

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Draft Internal Audit Strategy

2025-2028

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the Internal Audit Strategy is to enable the Internal Audit Service to effectively prioritise its resources and focus on meeting the expectations of stakeholders, enhancing and protecting the Council's strategic objectives and values by providing risk based and objective assurance, advice, insight and foresight.
- 1.2 An effective Internal Audit Strategy helps to guide the Internal Audit function towards fulfilling its mandate, providing valuable insights, and contributing to the organisation's success. This strategy will help Internal Audit deliver a focussed assurance programme ensuring that it remains proactive and forward looking. The strategy should enhance the arrangements for providing assurance to those charged with governance, the Audit Committee and management.
- 1.3 This strategy has been developed by considering the following:-
- The Council Plan 2025-30 and the Year Ahead Delivery Plan.
 - The requirements of the Global Internal Audit Standards (UK Public Sector).
 - The strategic risk register, to understand the risks faced by the Council and the controls in place to mitigate the risks.
 - An analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Internal Audit Service.
 - Feedback from stakeholders (the Audit Committee, Senior Leadership Team and Assistant Directors via an annual feedback questionnaire).
- 1.4 The Internal Audit Strategy will be reviewed every three years. However, if significant changes occur, such as updates to the Council Plan, shifts in stakeholder expectations, or new legislative requirements, the strategy will be revised more frequently. An annual review of progress against the actions in the strategy will be undertaken and reported to SLT and the Audit Committee.

2. Vision

- 2.1 The vision of the Internal Audit Service is to be recognised as:
- a professional, proactive, forward thinking trusted advisor.
 - a contributor towards organisational resilience with a focus on robust internal controls and effective risk management.
 - a value adding key component of the governance arrangements through delivery of assurance and advisory services with increasing use of a data driven approach.

3. Strategic Objectives and Initiatives

- 3.1 Our strategic objectives are designed to demonstrate how we will achieve our vision. These are supported by initiatives to deliver these in practice. The achievement of the initiatives will be included in the Quality Assurance and Improvement Action Plan which is reported to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.

Develop agile and data driven approaches to auditing

- 3.2 Internal Audit will embrace, develop and adopt the latest technologies and audit approaches across our work. This innovation will drive more efficient ways of working and be utilised as part of improving the impact of the advice and insights we provide to continuously increase quality and outcomes for the Council. This will enable the function to concentrate on key risks and provide services with more timely assurance in key risk areas.
- 3.3 Our innovative approach will embrace new technology, tools and techniques and will include:
- Maximising technological opportunities for more efficient audit planning, testing and reporting, including reviewing the future use of reporting dashboards to further increase our productivity.
 - Enhancing audit methodologies by integrating data analytics into most reviews, enabling deeper insights and broader risk coverage.
 - Implement automated testing and continuous auditing to support the development of real-time assurance.

Workforce planning and professional development

- 3.4 Our staff are our greatest asset. The age profile of the service is such that a key risk is the loss of team members through retirement. Succession planning is a priority that needs to be progressed over the period of this strategy.
- 3.5 In addition to succession planning, the team needs to continue to develop to ensure the effective delivery of Internal Audit services in the future. Forward thinking, adaptability and being receptive to change will be at the core of how the Internal Audit service develops and will involve being vigilant, recognising when change is on the horizon and being prepared to change, as necessary.
- 3.6 In accordance with Council policies and procedures, the following actions will be undertaken to future proof a high performing and resilient team:

- Review skills, ability, workforce profile and development requirements.
- Ensure team members have access to training and development opportunities to enhance and diversify the skill sets aligned to the needs of the Council and current developments within the profession.
- Take actions, wherever possible, on staff retention risks, undertake succession planning and review career pathways.
- Ensure recruitment approaches attract and secure quality staff.

Developing the assurance framework

3.7 The standards state that Internal Audit must coordinate with internal and external providers of assurance services and consider relying on their work. We recognise that Internal audit is one source of assurance and that further assurances from other providers exist and a mapping process would be of value to the Council.

3.8 The following will be undertaken to enhance the Council's assurance process:-

- grow the use of other sources of assurance and intelligence from within the Council, building strong working relationships with key service areas such as risk management, governance and business intelligence.
- Where feasible, utilise collaborative working opportunities with other assurance providers such as external auditors, external assessment teams and regulatory compliance teams. Utilise the assurances from external sources to provide insight and a rounded assessment of governance risk and control.
- Develop an assurance framework/map to provide a visual representation of the various sources of assurance across the key risks, controls and governance processes.

Strategic Action Plan 2025-28

Develop agile and data driven approaches to auditing		
Strategic Initiative	How this will be achieved	Timeframe
Maximising technological opportunities for more efficient audit planning, testing and reporting, including reviewing the future use of reporting dashboards to further increase our productivity.	Investigate and develop the use of Copilot and other tools to aid the planning, testing and reporting process.	2025/26
	Explore the potential use of a dashboard for audit reporting and seek stakeholder feedback.	2026/27
Enhancing audit methodologies by integrating data analytics into most reviews, enabling deeper insights and broader risk coverage.	Ensure the use of data analytics has been considered during each audit review. Where relevant make use of available data sets to provide assurance over the whole population rather than the traditional use of sample testing.	2025-26 and 2026-27
Implement automated testing and continuous auditing to support the development of real-time assurance.	Participate in data analytics Internal Audit groups and regional discussions to enhance knowledge and understanding of audit developments and techniques.	2026-27
	Enhance skills and knowledge through attendance on training and development events.	2025-26 and 2026-27
	Work with other service areas in the council for example the business and intelligence team to trial the use of data for continuous audit in key areas of risk, expenditure or potential fraud.	2026-27 and 2027-28

Workforce planning and professional development		
Strategic Initiative	How this will be achieved	Timeframe
Review skills, capability, workforce profile and development requirements.	Review the results of the audit team self assessment against the audit skills matrix and My Year Ahead Development Plan, and identify areas for common learning and development. Include these in the Audit Service Training Plan.	2025-26
Ensure team members have access to training and development opportunities to enhance and diversify the skill sets aligned to the needs of the Council and current developments within the profession.	Ensure that we have up to date awareness of current training available for auditors on topical subject areas through auditor sub group attendance and active scanning of relevant websites.	2025-26
	Identify and provide opportunities for specialist training/knowledge for staff to minimise gaps, for example anti fraud/investigations, data analysis and AI.	2025-28
Take actions, wherever possible, on staff retention risks, undertake succession planning and review career pathways.	Review staff development plans and provide opportunities for staff seeking progression to learn from others in the team (eg peer reviews, investigations).	2025-28
	Review the current career pathways for staff within the service and the potential for apprenticeships/qualification routes.	2025-26
Ensure recruitment approaches attract and secure quality staff.	Work with HR to ensure that any roles advertised are on a comparable basis to those of our closest neighbours. Ensure any roles advertised reach school/college/university leavers and the	TBC When advertised

	application/interview process is consistent with those of a similar grade within the council.	
Developing the assurance framework		
Grow the use of other sources of assurance and intelligence from within the Council, building strong working relationships with key service areas such as risk management, governance and business intelligence.	Engage with risk management, governance and business intelligence colleagues to enhance understanding of current sources of assurance (both internal assurance providers and external).	2026/27
Where feasible, utilise collaborative working opportunities with other assurance providers such as external auditors, external assessment teams and regulatory compliance teams. Utilise the assurances from external sources to provide insight and a rounded assessment of governance, risk and control.	<p>Identify key external assurance providers and reporting mechanisms into the Council. Review external assurance outputs and review opportunities for collaborative working.</p> <p>Further integrate the assurance into audit planning in 2026/27 and future years.</p>	2026-27
Develop an assurance framework/map to provide a visual representation of the various sources of assurance across the key risks, controls and governance processes.	<p>Create an assurance framework/map that can be continuously updated and refined. The use of a dashboard to track assurance sources and their effectiveness will be considered.</p> <p>Investigate the use tools such as PowerBi or Excel dashboards to visualise assurance coverage and apply data analytics to identify trends and emerging risks.</p>	2027-28