audit service providers, whether in-house or outsourced. During 2014-15 a self-assessment was undertaken to review our compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The review confirmed that there were no areas of non-compliance.

Internal Audit Coverage – April to August 2015

The level of internal audit resources required to examine all the Council's activities far exceed those available each year. It is, therefore, essential that the work of Internal Audit be properly planned to ensure that maximum benefit is gained from the independent appraisal function that internal audit provides.

Resources must be appropriately targeted by assessing the Council's total audit needs and preparing a plan that ensures systems are reviewed on a risk basis according to the impact they have on service delivery.

The Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16 is based, to a large extent, on the Council's Corporate Risk Register. This was complemented by:

- Priorities identified by Corporate Directors;
- Heads of Service key risks,
- The requirements of the Council's Section 151 Officer;
- External Audit and
- Those concerns / issues raised by Internal Audit in previous audits and our knowledge of potentially high-risk areas.

The Plan was submitted and approved by the Council's Audit Committee on 16th April 2015. The plan provided for a total commitment of 1,296 productive days for the year. Table 1 below provides the outturn for the service for the period April to August 2015 and further detail is provided in Appendix B. The current structure for the Shared Service comprises of 18.5 Full Time Equivalent employees (FTE's), which provides for a comprehensive Internal Audit Service to both the Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend County Borough Councils. The Head of Audit aims to achieve best practice, but continues to take account of the issues of affordability at a time when both Councils are looking to make substantial reductions in costs. The service has already been vastly streamlined and continues to apply lean auditing risk based methodologies to its plan of work. At the commencement of this financial year, the service is carrying 2.5 vacant FTE posts.

Table 1 – Productive outturn for the period April to August 2015

| Directorate | 2015/16 Full Year Plan Days | Proportion Of Plan Day April to Aug. 15 | April to Aug. Actual Days |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Resources | 355 | 148 | 121 |
| Legal and Regulatory Service | 80 | 33 | 13 |
| Children (Including Schools) | 155 | 65 | 35 |
| Communities | 155 | 65 | 67 |
| Wellbeing | 130 | 54 | 49 |
| Cross Cutting – Including External Client, Unplanned and Fraud and Error | 421 | 175 | 176 |
| Total | 1,296 | 540 | 461 |

As can be seen from the table above, the actual outturn for the Section shows that the overall productive days originally planned have not been achieved; there is a shortfall of 79 days. The Table further shows that the proportion of productive days achieved vary from that expected by Directorate activity. However, this will be addressed as the year progresses.

A total of 14 reviews have been completed so far to-date, twelve (86%) of which have been closed with either a substantial or reasonable assurance opinion level. Of the remaining two reviews (14%), although necessary, they did not culminate in an overall audit opinion.

Internal Control Weaknesses

There are no internal control weaknesses identified so far to date from the work undertaken for the period.

Our overall opinion on a system is based on both the materiality and impact of the system and our opinion on the internal control arrangements within the system. The combination of these factors then results in a category of risk to the Council as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2.

| SYSTEM CONTROL | | MATERIALITY AND IMPACT | | |
|----------------|--|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | | HIGH | MEDIUM | LOW |
| 1 | Satisfactory | Moderate | Minimal | Minimal |
| 2 | Reasonable | Moderate | Moderate | Minimal |
| 3 | Limited – Significant Improvements required | Of Concern | Moderate | Moderate |
| 4 | No Assurance – Fundamental weaknesses identified. | Significant | Of Concern | Moderate |

Therefore, having regards to the reviews completed so far to-date and the overall opinions given, my overall opinion is the Council's overall internal control arrangements are considered to be **reasonable**, resulting in a “**minimal**” level of risk.

Internal Audit - Successes

Some of our successes so far this year include:

- Internal Audit Plans for 2015/16 have been approved by both Audit Committees and Corporate Management in a timely manner.
- We continue to provide an excellent internal audit provision to both Bridgend County Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council, so much so that both Audit Committees have supported the proposal to extend the Shared Service Partnership Agreement for a further two years until 31st January 2018; which has been approved by both Cabinets.
- We continue to support staff in obtaining professional qualification including CIPFA - Corporate Governance, Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) as well as continuing professional development (CPD).
- We continue to build on our excellent working relationship with Members, Chief Officers and staff within both Councils.

Resources, Qualifications and Experience

The Head of Internal Audit requires appropriate resources at their disposal to undertake sufficient work to offer an independent opinion on the Council's internal control environment. This is a fundamental part of the Council's governance arrangements. The Internal Audit Annual Plan was presented to the Audit Committee in April 2015; based on a provision of 1,296 productive days.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council leads the Bridgend and Vale Internal Audit Shared Service and provides all internal audit services to its partner Bridgend County Borough Council. As at the 1st April 2015 the staffing structure is listed in table 3 below.

Table 3

| 2015-16 Staffing Structure | FTE |
|---|-------------|
| Operational Manager Audit - Head of Audit | 1 |
| Principal Auditor | 2 |
| Group Auditor | 2 |
| Group Auditor (Information Systems) | 1 |
| Auditor (2.5 posts are vacant at present) | 10 |
| Trainee Auditor | 1 |
| Trainee Auditor (Information Systems) | 1 |
| Administrative Assistant | 0.5 |
| Total | 18.5 |

The total resource of 18.5 Full Time Equivalents (FTE's) provides for a comprehensive Internal Audit Service. The Head of Audit aims to achieve best practice but continues to take account of the issues of affordability at a time when both Councils are looking to make substantial reductions in costs. The service has already been vastly streamlined and continues to apply lean auditing risk based methodologies to its plan of work. At the commencement of this financial year the Section is carrying 2.5 vacant posts.

In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards; the Head of Audit must ensure that Internal Auditors possess the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to perform their individual responsibilities. Internal Auditors are therefore encouraged to study for and obtain professional qualifications. In addition, it is a requirement of the standard that the Head of Audit must hold a professional qualification and be suitably experienced. The following information outlined in table 4 below demonstrates the experience and qualification mix for the Internal Audit Shared Service.

Experience and Qualifications

Table 4

| No of Years Experience | Auditing | % | In Local Government | % | Professional Qualifications | No of Staff. |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|---------------------|-------|--|--------------|
| Up to 1 year | 0 | | 0 | | Accountants (CIPFA; FCCA; ICAEW) | 3 |
| 1 to 2 years | 1 | 6.25 | 1 | 6.25 | Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) | 1 |
| 2 to 5 years | 5 | 31.25 | 3 | 18.15 | Institute of Internal Auditors – full membership | 1 |
| 5 to 10 years | 5 | 31.25 | 8 | 50 | Institute of Internal Auditors – practitioner level; part qualified or audit certificate | 2 |
| Over 10 years | 5 | 31.25 | 4 | 25 | Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) | 2 |
| | | | | | Part Qualified AAT | 3 |
| | | | | | Studying (CISA, AAT, IIA, CIPFA etc.) | 4 |
| Total Staff | 16 | | 16 | | Total | 16 |

All staff are encouraged to attend relevant courses and seminars to support their continual professional development. All staff have the opportunity to attend courses run by the Welsh Chief Auditors Group on a diverse range of topics. Individuals keep records of their continuing professional development based on their professional body requirements.

Internal Audit – Other Activities

- **Anti-Fraud** – the Internal Audit Shared Service continues to assist in promoting an anti-fraud and corruption culture.
- **National Fraud Initiative** – The Council, via Internal Audit, has again participated in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) as part of the statutory external audit requirements. This brings together data from across the public sector including local authorities, NHS, other government departments and other agencies to detect “matches” i.e. anomalies in the data which may or may not be indicative of fraud, for further investigation.

- **Advice and Guidance** – Internal Audit continues to provide advice and guidance both during the course of audits and responding to a wide range of ad-hoc queries.
- **Attendance at and contribution to, working groups etc.**, The Section continues to contribute to the development of the Council and ensuring that we are up to date with best practice by attending the following:-
 - Audit Committee;
 - Scrutiny Committees (as required);
 - Cabinet (as required);
 - Corporate Management Board / Team (as required);
 - The Welsh Chief Auditors Group and all its sub-groups (including South Wales Computer Audit Group; South East Education Audit Group; Social Services Audit Group).
- **Investigation Work** – We continue to support Senior Management in providing resources and expertise in investigating allegations of fraud and misappropriation.

Internal Audit – Review of Performance Management and Quality Assurance Framework

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards requires that the Head of Internal Audit develops and maintains a quality assurance and improvement programme that covers all aspects of the internal audit activity. The section has a “Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) that has been presented to, and approved by, the Audit Committee.

1. **Performance Management** – the section’s key performance indicators are set out in the section below.
2. **Quality Assurance** – each individual audit report and supporting working papers / documents are reviewed by either a Principal Auditor or the Head of Audit. Appropriate standards have been set by the Head of Internal Audit in accordance with the Standards. The file reviews ensure the audits comply with the Section’s internal processes and procedures and the overall Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Where necessary corrective action is taken.

Internal Audit – Performance Indicators

The Section has one key indicator as follows:

- **The Percentage of Audits Completed in Planned Time**

Justification of this performance indicator: to ensure that Internal Audit provides sufficient coverage to ensure that the requirements of the Council's Section 151 Officer and External Audit are met and that Internal Audit can give sufficient assurance to the Audit Committee regarding the Council's system of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Full Year Target: 89.6% | April to August 2015 Achievement: 80% Vale 75% BCBC |
|--------------------------------|--|

Therefore due to the small number of audits completed in quarter 1 the target has not been met but this will be addressed during the year. ☹

The Audit Committee and the Internal Audit Shared Service Board will be kept informed of progress against the audit plan throughout the year. The Section has started the year with 2.5 vacant posts.

The Section also participates annually in the Welsh Chief Auditors Group benchmarking exercise. The results for 2014/15 have only just been published and are as follows:

| Performance Indicator 2014/2015 | IASS Performance For the BCBC | Overall Average Performance 2014/15 | Overall Average Performance 2013/14 |
|---|--|--|--|
| Percentage of Planned Audits Completed | 98% | 84% | 80% |
| Number of Audits Completed | 113 | 111 | 126 |
| Percentage of Audits Completed in Planned Time | 89% | 71% | 71% |
| Percentage of directly chargeable time, actual versus planned | 94% | 88% | 94% |
| Average number of days from audit closing meeting to issue of draft report. | 9 days | 8.2 days | 9.5 days |
| % of staff leaving during the Financial Year | 10% | 11% | 22% |

As can be seen from the table above, the Section is performing well. This, together with our overall performance indicators for the service provided to the Vale of Glamorgan Council places us once again in the top quartile.

Governance Arrangements

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and cultures and values, by which the Council is directed and controls its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

Good Governance is about doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable way.

Bridgend County Borough Council is committed to the principles of good governance and as a result has adopted a formal Code of Corporate Governance (COCG) for the last five years. The Code of Governance is based upon the six principles as defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and incorporates the “Making the Connections” governance principles and values as set out by the Welsh Government.

The COCG also makes provision for a joint commitment by Members and Officers to the principles it contains, as well as a statement of assurance jointly signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. This helps to ensure that the principles of good governance are not only fully embedded but also cascade through the Council and have the full backing of the Leader of the Council and elected Members, as well as the Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Board. The work of the Internal Audit Shared Service represents a fundamental function in delivering the Council’s Corporate Governance responsibilities.

The Council has proactively responded to central government’s austerity drive that has created a period of unprecedented financial pressures in the public sector. Substantial savings are necessary and the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy estimates this to be in the region of £50million for the next four years on top of the £11.2million already identified for 2014/15.

As stated earlier in the report, based on the work underway and completed by Internal Audit for the period April to August 2015; no significant control issues have been identified. It is clear that the scale of the challenges to come will mean that “business as usual”, however well managed, will not be enough. The challenge will be to consider alternative delivery models for services across the Council and this will be essential to mitigate the impact of cuts and assist in continuing to provide priority services. Therefore, as the Council

continues to experience reduced resources, increased demands on services and new and innovative forms of delivery; there is a need to ensure that the control environment; including governance and risk management; remains robust, proportionate and is as efficient and effective as possible.