

# **Guildford Borough Council**

## **Head of Internal Audit Annual Opinion**

**1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 It is the duty of the Head of Internal Audit to give an opinion, at least annually, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control. This is based on the standard of control observed from internal audits, which have been carried out in accordance with the annual Audit Plan and other advice work on control systems. The results of our investigation work and the work of other internal and external reviews also informs my opinion.
- 1.2 My opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control informs and should be read alongside the Annual Governance Statement, which is incorporated into the Council's Statement of Accounts.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 An effective internal audit service is critical in delivering the Council's strategic objectives by:
  1. Championing best practice in governance,
  2. Objectively assessing the adequacy of governance and management of existing risks,
  3. Commenting on responses to emerging risks and proposed developments; and
  4. Giving an objective and evidence based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control.
- 1.5 It objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of the governance and control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic and effective use of resources. The control environment comprises the organisation's policies, procedures and operations in place to:
  1. Establish, and monitor the achievement of, the organisation's objectives.
  2. Identify, assess and manage the risks to achieving the organisation's objectives.
  3. Facilitate policy and decision making.
  4. Ensure the economical, effective and efficient use of resources.
  5. Ensure compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations.
  6. Safeguard the organisation's assets and interests from losses of all kind, including those arising from fraud, irregularity or corruption.
- 1.6 One of the main aims of the internal audit team is to provide assurance on the Council's overall system of internal control. This is achieved in part through the delivery of the annual audit plan which is designed to:
  1. Satisfy the requirements of the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee
  2. Ensure the delivery of a programme of audits on a risk-based needs assessment.
  3. Support the Director of Finance and Managing Director as the Responsible Financial

Officer and S151 Officer in discharging their statutory duties.

**2. Assurance on Internal Control**

2.1 To quantify my opinion on the adequacy of internal control, I have collated the assurance ratings based on for the outcome of each review undertaken in 2018-19. The results are shown in the table below.

**Levels of Audit Assurance:**

	Assurance Rating	Assurance Criteria
1	Significant assurance	Assurance that the controls are suitably designed consistently applied and effective
2	Significant Assurance with minor improvement opportunities	Assurance that the controls are suitably designed consistently applied and effective but we have identified issues that if not addressed, increase the likelihood of risk materialising in this area
3	<b>Partial assurance with improvements required</b>	Some assurance that the controls are suitably designed and effective but inconsistently applied and action needs to be taken to ensure risks in this are managed
4	No Assurance	Fundamental control weaknesses that need immediate action
5	No Opinion	Results of one-off investigations or consultancy work

2.2 In 2019-20 there were 31 planned audits, including service efficiency reviews and some contingency work. Over the year, we have completed or are currently working on 29 audits, which represent 94 per cent of the audit plan. The work carried out so far shows that there is no indication of any material or significant issues arising from this work that affect this statement. The results of the work carried out in the year to 31 March 2020 are shown below:

Assurance Rating	Number of Audits	
<b>Significant Assurance</b>		
<b>Significant Assurance with minor improvement opportunities</b>		
<b>Partial assurance with improvements required</b>		
<b>No Assurance</b>		
<b>No Opinion (one-off projects) Value for Money</b>		
<b>In progress(Inc. fundamental service reviews)</b>		

2.3 The Internal Audit work programme is based on a risk assessment, which is updated after each audit.

2.4 The Council has very high levels of assurance in respect of all the main financial systems. All of the main financial systems that feed into the Council's financial statements have good controls in place and have been given assurance following both internal and external audit reviews.

- 2.5 There were no financial control weaknesses found in the audits which represent a significant or material risk to the Council.
- 2.6 There are no material governance, risk management and internal control issues of which Internal Audit have been made aware during the year, which cause any qualification of the above opinion. A routine financial reconciliation highlighted a discrepancy in some ICT assets and an audit review was instigated. The review found that there were inconsistent asset management controls which put the Council's assets at risk, however, the proper financial controls, operated as intended in discovering the issue. In 2020-2021, there will be a full review of the control mechanisms of the Council's ICT assets.
- 2.7 The main issue and priority from an audit perspective, as recognised by management, is that the Council promotes and sustains good governance processes and completes the programme of transformational change to embed improvement across the Council whilst maintaining service delivery and the effective operation of key controls.
- 2.8 We have received 11 Ombudsman complaints within the year two of which were upheld and the remedial action was an apology to the complainants.
- 2.9 The key governance, risk management and internal control areas where I consider good progress has been made and which are integral to continued improvement are:
1. Improved performance management of our progress against the Corporate Plan with a reporting schedule to Corporate Management Team, Scrutiny and Executive,
  2. Improved service planning which recognises the emerging priorities and risks for the services,
  3. increased customer focus through more efficient and outward facing service delivery,
  4. a transformation programme Future Guildford which has delivered savings of ??? in the first phase.
  5. a review of the potential impact of Brexit on our services
  6. better governance on procurement
  7. channel shift by transferring front line administrative work and queries into the Customer Service Centre therefore releasing resources within the service to concentrate on professional and technical activities,
- 2.10 The work over the year focused on some of our corporate and governance risks in a number of areas. The audits identified a number of areas which were given partial assurance. These were:
- Asset Management
  - Lettings and Voids
- 2.11 The recommendations arising from these reviews were agreed and action plans put in place. Follow-up reviews were carried out during the year and the recommendations have been implemented and reported to Committee. The areas where work is continuing are:
- Programme and project management,
  - Governance arrangements of the Council's wholly owned limited company
  - Service planning

- 2.12 There have been continuing changes over the last year with the focus on the implementation of the first phase of the Future Guildford Project. This has transformed and re-organised services across the Council. The project was agreed by Council in February 2019 and implementation and transition is taking place over the next 24 months. We recognise that risk always increases in times of change and the increased levels of risk will be taken into account in the audit plan for 2020-21. We review the governance arrangements where changes have already taken place or are planned to identify any control issues.
- 2.13 In a Council of Guildford's size and complexity, with its significant change agenda and the on-going financial pressures, there is a greater risk of breakdown of control particularly where roles and systems are changing. We have worked actively with management to identify and examine these areas of potential risk. Where audit work has highlighted areas for improvement recommendations have been made to address any control implications. Overall, internal audit considers that appropriate actions are being taken to address recommendations but will continue to monitor and report progress.
- 2.14 There were a number of service requests for work, which were not on the audit plan, and this is covered in our contingency budget so there was limited impact on the work undertaken during the period, which was focussed on governance and high risk compliance areas in order to provide assurance on the Council's overall system of internal control.
- 2.15 I can therefore provide substantial assurance that the Council's systems of governance, risk management and internal control in operation until 31 March 2020 were generally sound and operate consistently across departments.

Joan Poole

Chief Internal Auditor