

Annual Internal Audit Opinion 2019/20

Blackpool Council



Annual Internal Audit Opinion

Introduction

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) note that a professional, independent and objective internal audit service is one of the key elements of good governance, as recognised throughout the UK public sector. The role of the Head of Audit and Risk, in accordance with the PSIAS, is to provide an annual opinion, based upon (and limited to) the work performed, on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management and control processes (i.e. the organisation's system of internal control). This is achieved through a risk-based plan of work, agreed with the Corporate Leadership Team and approved by the Audit Committee, which should provide a reasonable level of assurance, subject to the inherent limitations described in this report.

The CIPFA Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government noted that the Head of Internal Audit in a local authority plays a critical role in delivering the authority's strategic objectives by:

- 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; and
- Giving an objective and evidence based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Head of Audit and Risk's Annual Audit Opinion does not imply that internal audit has reviewed all risks and assurances relating to the Council. The purpose of the opinion is to contribute to the assurances available to the Council which underpin the Council's own assessment of the effectiveness of the organisation's governance arrangements and system of internal control. The Head of Audit and Risk's opinion is one component that the Council takes into account when compiling its Annual Governance Statement. In particular, apart from the overall opinion, where limited or inadequate assurance opinions have been issued against individual audits, or where critical or high risk priority recommendations have been made in consultancy reviews, then the Council should assess whether or not the sources of those opinions / recommendations necessitate the need for a disclosure of a significant issue.

The Council is accountable collectively for maintaining a sound system of internal controls and is responsible for putting in place arrangements for gaining assurance about the effectiveness of that overall system. The Annual Governance Statement is an annual statement by the Council setting out:

- How the responsibilities of the Council are discharged, with regard to maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of policies, aims and objectives;
- The purpose of the governance arrangements as evidenced by a description of the risk management and review processes; and
- The conduct and results of the review of effectiveness of the system of internal control, including any disclosures of significant control failures, together with assurances that actions are or will be taken where appropriate to address issues arising.

Annual Internal Audit Opinion

The Council's framework of assurance should bring together all of the evidence required to support the Annual Governance Statement.

Head of Audit and Risk Opinion

The Head of Audit and Risk Annual Audit Opinion is that:

Annual Audit Opinion 2019/20

The Head of Audit and Risk is satisfied that sufficient assurance work has been carried out to allow the provision of a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of Blackpool Council's internal control environment.

The opinion of the Head of Audit and Risk is that the overall control environment of the Council is adequate, however recognises that there are significant issues faced by Children's Services as identified in the OFSTED report and ongoing overspends which need to be addressed.

The Covid-19 pandemic also impacted on the control environment in March 2020 and this will continue to be monitored during 2020/21 and steps taken to manage risk as effectively as possible given the challenging circumstances.

Where weaknesses have been identified through internal audit work the team has worked with management to agree appropriate remedial actions and a timescale for improvement. This is particularly relevant in high risk areas where innovative solutions are being implemented to support the future sustainability.

Basis of the Opinion

Blackpool Council's Head of Audit and Risk is responsible for the delivery of an annual audit opinion and report that can be used by the Council to inform its Annual Governance Statement. The annual opinion concludes on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control. In giving this opinion assurance can never be absolute and, therefore, only reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in the processes reviewed can be provided. In assessing the level of assurance to be given the opinion has been given based on:

- Internal audit assurance statements issued throughout the year as part of the annual audit plan.
- Reports provided as a result of advice / consultancy work undertaken by the internal audit team.
- The implementation of recommendations made by internal audit linked to high risks throughout the year.
- The extent of resources available to deliver the annual internal audit plan.

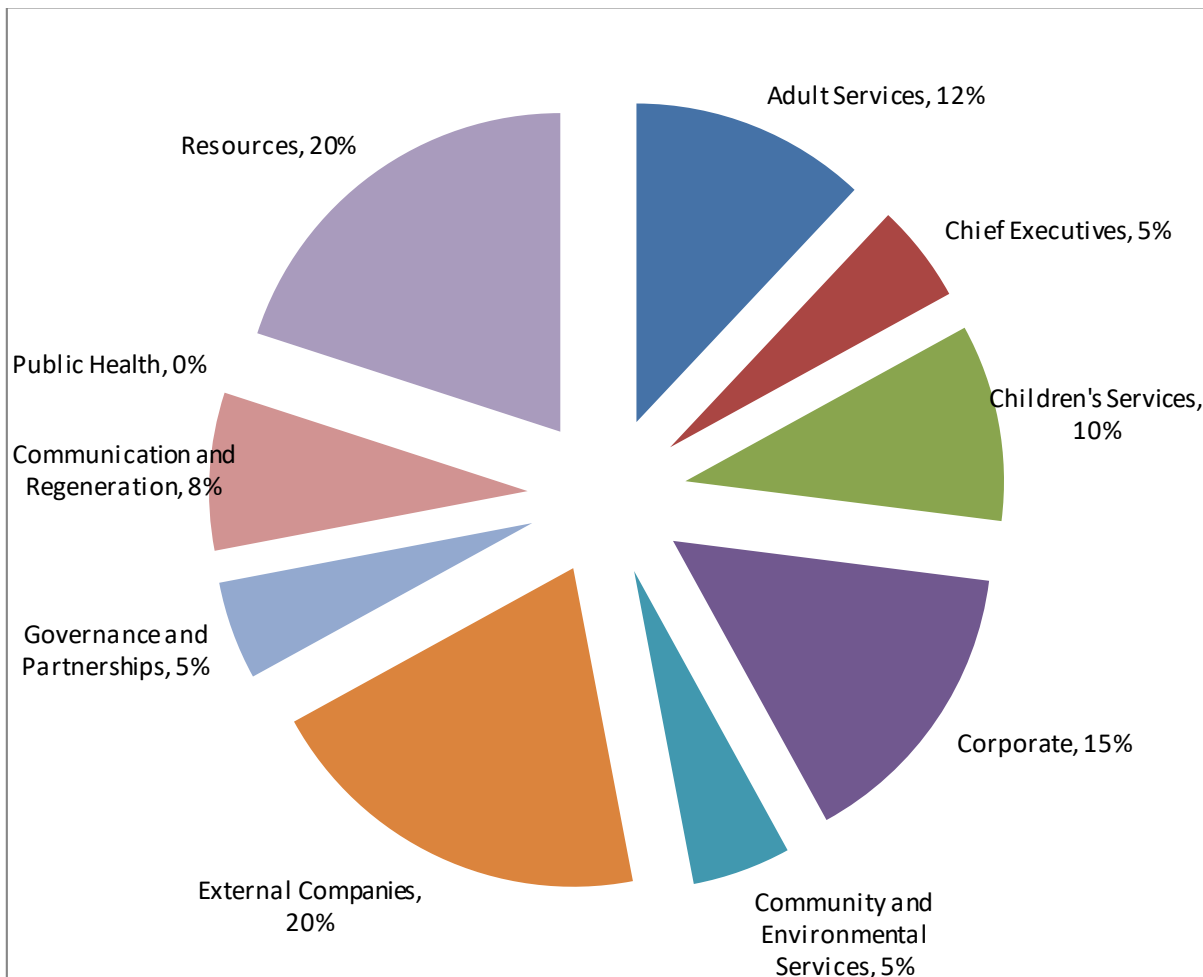
Annual Internal Audit Opinion

- The quality and performance of the internal audit service and the extent to which it complies with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- Whether the target for delivery of the internal audit plan has been achieved.
- The opinions of other review bodies where appropriate.

Internal Audit Coverage and Output

Planned Audit Work

The Annual Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20 was approved by the Corporate Leadership Team in February 2019 and Audit Committee in March 2019. The coverage of work, by directorate, for the audit plan completed, was as follows:



Annual Internal Audit Opinion

In terms of completed internal audits the level of assurance issued for each review is captured in the following table. This includes the assurance statements from reviews which were also started in 2018/19 but were not finalised until 2019/20.

Assurance Statement	Reviews
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Benefit Financial Control Assurance Testing Carbon Reduction Commitment Scheme
Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Years Financial System Detailed Follow-Up - Children's Payments Transformation Fund Payroll Financial Control Assurance Testing Volunteers Vitaline Advertising Business Support Leisure Centres Response to Brexit Layton Depot Management Organisational Culture Corporate Governance Creditor Payments Financial Control Assurance Testing Housing Rents Financial Control Assurance Testing Post OFSTED and YOT Inspection Governance Early Help Sustainability Client Finances Complaints Care at Home Children's Homes Moor Park Primary School Layton Primary School St John Vianney Primary School Holy Family RC Primary School Stanley Primary School
Split Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICT Security and Unstructured File Store Covert Surveillance Coopers Way Respite Service Extra Support Service Managing Leavers
Inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth and Prosperity Direct Payments Compliance with Corporate Arrangements

Annual Internal Audit Opinion

Assurance Statement	Reviews
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract Management and Social Value Non-Contracted ICT Software Water Self Supply
Uncontrolled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -

Any high risk areas identified in the year are given a priority one recommendation which is followed up by the Head of Audit and Risk. Where there is a failure to implement such a recommendation by the due date, without reasonable justification, a formal process of notification to the Corporate Leadership Team and Audit Committee is in place.

Planned internal audit work for 2019/20 which has not been undertaken after discussion with management is outlined below:

Review	Reason for Deferment
Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A scrutiny review of homelessness took place and therefore the internal audit was not undertaken to avoid duplication.
Conference Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the ongoing challenges with the construction of the conference centre it was not considered the appropriate timing for an internal audit.
Children's Legal Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management requested that this audit was deferred to a future year due to an ongoing restructure in the service.
Fostering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management advised that an external review of the service would be undertaken and therefore the internal audit was not undertaken to avoid duplication.

The Head of Audit and Risk does not consider this change to the plan to have an adverse impact of the delivery of the overall opinion for the period.

There is also some planned audit work for 2019/20 which is still at fieldwork / draft report stage as these have yet to be discussed with management, however the Head of Audit and Risk does not consider that excluding these will have a negative impact on the overall opinion for the period. The reports included in this category are:

- Bispham Endowed Primary School
- Information Governance
- Council Tax
- Wedding Chapel
- Election Process
- Commissioning

Annual Internal Audit Opinion

-
- CCTV
 - Flood Management
 - Opportunity Area Funding
 - Parking Services
 - Troubled Families
 - Research and Data Analysis
 - Adult Services - Executive Decisions

Unplanned Audit Work – Advice and Consultancy

Throughout the year internal audit has been asked to provide advice and consultancy on a range of risk and control issues. The key areas where advice has been given include:

Advice	Outcome
Use of Safes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice on the use of safes and strong rooms and the adequacy of these.
Channel Shift Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation in the Channel Shift scrutiny working group to provide advice based on internal audit findings.
Children’s Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice provided on financial controls.
Use of E-selling Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice provided on ensuring adequate controls when using on-line selling sites.
Employee Travel Loans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice provided on how to strengthen controls to avoid the risk of fraud.
Financial Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice offered in relation to temporary changes of financial limits for authorising expenditure and write-offs.

The Head of Audit and Risk has also participated in a number of corporate groups and initiatives throughout the year in order to provide support and advice on a variety of risk and controls issues. These include:

- Corporate Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Group
- Senior Leadership Team
- Good Governance Group
- Income and Debt Strategy Group
- Stage Three Complaints Panel
- Lancashire Waste Partnership Group
- Brexit Task and Finish Group
- Property Lockdown Procedures Task and Finish Group

Annual Internal Audit Opinion

- Refuse Insourcing Project Group
- HR and Finance System Replacement Project Board
- Covid-19 Incident Response

Other Sources of Assurance

We have liaised during the year with External Audit to ensure that we avoid unnecessary duplication and use resource to the best effect.

Where shared services are in place, particularly where we host a service for Fylde Borough Council, a joint approach to internal audit is in place, which makes best use of resource and experience as the auditors from both organisations work together. Similar joint working arrangements are in place with Merlin's Internal Audit Team, who operates a number of key leisure sites across the town.

Internal audit has continued to take into account other forms of assurance received by the Council. When preparing the audit plan and when undertaking individual reviews we will assess other sources of information available to us. Steps are also taken to link the work of Internal Audit to the strategic risk register.

Risk Management

A key element of the control environment at the Council is ensuring that risk management is effectively embedded. A Risk Management Framework 2018/2021 is in place which sets out the Council's policy and objectives in relation to risk management and the framework which is to be adopted.

A number of risk management groups, thematic or at directorate level, have been established, all of which are supported by the Head of Audit and Risk or nominated staff in Audit and Risk Services. These include:

- Corporate Risk Management Group
- Central Support Services Risk Management Group
- Children's Services Risk Management Group
- Adult Services Risk Management Group
- Communication and Regeneration Risk Management Group
- Community and Environmental Risk Management Group
- Driving at Work Risk Management Group
- Property Risk Management Group
- Safety Advisory Group
- Highways Risk Management Group
- Emergency Planning Risk Management Group
- Equalities Risk Management Group

Annual Internal Audit Opinion

Governance Framework

A Good Governance Group is established, chaired by the Director of Governance and Partnerships and supported by the Head of Audit and Risk and other Heads of Service charged with governance. The Group leads on the production of the Annual Governance Statement and undertook a mid-year review of progress on identified actions, which was reported to Audit Committee.

The Group is also raising awareness of the need for good and consistent application of the governance framework and are advocating the need for all services to ensure compliance with agreed mandatory arrangements across the Council.