

Core Cities Chief Internal Auditor Group

External Assessment – Peer Review

Terms of Reference

Background Information

External Assessments:

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standard (PSIAS) introduced a requirement for an external assessment to be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent reviewer from outside of the organisation as part of an ongoing quality assurance and improvement programme.

There are two possible approaches to external assessments outlined in the standard: a full external assessment; or an internal self-assessment which is validated by an external reviewer.

External reviewers should:

- possess a recognised professional qualification;
- have appropriate experience of internal audit within the public sector / local government;
- have detailed knowledge of leading practices in internal audit; and
- have current, in-depth knowledge of the Definition, the Code of Ethics and the International Standards.

The Head of Internal Audit should discuss the proposed form of the external assessment with their line manager (where relevant) or Section 151 Officer (or equivalent) or Chief Executive prior to making recommendations to the Audit Committee regarding the nature of the assessment. The scope of the external assessment should have an appropriate sponsor, such as the Chair of the Audit Committee or Section 151 Officer.

The Head of Internal Audit should report the results of their quality assurance improvement programme (ongoing activity, internal and external assessments) to stakeholders. Such stakeholders should monitor the implementation of actions arising from internal and external assessments.

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the external assessment is to help improve delivery of the audit service and establish whether governance requirements relating to the provision of service are embedded. The assessment should be a supportive process that identifies opportunities for development and enhances the value of the audit service to the authority.

Proposed Approach

Members of the Core Cities group have elected to adopt the internal self-assessment approach validated by an external peer reviewer. The key benefit to this approach is cost. The peer group has assessed potential cost per assessment if commissioned externally at between £12.5k and £30k. Under proposed arrangements there will be no external cost, the time spent on providing an external peer review will be resourced within the audit plan and existing budget.

There are clear financial savings to members of the Core Cities group by adopting a peer review approach. In addition, the approach is in keeping with the promotion of collaborative working arrangements.

Each authority will determine an appropriate member of their team to conduct the external assessment, taking into account qualifications and relevant experience.

Upon conclusion of the external assessment, the reviewer will offer a 'true and fair' judgement and it is proposed that each authority will be appraised as **Conforms**, **Partially Conforms** or **Does Not Conform** to the PSIAS.

Independence and Objectivity

Prior to the assessments taking place all parties will agree the programme of peer reviews and an appropriate timetable, including the number of days required to undertake the reviews. It is important to ensure the independence of the auditor undertaking the peer assessment. Any known or perceived conflicts of interest should be disclosed. It should be acknowledged at the outset that all Core City Internal Audit services have some knowledge of each other.

The Assessment Process and Indicative Timescales

Completion of the Checklist:

Each Head of Internal Audit must complete the Checklist for Conformance with the PSIAS which is attached to the Local Government Application Note in advance of the external assessment. It is essential that the basis of the assessment is documented.

Pre Assessment Phase (2 days):

- Confirm the terms of reference for the review, timescales and dates for the review – this should include any specific issues that the authority may want to be considered as part of their quality assessment.
- Obtain:
 - relevant background information to gain an understanding of the service. This should include the Internal Audit Charter / Strategy or Terms of Reference (independence, scope authority, purpose and the relationship with the Audit Committee and senior executives);
 - details of responsibilities, resources, structure and activities;
 - details of any external client organisations e.g. Joint Authorities and consider whether such organisations may have different outcomes in terms of compliance with the PSIAS and whether separate assessments may be required;
 - the completed self-assessment and supporting evidence; and
 - evidence of how quality is maintained, and performance measured and reported.

- Issue a questionnaire to key stakeholders at the Council to obtain feedback on the internal audit procedures and process.
- Evaluate all documentation supporting the self-assessment prior to the on-site visit.

Assessment Phase (on-site visit) (1 day):

- Raise and resolve any queries arising from the review of the self-assessment.
- Examine a sample of audit engagements to verify compliance to the PSIAS and procedures.
- Interview key staff and stakeholders to confirm audit procedures and process.
- Undertake an exit meeting with the Head of Internal Audit.

Post Assessment Phase (1 day):

The review should conclude with a detailed report providing an evaluation of the team's conformance with the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the Standards. The report should highlight areas of partial conformance / non-conformance and include suggested actions for improvement, as appropriate.

Reporting Phase (1 day):

- Discussion of the draft report with the Head of Internal Audit.
- Issue of draft final report and agreed actions to the Head of Internal Audit to confirm accuracy.
- Issue final report to the Head of Internal Audit and Sponsor.
- Head of Internal Audit / Sponsor to report outcomes to their Audit Committee, together with an action plan and proposed implementation date(s).

It is envisaged that the assessment process should take approximately 5 days in total.

Proposed schedule

Liverpool review Birmingham

Bristol review Liverpool

Manchester review Sheffield

Glasgow review Leeds

Leeds review Manchester

Sheffield review Nottingham

Nottingham review Bristol

Birmingham review Glasgow