Agenda Item 5. b

Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority

Joint Independent Audit Committee – 04 03 2026

Internal Audit Strategy Update – DRAFT Operational Plan 2026/27 and Charter

Date Prepared: February 2026

forvis mazars

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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 Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority ("NCFRA") 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 NCFRA 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 Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority (NCFRA), 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 2026/27 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 2026/27 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 2026/27 to 2027/28 is set out in **Section 03**.

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 Fire Officer, 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 NCFRA's agreed objectives.

IA Plan

Completion of the internal audits proposed in the 2026/27 Plan should be used to help inform the NCFRA'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 NCFRA's IA function, establishing our purpose, authority, responsibility, independence and scope, in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS).

Internal Audit Strategy

Vision: To provide high-quality internal audit that responds to our customers' needs. To seek to innovate and to provide insight to our customers through leveraging our expertise.

Objectives and Measures	
Objective 1: To be a responsive internal audit service that considers your key risks.	
• We will keep the Plan under continual review to respond to emerging risks and priorities, as appropriate. • We will respond to all mutually agreed changes to the Plan. • We will adopt a risk-based approach to planning internal audit coverage and engagements.	• Plan delivered has reflected mutually agreed changes. • Risk-based internal audit methodology has been applied. • Ensuring adequate resourcing to deliver audit plan
Objective 2: To deliver a high-quality service that supports the achievement of your strategic objectives.	
• We will consider your strategic objectives in planning and delivering our internal audit coverage and engagements. • We will seek regular feedback about the value of our work. • We will commission an External Quality Assessment (EQA) of our internal audit function in line with professional standards (*last one conducted December 2024*). • We will perform follow-up activity to verify our value is being realised through completion of internal audit recommendations.	• Internal audit engagements have been aligned to your strategic objectives. • Feedback has been proactively requested about our services. • EQA performed every five years. • Follow-up activity has been performed.
Objective 3: To support innovation and continual improvement of the internal audit service.	
• We will review and react to any feedback received. • We will leverage technology where possible, especially data analytics (subject to the capability of your systems).	• We have acted on any feedback received. • Data analytics has been deployed where applicable.
Objective 4: To proactively provide insights and share our expertise.	
• We will share our insights with you through channels such as our thought leadership. • We will allocate subject matter experts and specialists to deliver internal audit engagements as appropriate.	• Forvis Mazars insights have been proactively shared with you. • SMEs/specialists assigned to engagements, where appropriate.

Internal Audit Strategy (Continued)

Internal Audit function that supports the strategic objectives and success of the organisation

Internal Auditor Competency

Maintain Specialist Expertise: Continue delivering targeted technical and sector-specific training to ensure auditors possess the skills required to execute complex and high-value engagements effectively

Structured Development Pathways: Junior auditors are enrolled in accredited professional development programmes (e.g., ICAEW and IRM), with senior management providing oversight to ensure progression aligns with organisational needs and professional standards.

Commitment to Talent Growth: Demonstrate a sustained commitment to building a high-performing team through continuous learning, mentoring, and competency-based development initiatives.

Technology and Data Analytics

Leverage Advanced Tools: Incorporate innovative technologies—including AI-driven solutions and advanced data analytics platforms—to enhance audit quality, efficiency, and insight.

Collaborate with Specialists: Utilise expertise from internal IT and Fraud teams to strengthen audit coverage in areas requiring technical depth and forensic capabilities.

Continuous Improvement: Commit to exploring emerging technologies and analytics techniques to maintain a forward-looking, data-driven audit approach.

Resourcing

Optimised Resource Allocation: Ensure effective deployment of skills and experience across the internal audit team to maximise efficiency and deliver high-quality assurance.

Team Scale and Diversity: Leverage the strength of a team of approximately 80 auditors, representing a broad spectrum of experience and expertise, to address complex and varied audit requirements.

Dynamic Workforce Planning: Maintain flexibility in resource planning to align with organisational priorities, emerging risks, and specialist needs, ensuring the right capabilities are applied to the right engagements.

Enhancing engagement with stakeholders

Integrated Assurance Approach: Strengthen collaboration with other assurance providers to enhance coverage and improve coordination across risk areas.

Sector Best Practice Sharing: Continue to share within the sector, fostering knowledge exchange and continuous improvement.

Relationship-Driven Planning: Build on established relationships to review and refine the current Audit Plan, ensuring alignment with organisational priorities and emerging risks.

Quality of work

External Quality Assessment Compliance: Fully cooperate with external quality assessments to validate that internal audit activities meet professional standards and deliver high-quality, efficient outcomes.

Transparent Performance Reporting: Provide regular reporting on key performance indicators (KPIs) to the JIAC, ensuring clear oversight of audit timelines and overall effectiveness.

Continued planning and emerging risks

Annual Strategy Review: The internal audit strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure alignment with the organisation's evolving risk profile and strategic priorities. This process allows for realignment of the audit programme as new risks emerge

Annual Conclusion: Provide an annual, evidence-based conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management, and internal control framework.

02

Section 02

Internal Audit Operational Plan 2026/27

Preparing the Strategy Update and Operational Plan for 2026/27

As part of our approach, it is important we consider the strategic priorities of the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority (NCFRA), 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 2025/26 internal audit work
- Consideration of the latest assessment of risks facing the NCFRA, 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 04 December 2025 to discuss the draft plan.

This section includes the proposed 2026/27 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 JIAC meetings have been proposed for discussion and approval with the NCFRA'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 JIAC.

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 2026/27

An overview of the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2026/27 is set out below.

Proposed Summary Operational Plan					
Audit Area	**Estimated Days**	**Strategic Objective**	**Strategic Risk**	**Target Start Date**	**Target JIAC**
Joint Core Financials	10	Sound money management	CRR0013 / OPF0001 / OP1005	Q2	Oct-26
Budget setting / MTFP	10	Sound money management	CRR0013 / OP1005	Q1	Jul-26
Joint Occupational Health & Wellbeing	10	Professionalism and standards		Q2/3	Dec-26
JESIP and Major Incidents	15	Strong Partnerships	CRR0069	Q3/4	Mar-27
Culture and Governance	10	Professionalism and standards		Q1/2	Oct-26
Specialist Training & CPD	10	Professionalism and Standards		Q4	Mar-27
Joint Disaster Recovery	10	Sound Money Management	CRR0034	Q3	Dec-26
Management and Reporting Activities					
Contingency	5	Possible contingency or 27/28 review on Airwave Code of Practice		TBC	TBC
Management	10			Ongoing	N/A
Total	**90**				

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2026/27

The rationale behind the inclusion of each of the areas identified within the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2026/27 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 NCFRA sponsor prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Joint Core Financials (10 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

Budget Setting / MTFP (10 Days)

Whilst the details of the scope will be agreed with management, the audit will provide assurance with regards to the robustness of the budget setting process, the accuracy and completeness of underlying financial assumptions, and the effectiveness of controls supporting the MTFP.

Joint Occupational Health & Wellbeing (10 Days)

Whilst the details of the scope will be agreed with management, the audit will provide assurance with regards to the effectiveness of arrangements for managing occupational health and wellbeing, including governance, service delivery, compliance with statutory obligations, and the adequacy of support provided to officers and staff.

Deferred from 2024/25

JESIP and Major Incidents (15 Days)

Whilst the details of the scope will be agreed with management, the audit will provide assurance over the effectiveness of JESIP compliance and major incident preparedness, including the clarity of roles, interoperability arrangements, and the robustness of response and coordination processes.

Culture and Governance (10 days)

Whilst the details of the scope will be agreed with management, the audit will provide assurance over the effectiveness of organisational culture and governance arrangements, including clarity of roles, decision-making processes, accountability, and the consistency of behaviours with expected values and standards.

Internal Audit Operation Plan 2025/26

Specialist Training & CPD (10 days)

Whilst the details of the scope will be agreed with management, the audit will provide assurance over the effectiveness of training management and recording, including role-based training, continuing development and the maintenance of training records.

Joint Disaster Recovery (10 days)

Whilst the details of the scope will be agreed with management, the audit will provide assurance over the effectiveness of joint disaster recovery arrangements, including clarity of roles, shared planning, inter-agency coordination, and the robustness of processes to ensure continuity of critical services.

Contingency (5 Days)

Resources have been allocated across each NCFRA to provide assurance with regards to the systems and controls in place to deliver effective contingency planning and response. Consideration will be given to assessing whether current contingency arrangements remain aligned to their original objectives and what mechanisms are in place, from an NCFRA perspective, for monitoring, maintaining, and managing service resilience.

A detailed 26/27 Contingency Planning Audit Plan will be drafted and shared with the JIAC once agreed by the regional CFOs.

Management (10 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 2026/27 – 2027/28

Updated Internal Audit Strategy 2026/27 – 2027/28

The rationale behind the inclusion of each of the areas identified within the Internal Audit Operational Plan 2026/27 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 NCFRA sponsor prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Strategic Risks	Auditable Area	Previous Audits			Strategy	
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Indicative 2027/28
NCFRA Risks						
SR16 - Loss of Staff SR37 - Loss of Staff due to Industrial Action (includes action short of strike) SR38 - Mobilising. Ability to maintain a resilient & functioning Fire control room/function SR39 – Effective, accurate mobilising & management of operational resources (On Call)	Workforce Planning / Succession Planning		Moderate	TBC		✓
SR26 - Failure to adequately safeguard members of the community.	Safeguarding / Prevention		Limited	TBC		
SR30 - Inability to change culture to embed EDI effectively.	EDI Plan	Moderate				✓
OPFCC Risks						
OPF0003 – Cultural risks in Fire and Rescue Service	Grievance Policies	Substantial		TBC		
	Culture & Governance		Moderate		**10**	
	EDI Plan	Moderate				✓
OPF0001– Long term sustainability of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service budget	Medium Term Financial Planning				**10**	
	Core Financials	Moderate	Moderate		**10**	
Contingency					**5**	✓
Management and Control					**10**	✓

04

Section 04

Definitions of Assurance Opinions and Recommendations

Definitions of Assurance Opinions and Recommendations

Assurance Opinions

Definitions of 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

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 Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority's (NCFRA) Internal Audit function. 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 Application Note: Global Internal Audit Standards in the Public Sector, produced by CIPFA. The Charter will be reviewed and updated annually by Forvis Mazars.

Purpose of Internal Auditing

The purpose of the IA function is to strengthen NCFRA's ability to create, protect, and sustain value by providing the Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) and management with independent, risk-based, and objective assurance, advice, insight, and foresight.

IA carries out assurance and consulting activities across all aspects of NCFRA's business, based on a programme agreed with the JIAC, and coordinates these activities via the assurance framework. In doing so, IA works closely with risk owners, and the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's (OPFCC's) Senior Management and Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service's Chief Officer teams.

In addition to providing independent assurance to various stakeholders, IA helps identify areas where NCFRAs 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, IA liaises closely with the OPFCC's Senior Management and Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service's Chief Officer teams and management in relevant departments.

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

Commitment to Adhering to the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS)

The NCFRA's IA function will adhere to the mandatory elements of IIA's International Professional Practices Framework, which are the GIAS and Topical Requirements, and any interpretations of the standards made by the Relevant Internal Audit Standards Setters (RIASS).

We will report periodically to the JIAC and senior management regarding the IA function's conformance with GIAS, which will be assessed through a quality assurance and improvement program.

Mandate

Authority

The NCFRA are responsible for maintaining an effective Internal Audit function under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. These regulations mandate that:

- A relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes
- Any officer or member of a relevant authority must, if required to do so for the purposes of internal audit:
  - make available such documents and records (includes information recorded in an electronic form); and
  - Supply such information and explanations as are considered necessary by those conducting the internal audit.

The NCFRA's JIAC grants the IA function the mandate to provide the JIAC and senior management with objective assurance, advice, insight, and foresight.

The IA function's authority is created by its direct reporting relationship to the JIAC. Such authority allows for unrestricted access to the JIAC. Any restriction (management or other) on the scope of IA's activities will be reported to the JIAC.

The JIAC authorises the IA function to:

- Have full and unrestricted access to all functions, data, records, information, physical property, and personnel pertinent to carrying out IA responsibilities. Internal auditors are accountable for confidentiality and safeguarding records and information.
- Allocate resources, set frequencies, select subjects, determine scopes of work, apply techniques, and issue communications to accomplish the function's objectives.
- Obtain assistance from the necessary personnel of the NCFRA and other specialised services from within or outside the NCFRA to complete IA services.

Internal Audit Charter (continued)

Independence, Organisational Position, and Reporting Relationships

We will be positioned at a level in the organisation that enables internal audit services and responsibilities to be performed without interference from management, thereby establishing the independence of the internal audit function. (See “Mandate” section.) We will report functionally to the JIAC and administratively (for example, day-to-day operations) to the Resources Director or equivalent senior officer. This positioning provides the organisational authority and status to bring matters directly to senior management and escalate matters to the JIAC, when necessary, without interference and supports the internal auditors’ ability to maintain objectivity.

We will confirm to the JIAC, at least annually, the organisational independence of the internal audit function. If the governance structure does not support organisational independence, we will document the characteristics of the governance structure limiting independence and any safeguards employed to achieve the principle of independence. We will disclose to the JIAC any interference internal auditors encounter related to the scope, performance, or communication of internal audit work and results. The disclosure will include communicating the implications of such interference on the internal audit function’s effectiveness and ability to fulfil its mandate.

The NCFRA is responsible for the development of a risk management framework, overseen by the JIAC, which includes:

- Identification of the significant risks in the NCFRA programme of activity 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 Management and Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service’s Chief Officer teams and the JIAC 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 IA’s responsibilities.

NCFRA system of internal control comprises the policies, procedures and practices, as well as organisational culture that collectively support the NCFRA’s effective operation in the pursuit of its objectives. The risk management, control and governance processes enable the NCFRA 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 Management and Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service’s Chief Officer teams.

The NCFRA 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 NCFRA’s business. There are also many assurance providers. The NCFRA should, therefore, develop and maintain an assurance framework which sets out the sources of assurance to meet the assurance needs of its stakeholders.

Changes to the Mandate and Charter

Circumstances may justify a follow-up discussion between Forvis Mazars, JIAC, and senior management on the IA mandate or other aspects of the Charter. Such circumstances may include but are not limited to:

- A significant change in the GIAS.
- A significant acquisition or reorganisation within the organisation.
- Significant changes in the Forvis Mazars team, JIAC, and/or senior management.
- Significant changes to the organisation’s strategies, objectives, risk profile, or the environment in which the organisation operates.
- New laws or regulations that may affect the nature and/or scope of IA services.

Internal Audit Charter (continued)

JIAC Oversight

To establish, maintain, and ensure that the NCFRA's IA function has sufficient authority to fulfil its duties, the JIAC will:

- Champion the IA function to enable it to fulfil the Purpose of Internal Auditing and pursue its strategy and objectives.
- Discuss with Forvis Mazars and senior management the appropriate authority, role, responsibilities, scope, and services (assurance and/or advisory) of the IA function.
- Ensure Forvis Mazars has unrestricted access to and communicates and interacts directly with the JIAC, including in private meetings without senior management present.
- Discuss with the Forvis Mazars and senior management other topics that should be included in the IA Charter.
- Participate in discussions with Forvis Mazars and senior management about the "essential conditions," described in the GIAS, which establish the foundation that enables an effective IA function.
- Approve the IA function's Charter, which includes the IA mandate and the scope and types of IA services.
- Review the IA Charter periodically with Forvis Mazars to consider changes affecting the organisation and approve the IA charter typically annually.
- Confirm that Forvis Mazars has the required qualifications and competencies to provide internal audit services, as described in the GIAS (typically undertaken through the procurement of IA services).
- Authorise the appointment and removal of the IA provider.
- Provide input into senior management to support the evaluation of the IA provider.
- Receive communications from Forvis Mazars about the IA function including its performance relative to its plan.
- Ensure a quality assurance system has been established.
- Where required, make appropriate inquiries of senior management and Forvis Mazars to determine whether scope or resource limitations are appropriate.

Responsibilities of Management

Management has a role to identify key risks within their service and to ensure that this is effectively managed. Management can assist the process of internal audit by:

- Providing access to records, systems, personnel, premises and properties necessary for Internal Audit to fulfil its mandate
- Co-operate fully and promptly with internal audit during audit engagements
- Contribute to the IA planning process and provide insight into risk areas
- Accept and implement IA recommendations or propose alternative actions which support risk-mitigation, and report progress to
- Retain overall responsibility for establishing effective internal control and risk management framework
- Promote independence of IA within the organisation and ensure adequate resource for IA to fulfil its mandate

Forvis Mazars Roles and Responsibilities

Ethics and Professionalism

We will ensure that internal auditors:

- Conform with the GIAS, including the principles of Ethics and Professionalism: integrity, objectivity, competency, due professional care, and confidentiality.
- Understand, respect, meet, and contribute to the legitimate and ethical expectations of the organisation and be able to recognise conduct that is contrary to those expectations.
- Encourage and promote an ethics-based culture in the organisation.
- Report organisational behaviour that is inconsistent with the organisation's ethical expectations, as described in applicable policies and procedures.

Internal Audit Charter (continued)

Objectivity

We will ensure that the IA function remains free from all conditions that threaten the ability of internal auditors to carry out their responsibilities in an unbiased manner, including matters of engagement selection, scope, procedures, frequency, timing, and communication. If we determine that objectivity may be impaired in fact or appearance, the details of the impairment will be disclosed to appropriate parties.

Internal auditors will maintain an unbiased mental attitude that allows them to perform engagements objectively such that they believe in their work product, do not compromise quality, and do not subordinate their judgment on audit matters to others, either in fact or appearance.

Internal auditors will have no direct operational responsibility or authority over any of the activities they review. Accordingly, internal auditors will not implement internal controls, develop procedures, install systems, or engage in other activities that may impair their judgment, including:

- Assessing specific operations for which they had responsibility within the previous year.
- Performing operational duties for the NCFRA or its affiliates.
- Initiating or approving transactions external to the IA function.
- Directing the activities of any NCFRA employee that is not employed.

Internal auditors will:

- Disclose impairments of independence or objectivity, in fact or appearance, to appropriate parties and at least annually, such as management at Forvis Mazars, JIAC, NCFRA management, or others.
- Exhibit professional objectivity in gathering, evaluating, and communicating information.
- Make balanced assessments of all available and relevant facts and circumstances.
- Take necessary precautions to avoid conflicts of interest, bias, and undue influence.

Managing the IA Function

Forvis Mazars has the responsibility to:

- At least annually, develop a risk-based IA plan that considers the input of the JIAC and senior management. Discuss the plan with the JIAC and senior management and submit the plan to the JIAC for review and approval.
- Work with the JIAC and senior management to understand other assurance that could be relied upon by the IA Function.
- Communicate with the JIAC and senior management if there are significant interim changes to the IA plan.
- Coordinate assurance activities with other assurance providers as needed (such as the external auditors) such that the assurance needs of the NCFRA, regulators and other stakeholders are met in the most effective way. If the we cannot achieve an appropriate level of coordination, the issue must be communicated to senior management and if necessary, escalated to the JIAC.
- 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 NCFRA's business based on a risk-based plan agreed with the JIAC.
- Ensure IA engagements are performed, documented, and communicated in accordance with the GIAS.
- Provide the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and Chief Fire Officer 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 reports to the JIAC with results of assurance activities and follow ups.
- Subject to appointment by the NCFRA, assist in the investigation of allegations of fraud, bribery and corruption within the NCFRA and notifying management and the JIAC of the results.
- In accordance with the IA plan, follow up on remedial actions within IA reports to confirm implementation.
- Ensure the IA function collectively possesses or obtains the knowledge, skills, and other competencies and qualifications needed to meet the requirements of the GIAS and fulfil the IA mandate.
- Consider emerging trends and successful practices in internal auditing.
- Establish and ensure adherence to methodologies designed to guide the IA function.
- Ensure adherence to the NCFRA's relevant policies and procedures unless such policies and procedures conflict with the IA charter or the GIAS. Any such conflicts will be resolved or documented and communicated to the JIAC and senior management

Internal Audit Charter (continued)

Value for Money

Forvis Mazars will consider the importance of securing value for money, alongside key considerations, when determining appropriate evaluation criteria. Recommendations can be attached to any areas of significant weakness.

The JIAC should consider whether value for money is in line with governance objectives and to receive assurance on this to underpin the annual governance statement.

Communication with the JIAC and Senior Management

Forvis Mazars will report periodically to the JIAC and senior management regarding:

- The IA function's mandate.
- The IA plan and performance / progress relative to its plan.
- Significant revisions to the IA plan and budget.
- Potential impairments to independence, including relevant disclosures as applicable.
- Significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other areas of focus for the JIAC.
- Results of assurance and advisory services.
- Management's responses to risk that the IA function determines may be unacceptable or acceptance of a risk that is beyond the NCFRA's risk appetite.

Quality Assurance and Improvement Program

Forvis Mazars, as a regulated professional services provider to the public sector, maintain a quality assurance and improvement programme covering all aspects of the IA function, including internal and external reviews.

External assessments will be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor.

Scope and Types of IA Services

The scope of IA services covers the entire breadth of the organisation, including all NCFRA's activities, assets, and personnel. The scope of IA activities also encompasses but is not limited to objective examinations of evidence to provide independent assurance and advisory services to the JIAC and management on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management, and control processes for the NCFRA.

The nature and scope of advisory services may be agreed with the party requesting the service, provided the IA function does not assume management responsibility. Opportunities for improving the efficiency of governance, risk management, and control processes may be identified during advisory engagements. These opportunities will be communicated to the appropriate level of management.

- IA engagements may include evaluating whether:
- Risks relating to the achievement of the NCFRA's strategic objectives are appropriately identified and managed.
- The actions of the NCFRA's officers, directors, management, employees, and contractors or other relevant parties comply with the NCFRA's policies, procedures, and applicable laws, regulations, and governance standards.
- The results of operations and programs are consistent with established goals and objectives.
- Operations and programs are being carried out effectively and efficiently.
- Established processes and systems enable compliance with the policies, procedures, laws, and regulations that could significantly impact the NCFRA.
- The integrity of information and the means used to identify, measure, analyse, classify, and report such information is reliable.
- Resources and assets are acquired economically, used efficiently and sustainably, and protected adequately.

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Statement of Responsibility

We take responsibility to the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire ("OPFCC") and Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority ("NCFRA") 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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