

ESPO - Internal Audit Charter (February 2024) : Contents

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Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (the PSIAS), provide a consolidated approach to the function of internal auditing across the whole of the public sector enabling continuity, sound corporate governance and transparency. The PSIAS encompass the mandatory elements of the Global Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) standards, and also additional requirements and interpretations for the UK public sector. The PSIAS were further revised from 1st April 2017. A Local Government Application Note (LGAN) developed by CIPFA (revised April 2019) provides practical guidance on how to apply the PSIAS.

The objectives of the PSIAS are to:

- a. define the nature of internal auditing within the UK public sector
- b. set basic principles for carrying out internal audit in the UK public sector
- c. establish a framework for providing internal audit services which add value to the organisation, leading to improved organisational processes and operations
- d. establish the basis for the evaluation of internal audit performance and to drive improvement planning.

1.2. The PSIAS mandate that the purpose, authority, and responsibility of the internal audit activity must be formally defined in an internal audit charter (the Charter), consistent with the Mission of Internal Audit and the mandatory elements of the International Professional Practices Framework (the Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, the Standards, and the Definition of Internal Auditing). The chief audit executive (the term is explained at 5.10 below) must periodically review the Charter and present it to senior management and the board for approval. Responsibility for, and ownership of, the Charter remains with the organisation and final approval of the Charter resides with the Board (the term is explained in 5.12 and 5.13 below).

2. The Mission of Internal Audit

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

3. Purpose

3.1. Leicestershire County Council Internal Audit Service (LCCIAS) has adopted the Definition of Internal Auditing from the PSIAS. The definition explains the purpose of the internal audit activity: -

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.

The LGAN further explains that the organisation (ESPO's management) is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements (known as the control environment). Internal audit plays a vital part in advising the organisation that these arrangements are in place and operating properly. The annual internal audit opinion, which informs the governance statement, both emphasises and reflects the importance of this aspect of internal audit work. The organisation's response to internal audit activity should lead to the strengthening of the control environment and, therefore, contribute to the achievement of the organisation's objectives.

4. Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

4.1. The Core Principles, taken as whole, articulate internal audit effectiveness.

4.2. For an internal audit function to be considered effective, all Principles should be present and operating effectively. The Head of Internal Audit Service (HoIAS) is responsible for ensuring that internal auditors, as well as the internal audit activity, demonstrate achievement of the Core Principles.

4.3. The Core Principles are: -

- a. Demonstrates integrity.
- b. Demonstrates competence and due professional care.
- c. Is objective and free from undue influence (independent).
- d. Aligns with the strategies, objectives, and risks of the organisation.
- e. Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced.
- f. Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement.
- g. Communicates effectively.
- h. Provides risk-based assurance.
- i. Is insightful, proactive, and future-focused.
- j. Promotes organisational improvement.

5. Definitions

Independence

5.1. The PSIAS define independence as 'the freedom from conditions that threaten the ability of the internal audit activity to carry out internal audit responsibilities in an unbiased manner. To achieve the degree of independence necessary to effectively carry out the responsibilities of the internal audit activity requires the head of the activity to have direct and unrestricted access to senior management and the board. This can be achieved through a dual-reporting relationship. Threats to independence

must be managed at the individual auditor, engagement, functional and organisational levels’.

Objectivity

5.2. The PSIAS define objectivity as ‘an unbiased mental attitude that allows internal auditors to perform engagements in such a manner that they believe in their work product and that no quality compromises are made. Objectivity requires that internal auditors do not subordinate their judgment on audit matters to others. Threats to objectivity must be managed at the individual auditor, engagement, functional and organisational levels’.

Assurance Services

5.3. This is defined in the PSIAS as ‘An objective examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an independent assessment on governance, risk management and control processes for the organisation. Examples may include financial, performance, compliance, system security and due diligence engagements’.

5.4. LCCIAS conducts a wide range of engagements (assignments) designed to evaluate the quality of risk management processes, systems of internal control and corporate governance processes, across all aspects of ESPO’s control environment (including where it works in partnership with and leads on behalf of others).

5.5. LCCIAS aims to co-ordinate its assurance activity with any other identified internal and external providers of assurance services to ensure sufficient and proper coverage over the control environment and minimise duplication of efforts.

Consulting Services

5.6. This is defined in the PSIAS as ‘Advisory and related client service activities, the nature and scope of which are agreed with the client, are intended to add value and improve an organisation’s governance, risk management and control processes without the internal auditor assuming management responsibility’.

5.7. LCCIAS often acts in a consulting role and provides support for improvement in ESPO’s systems, procedures, and control processes without assuming management responsibility. Examples include advice, commentary on management’s intended control design and framework and potential implications of changes to systems, processes, and policies. The provision of such advice does not prejudice LCCIAS’ right to evaluate the established systems and controls at a later date. Other consulting could include counsel, facilitation, and training.

5.8. There is a specific public sector requirement that ‘Approval must be sought from the Board (see explanation in paragraphs 5.12 and 5.13 below) for any

significant additional consulting services not already included in the audit plan, prior to accepting the engagement. This is to ensure an appropriate balance of assurance (the primary internal audit function) and consulting activity.

- 5.9. The combined results and outcomes of assurance and consulting activities are fundamental to determining the annual internal audit opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of ESPO's control environment.

The Chief Audit Executive

- 5.10. Although the PSIAS and LGAN have both adopted the original IIA Standards term 'Chief Audit Executive', it is recognised that this only describes a role, which at Leicestershire County Council (the Servicing Authority for ESPO) is performed by the Head of Internal Audit & Assurance Service in his capacity of Head of Internal Audit Service (HoIAS). Within this Charter, all references from hereon are to the HoIAS.

The Board and Senior Management

- 5.11. A public sector requirement of the PSIAS is for the Charter to define the terms 'Board' and 'Senior Management' for the purposes of internal audit activity. The LGAN advises the terms must be interpreted in the context of the governance arrangements within each individual organisation.

The Board

- 5.12. The PSIAS define the Board as 'The highest level of governing body charged with the responsibility to direct and/or oversee the activities and management of the organisation. This includes a supervisory board or a board of governors or trustees... 'Board' may refer to an audit committee to which the governing body has delegated certain functions.

- 5.13. For ESPO, the Terms of Reference for the Finance and Audit Subcommittee (the Subcommittee) include a delegated function to, 'To receive and approve Internal Audit annual reports (annual plans, progress and annual reports, and the Internal Audit Charter), escalating high importance recommendations and significant governance concerns to Management Committee for review'. Consequently, at ESPO the Finance and Audit Subcommittee (the Subcommittee) will perform the function of the Board. Within this Charter, all references from hereon are to the Subcommittee.

Senior Management

- 5.14. There is not a specific definition of 'senior management' in either the PSIAS or the LGAN. However, the PSIAS require 'the HoIAS to establish risk-based plans to determine the priorities of the internal audit activity, consistent with the organisation's goals', and the LGAN advises that 'an

effective internal audit service should understand the whole organisation, its needs, and objectives’.

- 5.15. To fully understand and be able to fulfill its responsibilities, the HoIAS and his/her team requires unfettered access to not only the Director of ESPO (the Director) but also, given the role of the Servicing Authority, to both the Consortium Secretary (the Secretary) and Consortium Treasurer (the Treasurer).
- 5.16. Consequently, at ESPO, the three roles of Director, Secretary and Treasurer (collectively referred to as the Delegated Officers (the Officers)) will perform the functions of Senior Management. Within this Charter, all references from hereon are to the Officers.

6. Authority

Statutory and Professional Requirements for internal audit activity

- 6.1. ESPO is a local authority purchasing consortium made up of six local authorities for which the Council is the Servicing Authority. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (the Regulations), require 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’.
- 6.2. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, states that every local authority should ‘*make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs, and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs*’. CIPFA defines that ‘*proper administration*’ should include ‘*compliance with the statutory requirements for accounting and internal audit*’. ESPO’s Constitution (Financial Regulation Rule 15(a)) determines that ‘Responsibility for arranging a continuous internal audit of the ESPO’s financial management arrangements will be delegated by the Management Committee to the Consortium Treasurer’.
- 6.3. The relationship between the head of the internal audit activity, namely the HoIAS, and the Treasurer (the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the Council) is of particular importance in local government. The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the CFO in public service organisations (September 2023) states that the CFO:
- a. works closely with the organisation’s internal audit team, and recognises the team’s role in providing assurance in respect of the organisation’s governance, risk management and internal control frameworks
 - b. acknowledges the internal audit team’s role in helping the organisation to learn from others and to improve continuously the way that it works
 - c. supports the head of internal audit in the fulfilment of their role but does not seek to direct or to control the work of the internal audit team.

6.4. At ESPO, the Treasurer: -

- a. In conjunction with the Director and the Secretary contributes to and agrees the overall annual internal audit plan
- b. In conjunction with the Director receives periodic updates on progress and performance against the plan and approves major variations before they are reported to the Committee
- c. commissions (or approves) unplanned audits
- d. is the HoIAS' line manager and conducts his/her annual performance and development review;
- e. In conjunction with the Director determines LCCIAS resources required for ESPO.

Access

6.5. PSIAS 1000 requires the Charter to, *'establish internal audit's right of access to all records, assets, personnel and premises, including those of partner organisations where appropriate, and its authority to obtain such information and explanations as it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities'*.

6.6. ESPO's Constitution Financial Regulations Rule 15(b) states that the Treasurer or an authorised representative (interpreted to be any LCCIAS internal auditors) has authority to:-

- a. enter any ESPO building or land at all reasonable times;
- b. have access to all records, documents and correspondence relating to any transactions of ESPO;
- c. receive such explanations as he or she considers necessary on any matter under examination;
- d. require any employee of ESPO to produce cash, stores or any other ESPO property under his/her her control.

6.7. Whilst not explicit, Rule 15(b) is a conduit to seeking agreement to access any relevant partner organisations' records.

Organisational independence

6.8. The PSIAS require that *'reporting and management arrangements must be put in place that preserves the HoIAS (and LCCIAS)' independence and objectivity, in particular with regard to the principle that they must remain independent of the audited activities'*. This requirement aligns to CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) that *'organisations need to ensure that where the HoIAS is an employee, he or she is 'independent of operational management and is seen to provide objective views and opinions'*.

6.9. PSIAS 1110 on Organisational Independence states that *'the HoIAS must report to a level within the organisation that allows the internal audit activity to fulfil its responsibilities. The HoIAS must confirm to the Subcommittee, at least annually, the organisational independence of the internal audit activity'*. An additional public sector requirement of PSIAS 1110 is that *'The HoIAS must also establish effective communication with, and have free and*

unfettered access to, the chief executive (or equivalent) and the chair of the audit committee’.

- 6.10. The HoIAS reports to the Treasurer and to the Subcommittee (reports are agreed with the Director beforehand). The HoIAS has direct access to ESPO’s organisational management team, the Secretary and, if required, to the Chair of the Subcommittee.

In accordance with PSIAS 1110A.1, there is acknowledgement amongst these parties that the internal audit activity must be free from interference in determining the scope of internal auditing, performing work and communicating results.

7. Responsibility

This section of the Charter summarises the key responsibilities of the Subcommittee, the Officers and the HoIAS and LCCIAS internal auditors

The Subcommittee’s responsibilities

- 7.1. The Subcommittee has delegated decision making authority. As such, it will undertake the following key duties within the PSIAS, receive and approve reports on: -

- a. the internal audit charter
- b. the risk based internal audit plan
- c. communications from the HoIAS on internal audit performance relative to its plan and other matters
- d. an annual confirmation from the HoIAS with regard to the organisational independence of the internal audit activity
- e. the HoIAS’ annual report, including the opinion on the control environment, a statement on conformance to the PSIAS and the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme – QAIP (see 5.4a)
- f. whether there are inappropriate scope or resource limitations, determined by making appropriate enquiries of the Officers and the HoIAS.

The Officers’ responsibilities

- 7.2. The effectiveness of the internal audit activity relies upon the full co-operation of Senior Management. Under this Charter, the Officers will co-operate with the HOIAS in the following: -

- a. providing input to the annual risk based internal audit plan
- b. agreeing Terms of Engagement within agreed timescales
- c. sponsoring each audit at Assistant Director level
- d. providing LCCIAS with full support and co-operation including access to relevant records and personnel
- e. responding to LCCIAS reports within agreed timescales;

- f. ensuring that agreed recommendations are implemented within timescales;
- g. providing assurance that management actions have been implemented
- h. notifying the Treasurer of any significant changes in the control environment and proposed changes and developments in systems;
- i. notifying the Treasurer and Secretary of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety.

The HoIAS' responsibilities

Code of Ethics

7.3. The HoIAS must ensure that LCCIAS internal auditors conform to the Code of Ethics (the Code), which promotes an ethical and professional culture and comprises both principles that are relevant to the profession and practice of internal auditing, and rules of conduct that describe behaviour norms and guide the ethical conduct expected of internal auditors. The Code does not supersede or replace either individuals' own professional bodies' codes of ethics or those of the Council (LCCIAS' employer). A PSIAS public sector requirement is that LCCIAS internal auditors must have regard to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's 'Seven Principles of Public Life'.

International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

7.4. The HoIAS must ensure that there is a robust framework supporting the activity of internal audit and that LCCIAS' internal auditors are trained and guided, and their performance monitored, to ensure they conform to the detailed attribute and performance standards within the PSIAS.

7.5. LCCIAS will conform to the full range of the standards.

8. The Scope of Internal Audit Activity

8.1. The Officers are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate governance, risk management and control arrangements (i.e. the control environment), for not only ESPO activities, but also for those provided in conjunction with, and/or on behalf of its partners. LCCIAS' remit extends to ESPO's entire control environment. However, limitations on internal audit resource requires the HoIAS to understand and take account of the position with respect to ESPO's other sources of assurance (internal and external) and plan internal audit work accordingly so that activity can be co-ordinated, ensuring proper coverage and minimising duplication of effort.

8.2. Internal audit activity for ESPO (& where appropriate its partners) includes: -

- providing assurance services i.e. reviewing, appraising and reporting on: -
 - the soundness, adequacy and application of governance processes, risk management frameworks and internal controls;

- the extent to which assets are accounted for and safeguarded from losses of all kinds
- the suitability and reliability of financial and other data developed;
- reviewing compliance and conformance to rules, regulations, laws, codes of practice, guidelines and principles
- the accuracy and completeness of grant claims
- providing consulting services;
- undertaking investigations, studies, reviews or assignments as directed (or approved) by the Officers;

The role of internal audit in the compilation of the annual governance statement

8.3. The HoIAS delivers an annual internal audit opinion and report that can be used by ESPO to inform its governance statement. Should there be any non-conformance with the Code of Ethics or the Standards and it impacts the overall scope or operation of the internal audit activity, the HoIAS must disclose the non-conformance and the impact to Senior Management and the Subcommittee and be considered for inclusion in the governance statement.

The role of internal audit in fraud and corruption

8.4. The Officers are responsible for developing and maintaining a control environment that mitigates the risk of fraud and corruption

8.5. The HoIAS is responsible for reviewing and evaluating ESPO's approach to managing the risks of fraud, bribery and corruption. This includes: -

- Ensuring that strategies, policies and procedures are kept up to date and align with relevant codes of conduct
- Ensuring adherence to the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption
- Assisting with developing training and guidance on fraud awareness
- Coordination of ESPO's involvement in national anti-fraud projects

8.6. LCCIAS does not have responsibility for the detection or prevention of fraud and corruption, but it considers those risks when undertaking its activities. The independence of the internal audit activity leaves it well placed to undertake (or guide) any investigations that are required. The HoIAS will determine the level and scope of LCCIAS' involvement including delegating the investigation of specific allegations to ESPO itself following an assessment of risk and financial impact.