



Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire and
Northamptonshire Police

Joint Independent Audit Committee – 19 March 2025

Internal Audit Strategy Update – DRAFT Operational Plan 2025/26 and Charter

Date Prepared: February 2025

Contents

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26
- 03 Updated Internal Audit Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28
- 04 Definitions of Assurance Opinions and Recommendations
- 05 Internal Audit Charter

Disclaimer

This report (“Report”) was prepared by Forvis Mazars LLP at the request of the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (“OPFCC”) and Northamptonshire Police (“Force”) and terms for the preparation and scope of the Report have been agreed with them. The matters raised in this Report are only those which came to our attention during our internal audit work. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure that the information provided in this Report is as accurate as possible, Internal Audit have only been able to base findings on the information and documentation provided and consequently no complete guarantee can be given that this Report is necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist, or of all the improvements that may be required.

The Report was prepared solely for the use and benefit of the OPFCC and Force and to the fullest extent permitted by law Forvis Mazars LLP accepts no responsibility and disclaims all liability to any third party who purports to use or rely for any reason whatsoever on the Report, its contents, conclusions, any extract, reinterpretation, amendment and/or modification. Accordingly, any reliance placed on the Report, its contents, conclusions, any extract, reinterpretation, amendment and/or modification by any third party is entirely at their own risk. Please refer to the Statement of Responsibility in this report for further information about responsibilities, limitations and confidentiality.

01

Section 01

Introduction

Introduction

The Internal Audit Strategy (the Strategy) is used to direct Internal Audit resources to those aspects of the organisation that are assessed as generating the greatest risk to the achievement of its objectives. This is subject to review and update on at least an annual basis to ensure it meets the needs of the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (OPFCC) and Northamptonshire Police (Force) , including taking account of any areas of new and emerging risk within the Risk Register. The purpose of this document is to provide the Joint Independent Audit Committee with a further update of the Strategy and the proposed 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan (the Plan) for consideration.

In considering the document, the Joint Independent Audit Committee is asked to consider:

- whether the balance is right in terms of coverage and focus;
- whether key areas have been captured that would be expected; and
- whether there are any significant gaps.

We have set out how the 2025/26 Plan was prepared in **Section 02**. This section also sets out the proposed Plan along with a proposed high-level scope for each review.

The updated Internal Audit Strategy for 2025/26 to 2027/28 is set out in **Section 03**.

From September 2023, we harmonised the gradings across our Public and Social Sector clients to allow for better benchmarking within the sector. **Section 04** includes the definition for the new assurance levels and recommendation gradings.

In addition, we are also asking for consideration from the Joint Independent Audit Committee for the Internal Audit Charter in **Section 05**, which we request on an annual basis.

Scope and Purpose of Internal Audit



IA's Role

The purpose of internal audit is to provide the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable, through the Joint Independent Audit Committee, and management, with an independent and objective conclusion on risk management, control and governance and their effectiveness in achieving the OPFCC and Force's agreed objectives.



IA Plan

Completion of the internal audits proposed in the 2025/26 Plan should be used to help inform the OPFCC and Force's statement on the effectiveness of internal control within its annual report and accounts



Objective

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. Internal Audit also has an independent and objective consultancy role to help line managers improve risk management, governance and control



Charter

We have included our Internal Audit Charter in **Section 05**. The Charter sets out terms of reference and serves as a basis for the governance of the OPFCC and Force's IA function, establishing our purpose, authority, responsibility, independence and scope, in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditor's (IIA) standards.

02

Section 02

Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26

Preparing the Strategy Update and Operational Plan for 2025/26

As part of our approach, it is important we consider the strategic priorities of the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (OPFCC) and Northamptonshire Police (Force), as well as the key strategic risks identified, as we seek to align our risk-based approach accordingly. In preparing the Strategy update, the following activities have been undertaken:

A review of the outcomes of 2024/25 internal audit work

Consideration of the latest assessment of risks facing the OPFCC and Force, as detailed in the Strategic and Departmental Risk Registers

Consideration of areas which are not necessarily high risk (such as core operational controls), but where the work of internal audit can provide a tangible input to assurance

Consideration of the results of internal audit across our wider client base

A meeting between Forvis Mazars, OPFCC Chief Finance Officer, Force Chief Finance Officer, Joint Assistant Chief Officer for Enabling Services (Police and Fire), Force Business Continuity & Risk Manager and OPFCC Director of Delivery on 08 January 2025 to discuss the draft plan.

This section includes the proposed 2025/26 Plan. This also includes a proposed high-level scope for each review which will be revisited as part of the detailed planning for each review. Fieldwork dates for each of the audits, including presentation of finalised reports at future dates for Joint Independent Audit Committee meetings have been proposed for discussion and approval with the OPFCC and Force's management.

The Plan will be reassessed on a continual basis in light of emerging risks (including issues identified by Internal Audit). Should this result in a need for significant revisions, the plan will be revised and presented for re-approval to the Joint Independent Audit Committee.

Our professional judgement has been applied in assessing the level of resource required to carry out the audits identified in the strategic cycle. This includes consideration of the complexity of the system, volume and frequency of transactions, sources of assurance and the audit approach to the area under review.

Recommendations made as part of our work will be subject to on-going review as part of our Follow up Audit approach.

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2025/26

An overview of the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26 is set out below.

Proposed Summary Operational Plan					
Audit Area	Estimated Days	Strategic Objective	Strategic Risk	Target Start Date	Target JIAC
Joint Core Financials	15	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future	CRR0013 OPF0001 OP1005	Q2	Oct-25
Seized Property	10	Effective and Efficient Response	CRR0054 / CRR0058 / CRR0066	Q2	Oct-25
Misconduct Hearings	10	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future	CRR0044	Q4	Mar-26
Digital Forensics	10	Effective and Efficient Response	CRR0037 / CRR0070	Q4	Mar-26
Accreditation Management	15	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future	CRR0037 / CRR0063	Q1/2	Oct-25
Investigations	10	Effective Justice	CRR0049 / CRR0068 / CRR0069	Q3	Dec-25
Joint Fleet Management	7	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future		Q1	Jul-25
Control Room / First Contact	10	Effective and Efficient Response	CRR0069	Q3/4	Mar-26

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2025/26

An overview of the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26 is set out below.

Proposed Summary Operational Plan					
Audit Area	Estimated Days	Strategic Objective	Strategic Risk	Target Start Date	Target JIAC
Wellbeing	10	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future		Q3	Dec-25
IT Audit - Legacy Systems	10	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future	CRR0034	Q3	Dec-25
Joint IT Audit – Cyber Security	10	Modern Services that are Fit for the Future	CRR0060	Q4	Mar-26
Management and Reporting Activities					
Collaboration	5			TBC	TBC
Management	20			Ongoing	N/A
Total	142				

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2025/26

The rationale behind the inclusion of each of the areas identified within the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26 is detailed below, alongside an indicative high-level scope. Please note that the detailed scope of each review will be discussed and agreed with the relevant OPFCC and/or Force sponsor prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Joint Core Financials (15 Days)

To provide assurance with regards the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems of internal control in operation to manage the core financial systems. The scope of the work will include, but not be limited to:

- Policies and procedures
- Access controls
- Amendments to standing data
- Reconciliations
- Authorisation routines
- Reporting

Seized Property (10 Days)

The audit will provide assurance that the Force has effective controls in place for the receipting, storage, management and disposal of seized and found property. We will also consider the controls in place for the disposal of hazardous material and business continuity provision for the estates.

Misconduct Hearings (10 Days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding misconduct a change in Regulations, including a change in the chair of misconduct hearings,

Digital Forensics (10 days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding the seizure, extraction, storage, governance and protection of digital evidence from electronic devices.

Accreditation Management (15 days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding the management of accreditations across several departments, such as the Digital Forensics Unit and/or the Forensic Collision Investigation Unit.

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2025/26

Investigations (10 Days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding the investigation of statutory offences. Specifically, in relation to recent statistics regarding the level of No Further Action outcomes due to the time elapsing since the offence has taken place and/or been reported.

Joint Fleet Management (7 Days)

To provide assurance with regards to the controls framework in place following the implementation of a joint team and workshop for fleet management and maintenance.

Control Room / First Contact (10 Days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding the Force Control Room and the allocation of crimes and investigations among officers and/or staff.

Wellbeing (10 days)

Following the establishment of the Enabling Services Wellbeing Team and the in-house Occupational Health Unit, the audit will look to provide assurance that an effective control framework has been established for the new functions and that data is being accurately recorded.

Deferred from 2024/25.

IT Audit - Legacy Systems (10 days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding the management of legacy systems within the Force including the nature of these systems, how they're being managed and the risks they present.

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2025/26

Joint IT Audit – Cyber Security (10 Days)

Whilst the exact scope of review will be agreed with management, the focus will be on providing assurance regarding the control framework in place regarding cyber security.

Collaboration(5 Days)

Resources have been allocated across each OPFCC / Force to provide assurance with regards the systems and controls in place to deliver specific elements of regional collaboration. Consideration will be given to assessing whether the area of collaboration is delivering against its original objectives and what arrangements are in place, from an OPFCC / Force perspective, for monitoring and managing the service.

A detailed 25/26 Collaboration Audit plan will be drafted and shared with the JIAC once agreed by the regional CFO's.

Management (20 Days)

Resources for client and external audit liaison.

For example, preparation and attendance at JIAC, strategic and operational planning, meetings with Force Chief Officer Team/Chair of JIAC, preparation of the Internal Audit Annual Conclusion, Annual Internal Audit Plan and other reports to the JIAC, etc

03

Section 03

Updated Internal Audit Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28

Updated Internal Audit Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28

The rationale behind the inclusion of each of the areas identified within the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26 is detailed below, alongside an indicative high-level scope. Please note that the detailed scope of each review will be discussed and agreed with the relevant OPFCC and/or Force sponsor prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Strategic Risks	Auditable Area	Previous audits				Strategy		
		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Indicative 2026/27	Indicative 2027/28
Force Risks								
CRR0034 – Force Intelligence System	IT Audit	Limited	Limited	Limited	TBC	20		
CRR0065 – Access Control	Physical Access						✓	
CRR0013 – Medium Term Financial Plan	MTFP		Substantial		Substantial			✓
CRR0031 – Police Pension Challenge								
CRR0059 – Geolocation FSA Accreditation	Accreditation					15		
CRR0063 – FCIU Accreditation								
CRR0037 – Digital Forensics Unit	Digital Forensics					10		
CRR0070 – DFU Data Storage and Transfer								
CRR0044 – PSD Misconduct Hearings	Misconduct Hearings					10		
CRR0051 – Response Sergeants	Workforce Planning				Moderate		✓	
CRR0061 – Officer Uplift								

Updated Internal Audit Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28 (Cont.)

Strategic Risks	Auditable Area	Previous audits				Strategy		
		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Indicative 2026/27	Indicative 2027/28
Force Risks								
CRR0054- Evidential Property Store	Seized Property	Moderate				10		
CRR0058 – Evidential Tapes and Disks								
CRR0066 – Hazardous Waste Storage								
CRR0064 – FOI/SAR Backlog	Freedom of Information		Moderate				✓	
CRR0067 – Suspicious Activity Report Volume	Statutory Reporting							✓
CRR0069 – Grade 1 Incident Volume	Investigations					10	✓	
OPFCC Risks								
OP1005 – Long term sustainability of Northamptonshire Police funding	MTFP		Substantial		Substantial			
Collaboration						5	✓	✓
Management and Control						20	✓	✓

04

Section 04

Definitions of Assurance Opinions and Recommendations

Definitions of Assurance Opinions and Recommendations

Assurance Opinions

From September 2023, we harmonised the gradings across our Public and Social Sector clients to allow for better benchmarking with the sector. This was launched through our new report template.

Definitions of New Assurance Levels	
Substantial Assurance	The framework of governance, risk management and control is adequate and effective.
Moderate Assurance	Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control.
Limited Assurance	There are significant weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it could be or could become inadequate and ineffective.
Unsatisfactory Assurance	There are fundamental weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it is inadequate and ineffective or is likely to fail.

Recommendation gradings

We introduced the following recommendation grading approach to align it with the approach utilised by the Government Internal Audit Agency and enable further benchmarking of the number of recommendations raised per audit area across our wider public and social sector client base.

Definitions of Recommendations		
High (Priority 1)	Significant weakness in governance, risk management and control that if unresolved exposes the organisation to an unacceptable level of residual risk.	Remedial action must be taken urgently and within an agreed timescale.
Medium (Priority 2)	Recommendations represent significant control weaknesses which expose the organisation to a moderate degree of unnecessary risk.	Remedial action should be taken at the earliest opportunity and within an agreed timescale.
Low (Priority 3)	Recommendations show areas where we have highlighted opportunities to implement a good or better practice, to improve efficiency or further reduce exposure to risk.	Remedial action should be prioritised and undertaken within an agreed timescale.

05

Section 05

Internal Audit Charter

Internal Audit Charter

The Internal Audit Charter sets out the terms of reference and serves as a basis for the governance of the Internal Audit function of the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (OPFCC) and Northamptonshire Police (Force). It sets out the purpose, authority and responsibility of the function in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) of the IIA and the CIPFA Application Note: Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector. The Charter will be reviewed and updated annually by the Head of Internal Audit.

Nature and Purpose

The OPFCC and Force are responsible for the development of a risk management framework, overseen by the Joint Independent Audit Committee, which includes:

- Identification of the significant risks in the operations and allocation of a risk owner to each;
- An assessment of how well the significant risks are being managed; and
- Regular reviews by the OPFCC's Senior Staff and the Force's Chief Officer Team and the Joint Independent Audit Committee of the significant risks, including reviews of key risk indicators, governance reports and action plans, and any changes to the risk profile.

A system of internal control is one of the primary means of managing risk and consequently the evaluation of its effectiveness is central to Internal Audit's responsibilities.

The OPFCC and Force's system of internal control comprises the policies, procedures and practices, as well as organisational culture that collectively support the OPFCC and Force's effective operation in the pursuit of its objectives. The risk management, control and governance processes enable the OPFCC and Force to respond to significant business risks, be these of an operational, financial, compliance or other nature, and are the direct responsibility of the OPFCC's Senior Staff and the Force's Chief Officer Team. The OPFCC and Force needs assurance over the significant business risks set out in the risk management framework. In addition, there are many other stakeholders, both internal and external, requiring assurance on the management of risk and other aspects of the OPFCC and Force's business. There are also many assurance providers. The OPFCC and Force should, therefore, develop and maintain an assurance framework which sets out the sources of assurance to meet the assurance needs of its stakeholders.

Internal Audit is defined by the Institute of Internal Auditors' International Professional Practices

Framework (IPPF) as '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.'

Internal Audit carries out assurance and consulting activities across all aspects of the OPFCC and Force's business, based on a programme agreed with the Joint Independent Audit Committee, and coordinates these activities via the assurance framework. In doing so, Internal Audit works closely with risk owners, and the OPFCC's Senior Staff and the Force's Chief Officer Team.

In addition to providing independent assurance to various stakeholders, Internal Audit helps identify areas where the OPFCC and Force's existing processes and procedures can be developed to improve the extent with which risks in these areas are managed; and public money is safeguarded and used economically, efficiently and effectively. In carrying out its work, Internal Audit liaises closely with the OPFCC's Senior Staff and the Force's Chief Officer Team and management in relevant departments.

The independent assurance provided by Internal Audit also assists the OPFCC and Force to report annually on the effectiveness of the system of internal control included in the Annual Governance Statements.

Authority and Access to Records, Assets and Personnel

Internal Audit has unrestricted right of access to all the OPFCC and Force's records and information, both manual and computerised, and other property or assets it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. Internal Audit may enter business property and has unrestricted access to all locations and officers where necessary on demand and without prior notice.

Any restriction (management or other) on the scope of Internal Audit's activities will be reported to the Joint Independent Audit Committee.

Internal Audit is accountable for the safekeeping and confidentiality of any information and assets acquired in the course of its duties and execution of its responsibilities.

Internal Audit will consider all requests from the external auditors for access to any information, files or working papers obtained or prepared during audit work that has been finalised, and which external audit would need to discharge their responsibilities.

Internal Audit Charter (continued)

Responsibility

The Head of Internal Audit is required to provide an annual conclusion to the OPFCC and Force, through the Joint Independent Audit Committee, on the adequacy and the effectiveness of the OPFCC and Force's risk management, control and governance processes.

In order to achieve this, Internal Audit will:

- Coordinate assurance activities with other assurance providers as needed (such as the external auditors) such that the assurance needs of the OPFCC and Force, regulators and other stakeholders are met in the most effective way
- Evaluate and assess the implications of new or changing systems, products, services, operations and control processes.
- Carry out assurance and consulting activities across all aspects of the OPFCC and Force's business based on a risk-based plan agreed with the Joint Independent Audit Committee. Provide the Police & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable with reasonable, but not absolute, assurance as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the key controls associated with the management of risk in the area being audited.
- Issue periodic reports to the Joint Independent Audit Committee and the OPFCC's Senior Staff and the Force's Chief Officer Team summarising results of assurance activities.
- Assist, when requested, in the investigation of allegations of fraud, bribery and corruption within the OPFCC and Force and notifying management and the Joint Independent Audit Committee of the results.
- Assess the adequacy of remedial action to address significant risk and control issues reported to the Joint Independent Audit Committee. Responsibility for remedial action in response to audit findings rests with line management.

There are inherent limitations in any system of internal control and thus errors or irregularities may occur and not be detected by Internal Audit's work.

When carrying out its work, Internal Audit will provide line management with comments and report

breakdowns, failures or weaknesses of internal control systems together with recommendations for remedial action.

However, Internal Audit cannot absolve line management of responsibility for internal controls.

Internal Audit will support line managers in determining measures to remedy deficiencies in risk management, control and governance processes and compliance to the OPFCC and Force's policies and standards and will monitor whether such measures are implemented on a timely basis.

The Joint Independent Audit Committee is responsible for ensuring that Internal Audit is adequately resourced and afforded a sufficiently high standing within the organisation, necessary for its effectiveness.

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Statement of Responsibility

We take responsibility to the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire and Northamptonshire Police for this report which is prepared on the basis of the limitations set out below.

The responsibility for designing and maintaining a sound system of internal control and the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities rests with management, with internal audit providing a service to management to enable them to achieve this objective. Specifically, we assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control arrangements implemented by management and perform sample testing on those controls in the period under review with a view to providing an opinion on the extent to which risks in this area are managed.

We plan our work in order to ensure that we have a reasonable expectation of detecting significant control weaknesses. However, our procedures alone should not be relied upon to identify all strengths and weaknesses in internal controls, nor relied upon to identify any circumstances of fraud or irregularity. Even sound systems of internal control can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance and may not be proof against collusive fraud.

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during the course of our work and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made. Recommendations for improvements should be assessed by you for their full impact before they are implemented. The performance of our work is not and should not be taken as a substitute for management's responsibilities for the application of sound management practices.

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