



ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Internal Audit Strategy 2023/24

Presented at the Audit Committee meeting of: 28 March 2023

This report is solely for the use of the persons to whom it is addressed.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP will accept no responsibility or liability in respect of this report to any other party.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparing our Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24 we have worked closely with management to produce an audit programme which remains mindful of the continuing developments and challenges around Covid-19. Whilst this plan is presented for consideration by the Audit and Governance Committee, we will continue to hold regular meetings with management during the year, to deliver an internal audit programme which remains flexible and 'agile' to ensure it meets your needs in these ever changing circumstances.

The key points to note from our plan are:



2023/24 Internal Audit priorities: Internal audit activity for 2023/24 is based on analysing your corporate objectives, risk profile and assurance framework as well as other factors affecting you in the year ahead, including changes within the sector. Our detailed plan for 2023/24 is included at Section 1.



Level of Resource: The level of resource required to deliver the plan is consistent with the rates within our contract with you. We will continue with our approach of introducing the use of technology when undertaking our operational audits. In recent years, we embraced more ways of using technology to undertake our audit work including; the use of 4questionnaires, MS Teams meetings, secure web portals for audit data sharing (Huddle) and data analytics technology. This will strengthen our sampling and focus our audit testing. Refer to Appendix A.



Core Assurance: At the request of management and detailed in section 1, the areas for consideration are broadly in line with prior years in a number of areas where core assurance reviews have been requested over a number of key areas. In particular, we have included audits on **Information governance/GDPR, Corporate Risk Management Planning** and **Sickness Absence Management**. We have also included coverage on an area of Key Financial Controls and we have been requested to undertake a further review of Cyber Security. Six of the reviews in 2023/24 have been directly driven by risks on the strategic risk register.



'Agile' approach: Our approach to working with you has always been one where we will respond to your changing assurance needs. By employing 'agile' or a 'flexible' approach to our service delivery, we are able to change the focus of audits / audit delivery; keeping you informed of these changes in our progress papers to Audit & Governance Committee during the year.

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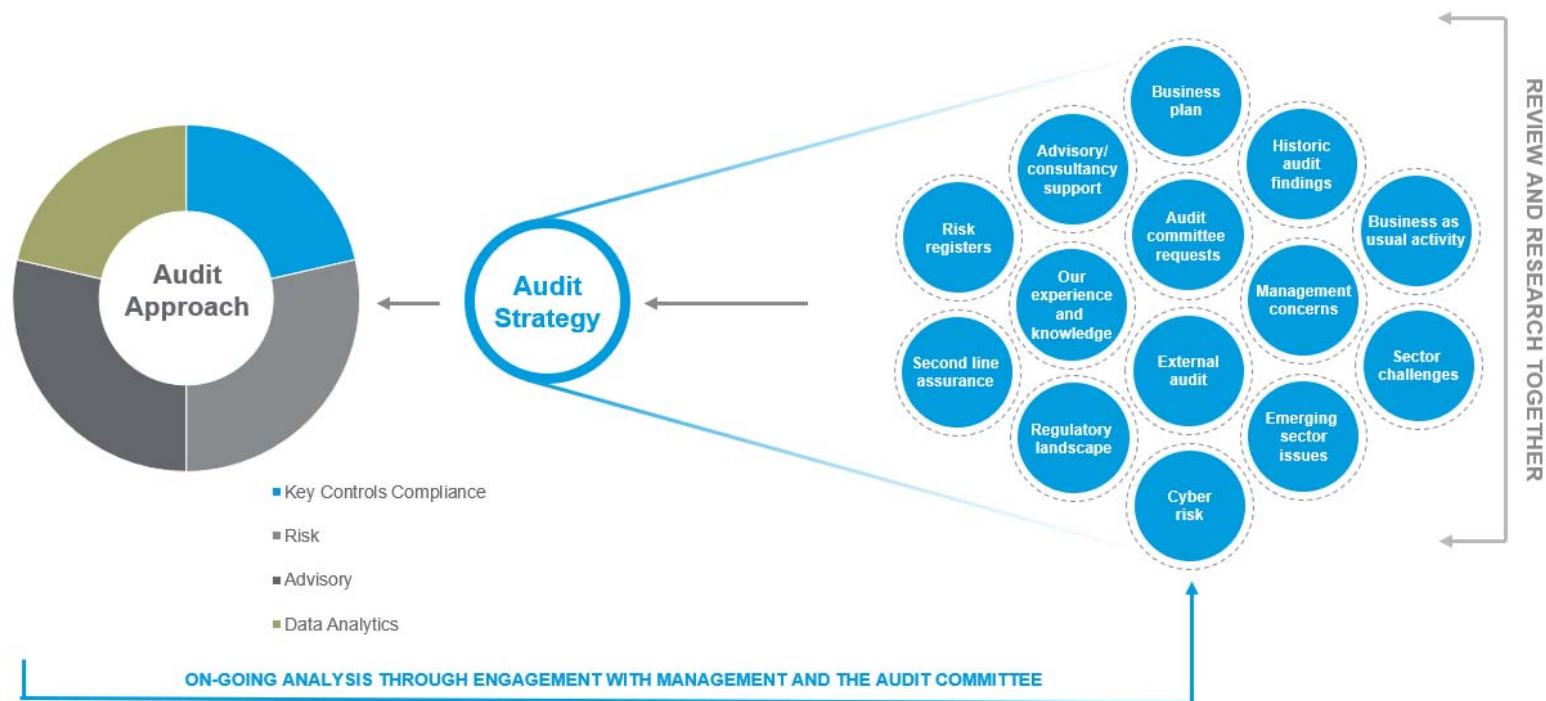
1. YOUR INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2023/24

Our approach to developing your internal audit plan is based on analysing your corporate objectives, risk profile and assurance framework as well as other, factors affecting Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service in the year ahead, including changes within the sector.

Risk management processes

We have evaluated your risk management processes and consider that we can place reliance on your strategic risk register to inform the internal audit strategy. We have used various sources of information (see Figure A below) and discussed priorities for internal audit coverage with senior management who have indicated a preference to continue to review areas of key concern which are detailed in section 2 which follow a similar theme with prior years

Figure A: Audit considerations – sources considered when developing the Internal Audit Strategy.



Based on our understanding of the organisation, the information provided to us by stakeholders, and the regulatory requirements, we have developed an annual internal plan for the coming year and a high level strategic plan (see Section 2 and Appendix B for full details).

2. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2023/24

The table below shows each of the reviews that we propose to undertake as part of the internal audit plan for 2023/24. The table details the strategic risks / strategic objectives which may warrant internal audit coverage. This review of your risks allows us to ensure that the proposed plan will meet the organisation's assurance needs for the forthcoming and future years. As well as assignments designed to provide assurance or advisory input around specific risks, the strategy also includes: time for tracking the implementation of actions and an audit management allocation.

	Audit approach	Fee	Proposed timing	Proposed Audit & Governance Committee
Corporate Risk: Management of Cyber Security				
Cyber Essentials Our audit would allow the Service to understand whether a robust control framework in relation to cyber security has been put in place. We would utilise our Technology Risk Assurance team and the exact scope will be agreed with the sponsor of the audit ahead of the fieldwork being completed. We will also follow up any management actions agreed as part of the 2022/23 audit in this area.	Advisory	£8,250	March 2024	July 2024
Corporate Risk: Management of Premises Risk Information				
Information Governance/GDPR We will review compliance with the GDPR requirements. Specific areas for coverage to be agreed at the time of detailed scoping. We will utilise our specialist Technology Risk Assurance team to undertake this review.	Advisory	£7,050	August 2023	January 2024
Corporate Risk Management Plan Review of the Corporate Risk Management Planning Framework and Service reporting structure in place to approve and monitor the Plan. We will also look at a sample of assumptions which will be agreed at the scoping stage. As part of our audit we will assess the clarity of the framework and reporting structure to ensure roles and responsibilities have been defined and are being effectively discharged through the Service reporting structure.	Risk based	£5,000	August 2023	January 2024
Risk Management and Governance In order to comply with public sector internal audit standards, and to facilitate RSM's annual Head of Internal Audit opinion on risk management and governance, RSM will undertake the following:	Risk based	£5,000	March 2024	July 2024

	Audit approach	Fee	Proposed timing	Proposed Audit & Governance Committee
Risk Management:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep dive on a sample of risks to challenge controls, assessments, assurances and actions recorded within the risk register to ensure that reflect operating practice. Follow up of prior year actions 				
Governance (coverage tbc but could include one of the following areas):				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business / Strategic Planning Key Performance Indicators Performance Management 				
Service Plan Risk: Pensions Governance				
Firefighter Pension Administration (WYPF)	Risk based	£5,000	November 2023	January 2024
A review of the Fire Authorities pension provider 'West Yorkshire Pension Fund', to allow the service to take assurance that WYPF have adequate processes and controls in place to process Firefighter pensions.				
Service Plan Risk: TVFCS Staffing Resilience				
Sickness Absence Management	Risk based	£5,000	July 2023	October 2023
To review the policies and procedures in place in relation to sickness absence management (& use of analytics) and the compliance with these, this will include short and long term, in addition to how trigger points and trends are identified and managed. As part of our audit, we will use data analytics to support identification of our sample testing.				
Core Assurance				
Payroll Provider – Dataplan	Key controls	£5,000	November 2023	January 2024
A review of the Fire Authorities payroll provider 'Dataplan', to allow the service to take assurance that Dataplan have adequate processes and controls in place to process the payroll.				
Key Financial Controls	Key controls	£5,500	January 2024	March 2024
In prior years, RSM has conducted a high-level review across a number of KFC areas. We will in future undertake a deep dive of one / two of the areas on a cyclical basis.				

		Audit approach	Fee	Proposed timing	Proposed Audit & Governance Committee
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General ledger (2023/24) • Cash, bank and treasury management (2023/24) • Payroll • Payments and creditors – 2019/20 • Income and debtors - 2022/23 • Asset Management • Annual Pension Return – 2020/21 • Creditors – 2021/22 • Expenses - 2022/23 				
Other Internal Audit Activity					
Follow Up	To meet internal auditing standards, and to provide assurance on action taken to address recommendations previously agreed by management.	N/A		The fees and timings will be included within the internal audit reviews noted above	
Management	This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual planning • Preparation for, and attendance at, audit committee • Regular liaison and progress updates • Liaison with external audit and other assurance providers • Preparation of the annual opinion 	N/A	£7,550	Ongoing	Ongoing

A detailed planning process will be completed for each review, and the final scope will be documented in an Assignment Planning Sheet. This will be issued to the key stakeholders for each review.

2.1 Working with other assurance providers

The Audit & Governance Committee is reminded that internal audit is only one source of assurance and through the delivery of our plan we will not, and do not, seek to cover all risks and processes within the organisation. We will however continue to work closely with other assurance providers, such as external audit and HMICFRS to ensure that duplication is minimised, and a suitable breadth of assurance obtained.

APPENDIX A) YOUR INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

Your internal audit service is provided by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP. The team will be led by Dan Harris as your Head of Internal Audit, supported by Zoe Hibbert as your client manager.

Fees

Our fee to deliver the plan is £53,350 (excluding VAT).

Core team

The delivery of the 2023/24 audit plan will be based around a core team. However, we will complement the team with additional specialist skills where required.

Conformance with internal auditing standards

RSM affirms that our internal audit services are designed to conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Under PSIAS, internal audit services are required to have an external quality assessment every five years. Our risk assurance service line commissioned an external independent review of our internal audit services in 2021 to provide assurance whether our approach meets the requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), and the Internal Audit Code of Practice, as published by the Global Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the Chartered IIA, on which PSIAS is based.

The external review concluded that RSM 'generally conforms*' to the requirements of the IIA Standards' and that 'RSM IA also generally conforms with the other Professional Standards and the IIA Code of Ethics. There were no instances of non-conformance with any of the Professional Standards'.

*The rating of 'generally conforms' is the highest rating that can be achieved, in line with the IIA's EQA assessment model.

Conflicts of interest

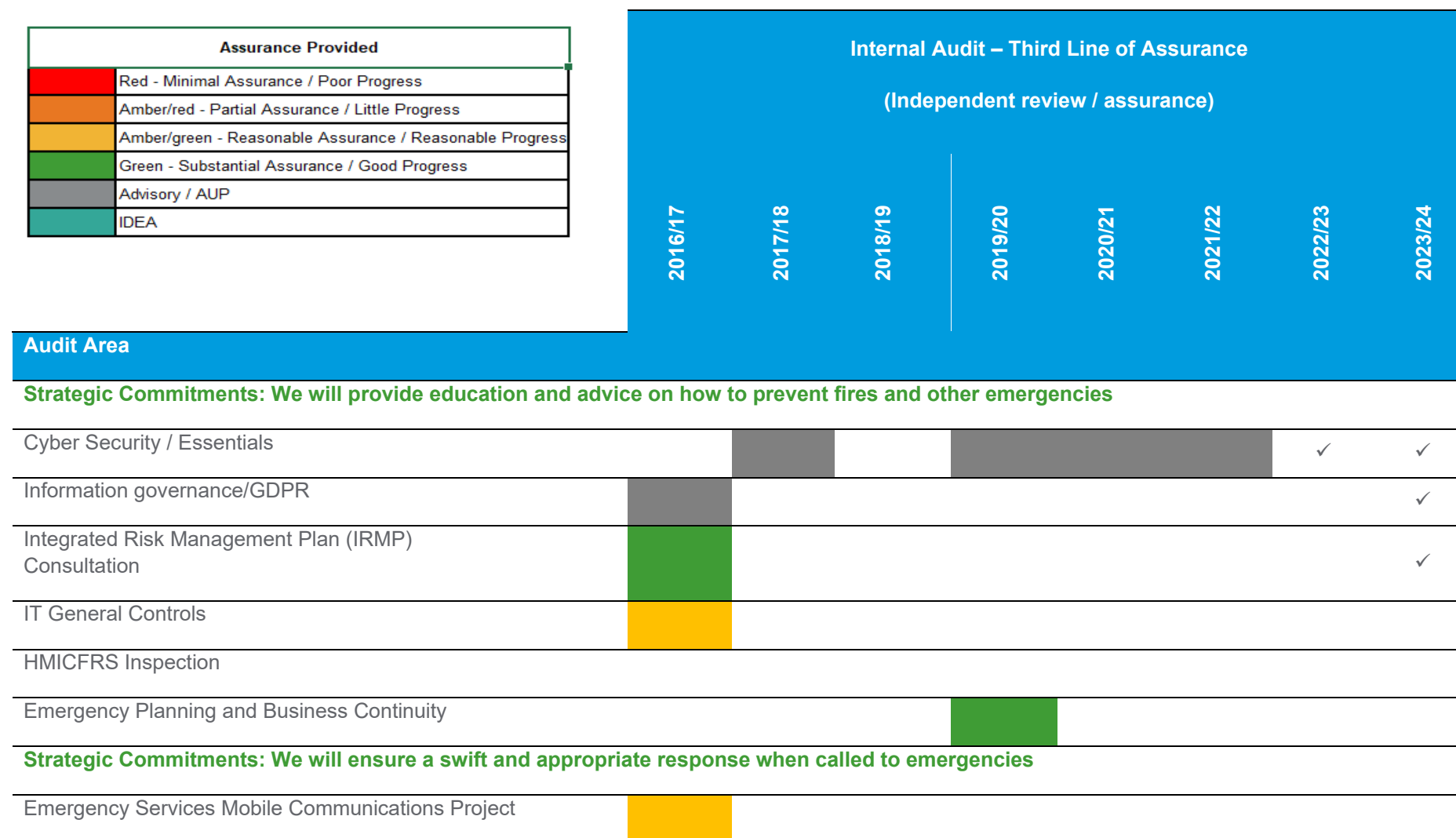
We are not aware of any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the team, and which are required to be disclosed under internal auditing standards.

Corporate responsibility

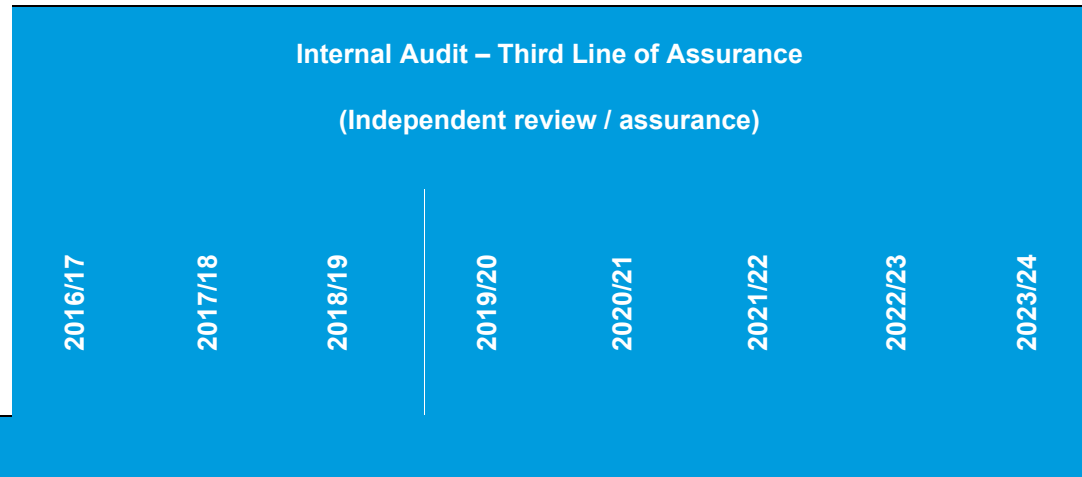
At RSM we believe it is our responsibility to positively impact on our society and the environment. We have three pillars of corporate responsibility: environment, charity and community. For more details on RSM's commitment visit our website: [Corporate responsibility | RSM UK](#).

APPENDIX B) INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY 2023/24

The table below shows an overview of the audit coverage to be provided through RSM's delivery of the internal audit strategy. This has been derived from the process outlined in Section 1 above, as well as our own view of the risks facing the sector as a whole.



Assurance Provided	
	Red - Minimal Assurance / Poor Progress
	Amber/red - Partial Assurance / Little Progress
	Amber/green - Reasonable Assurance / Reasonable Progress
	Green - Substantial Assurance / Good Progress
	Advisory / AUP
	IDEA



Audit Area

Vehicle Disposals

Fleet / Transport Management

Strategic Commitments: We will provide advice, consultation and enforcement in relation to fire safety standards in buildings

Facilities / Estates Management

Grenfell Action Plans

Capital Investment Strategy

Capital Projects

Strategic Commitments: We will seek opportunities to contribute to broader safety, health and wellbeing agenda, whilst delivering our core functions

Health and Safety

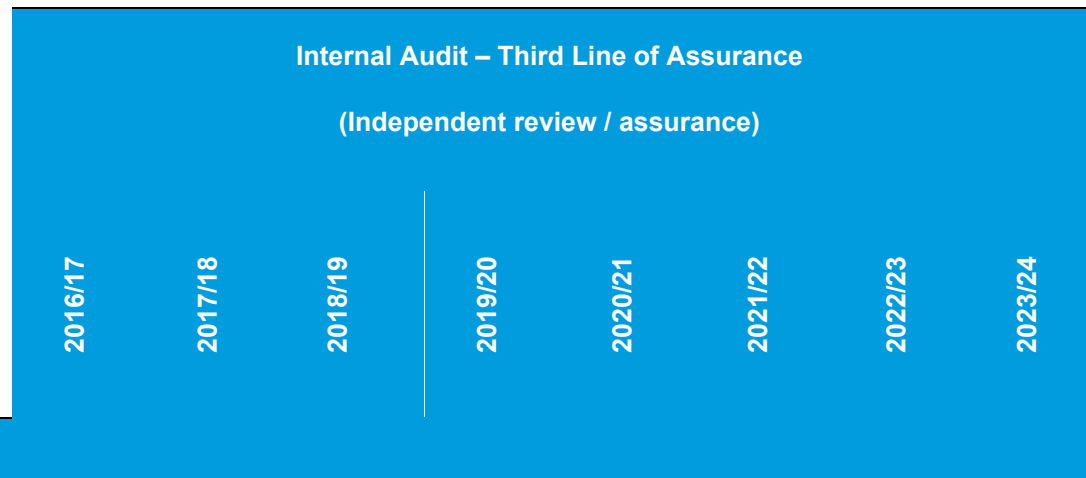
HR – Recruitment

Sickness Absence Management

Performance Management (Hub Model)

✓

Assurance Provided	
	Red - Minimal Assurance / Poor Progress
	Amber/red - Partial Assurance / Little Progress
	Amber/green - Reasonable Assurance / Reasonable Progress
	Green - Substantial Assurance / Good Progress
	Advisory / AUP
	IDEA



Audit Area

Performance Development Reviews

Vetting

Strategic Commitments: We will ensure that RBFRS provides good value for money

Key Financial Controls										✓	
Fire Fighter Pension Administration											✓
Payroll Provider – Dataplan				Follow up – Good progress							✓
Procurement											
Timesheet and Timekeeping											
Financial Planning / Long Term Budgeting											
Value for Money											
Core Assurance											
Risk Management & Governance											✓ ✓
Follow Up (Included within individual audits)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

APPENDIX C) INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

Need for the charter

This charter establishes the purpose, authority and responsibilities for the internal audit service for Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service. The establishment of a charter is a requirement of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and approval of the charter is the responsibility of the audit committee.

The internal audit service is provided by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP ("RSM").

We plan and perform our internal audit work with a view to reviewing and evaluating the risk management, control and governance arrangements that the organisation has in place, focusing in particular on how these arrangements help you to achieve its objectives. The internal audit function is required to comply with the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) as follows:

- Core principles for the professional practice of internal auditing;
- Definition of internal auditing;
- Code of ethics; and
- The Standards.

Mission of internal audit

As set out in the PSIAS, the mission articulates what internal audit aspires to accomplish within an organisation. Its place in the IPPF is deliberate, demonstrating how practitioners should leverage the entire framework to facilitate their ability to achieve the mission.

"To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight".

Independence and ethics

To provide for the independence of internal audit, its personnel report directly to Dan Harris (acting as your head of internal audit). The independence of RSM is assured by the internal audit service reporting to the chief executive, with further reporting lines to the Head of Finance and Procurement

Your head of internal audit Dan Harris has been in place for nine years. The Internal Audit Code of Practice as published by the Chartered IIA suggests that this is brought to the attention of the audit committee [or as appropriate] to review and confirm your assessment on the independence of your internal audit services. To assist the assessment; RSM is able to remain independent for the following reasons:

- As an outsourced provider of internal audit services to Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, independence is inherent in our delivery and audit methodology.

- Our internal auditors do not have any operational responsibilities across Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service.
- No member of the audit team is employed by Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service.
- The head of internal audit reports to the Chief Executive and Audit Committee chair [amend as appropriate].
- RSM methodology includes a second partner review (by another head of internal audit who does not work on Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service) of the annual plan, the year-end annual report and opinion.
- The Internal Audit Charter details our role and responsibilities and the authority we have which enables us to undertake our internal audit service.

You should explicitly state here if RSM provides any other services and explain how the conflict is managed

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The head of internal audit has unrestricted access to the chair of audit committee to whom all significant concerns relating to the adequacy and effectiveness of risk management activities, internal control and governance are reported.

Conflicts of interest may arise where RSM provides services other than internal audit to Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service. Steps will be taken to avoid or manage transparently and openly such conflicts of interest so that there is no real or perceived threat or impairment to independence in providing the internal audit service. If a potential conflict arises through the provision of other services, disclosure will be reported to the audit committee. The nature of the disclosure will depend upon the potential impairment and it is important that our role does not appear to be compromised in reporting the matter to the audit committee. Equally we do not want the organisation to be deprived of wider RSM expertise and will therefore raise awareness without compromising our independence.

Responsibilities

In providing your outsourced internal audit service, RSM has a responsibility to:

- Develop a flexible and risk based internal audit strategy with more detailed annual audit plans. The plan will be submitted to the audit committee for review and approval each year before work commences on delivery of that plan.
- Implement the internal audit plan as approved, including any additional tasks requested by management and the audit committee.
- Ensure the internal audit team consists of professional audit staff with sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience.
- Establish a quality assurance and improvement program to ensure the quality and effective operation of internal audit activities.
- Perform advisory activities where appropriate, beyond internal audit's assurance services, to assist management in meeting its objectives.

- Bring a systematic disciplined approach to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of risk management, internal control and governance processes.
- Highlight control weaknesses and required associated improvements together with corrective action recommended to management based on an acceptable and practicable timeframe.
- Undertake follow up reviews to ensure management has implemented agreed internal control improvements within specified and agreed timeframes.
- Report regularly to the audit committee to demonstrate the performance of the internal audit service.

For clarity, we have included the definition of 'internal audit', 'senior management' and 'board'.

- Internal audit – a department, division, team of consultant, or other practitioner (s) that provides independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. The internal audit activity helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes.
- Senior management who are the team of individuals at the highest level of organisational management who have the day-to-day responsibilities for managing the organisation.
- Board of governors - The highest level governing body charged with the responsibility to direct and/or oversee the organisation's activities and hold organisational management accountable. Furthermore, "board" may refer to a committee or another body to which the governing body has delegated certain functions (eg an audit committee).

Client care standards

In delivering our services we require full cooperation from key stakeholders and relevant business areas to ensure a smooth delivery of the plan. We proposed the following KPIs for monitoring the delivery of the internal audit service:

- Discussions with senior staff at the client take place to confirm the scope six weeks before the agreed audit start date.
- Key information such as: the draft assignment planning sheet are issued by RSM to the key auditee six weeks before the agreed start date.
- The lead auditor to contact the client to confirm logistical arrangements at least 15 working days before the commencement of the audit fieldwork to confirm practical arrangements, appointments, debrief date etc.
- Fieldwork takes place on agreed dates with key issues flagged up immediately.
- A debrief meeting will be held with audit sponsor at the end of fieldwork or within a reasonable time frame.
- Draft reports will be issued within 10 working days of the debrief meeting and will be issued by RSM to the agreed distribution list / Huddle.

- Management responses to the draft report should be submitted to RSM.
- Within three working days of receipt of client responses the final report will be issued by RSM to the assignment sponsor and any other agreed recipients of the report.

Authority

The internal audit team is authorised to:

- Have unrestricted access to all functions, records, property and personnel which it considers necessary to fulfil its function.
- Have full and free access to the audit committee.
- Allocate resources, set timeframes, define review areas, develop scopes of work and apply techniques to accomplish the overall internal audit objectives.
- Obtain the required assistance from personnel within the organisation where audits will be performed, including other specialised services from within or outside the organisation.

The head of internal audit and internal audit staff are not authorised to:

- Perform any operational duties associated with the organisation.
- Initiate or approve accounting transactions on behalf of the organisation.
- Direct the activities of any employee not employed by RSM unless specifically seconded to internal audit.

Reporting

An assignment report will be issued following each internal audit assignment. The report will be issued in draft for comment by management, and then issued as a final report to management, with the executive summary being provided to the audit committee. The final report will contain an action plan agreed with management to address any weaknesses identified by internal audit.

The internal audit service will issue progress reports to the audit committee and management summarising outcomes of audit activities, including follow up reviews.

As your internal audit provider, the assignment opinions that RSM provides the organisation during the year are part of the framework of assurances that assist the board in taking decisions and managing its risks.

As the provider of the internal audit service we are required to provide an annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management and control arrangements. In giving our opinion it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The most that the internal audit service can provide to the board is a reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in risk management, governance and control processes. The annual opinion will be provided to the organisation by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP at the financial year end. The results of internal audit reviews, and the annual opinion, should be used by management and the Board to inform the organisation's annual governance statement.

Data protection

Internal audit files need to include sufficient, reliable, relevant and useful evidence in order to support our findings and conclusions. Personal data is not shared with unauthorised persons unless there is a valid and lawful requirement to do so. We are authorised as providers of internal audit services to our clients (through the firm's terms of business and our engagement letter) to have access to all necessary documentation from our clients needed to carry out our duties.

Quality Assurance and Improvement

As your external service provider of internal audit services, we have the responsibility for maintaining an effective internal audit activity. Under the standards, internal audit services are required to have an external quality assessment every five years. In addition to this, we also have in place an internal quality assurance and improvement programme, led by a dedicated team who undertake these reviews. This ensures continuous improvement of our internal audit services.

Any areas which we believe warrant bringing to your attention, which may have the potential to have an impact on the quality of the service we provide to you, will be raised in our progress reports to the audit committee.

Fraud

The audit committee recognises that management is responsible for controls to reasonably prevent and detect fraud. Furthermore, the audit committee recognises that internal audit is not responsible for identifying fraud; however internal audit will be aware of the risk of fraud when planning and undertaking any assignments.

Approval of the internal audit charter

By approving this document, the internal audit strategy, the audit committee is also approving the internal audit charter.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

Dan Harris

Daniel.Harris@rsmuk.com

+44 1908 687915

Zoe Hibbert

Zoe.Hibbert@rsmuk.com

+44 1245 454106

rsmuk.com

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during the course of our review and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made. Actions for improvements should be assessed by you for their full impact. This report, or our work, should not be taken as a substitute for management's responsibilities for the application of sound commercial practices. We emphasise that the responsibility for a sound system of internal controls rests with management and our work should not be relied upon to identify all strengths and weaknesses that may exist. Neither should our work be relied upon to identify all circumstances of fraud and irregularity should there be any.

Our report is prepared solely for the confidential use of Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, and solely for the purposes set out herein. This report should not therefore be regarded as suitable to be used or relied on by any other party wishing to acquire any rights from RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP for any purpose or in any context. Any third party which obtains access to this report or a copy and chooses to rely on it (or any part of it) will do so at its own risk. To the fullest extent permitted by law, RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP will accept no responsibility or liability in respect of this report to any other party and shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense of whatsoever nature which is caused by any person's reliance on representations in this report.

This report is released to you on the basis that it shall not be copied, referred to or disclosed, in whole or in part (save as otherwise permitted by agreed written terms), without our prior written consent.

We have no responsibility to update this report for events and circumstances occurring after the date of this report.

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