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# **Southern Internal Audit Partnership**

Assurance through excellence  
and innovation

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## **HAMPSHIRE PENSION FUND PANEL AND BOARD**

### **Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion 2023-24**

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**March 2024**

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## 1. Role of Internal Audit

Hampshire County Council ('the Council') is required by the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, to

*'undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of their risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.'*

In fulfilling this requirement, the Council should have regard to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), as the internal audit standards set for local government. In addition, the Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations issued by CIPFA sets out best practice and should be used to assess arrangements to drive up audit quality and governance arrangements.



The role of internal audit is best summarised through its definition within the Standards, 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'.***

The Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate risk management processes, control systems, accounting records and governance arrangements. The Council is the local authority responsible for administering the Hampshire Pension Fund, known as the Administering Authority. In this capacity, the Council has delegated responsibility for the governance and management of the Pension Fund to Hampshire Pension Fund Panel and Board. Internal audit plays a vital role in advising the Pension Fund Panel and Board that these arrangements are in place and operating effectively.

The Pension Fund Panel and Board'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.

## 2. Internal Audit Approach

To enable effective outcomes, internal audit provides a combination of assurance and consulting activities. Assurance work involves assessing how well the systems and processes are designed and working, with consulting activities available to help to improve those systems and processes where necessary. A full range of internal audit services is provided in forming the annual opinion.

The approach to each review is determined by the Chief Internal Auditor and will depend on the:

- Level of assurance required.
- Significance of the objectives under review to the organisation's success.
- Risks inherent in the achievement of objectives.
- Level of confidence required that controls are well designed and operating as intended.

All formal internal audit assignments will result in a published report. The primary purpose of the audit report is to provide an independent and objective opinion to the Pension Fund Panel and Board on the framework of internal control, risk management and governance in operation and to stimulate improvement.



The Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP) maintain an agile approach to audit, seeking to maximise efficiencies and effectiveness in balancing the time and resource commitments of our clients, with the necessity to provide comprehensive, compliant and value adding assurance.

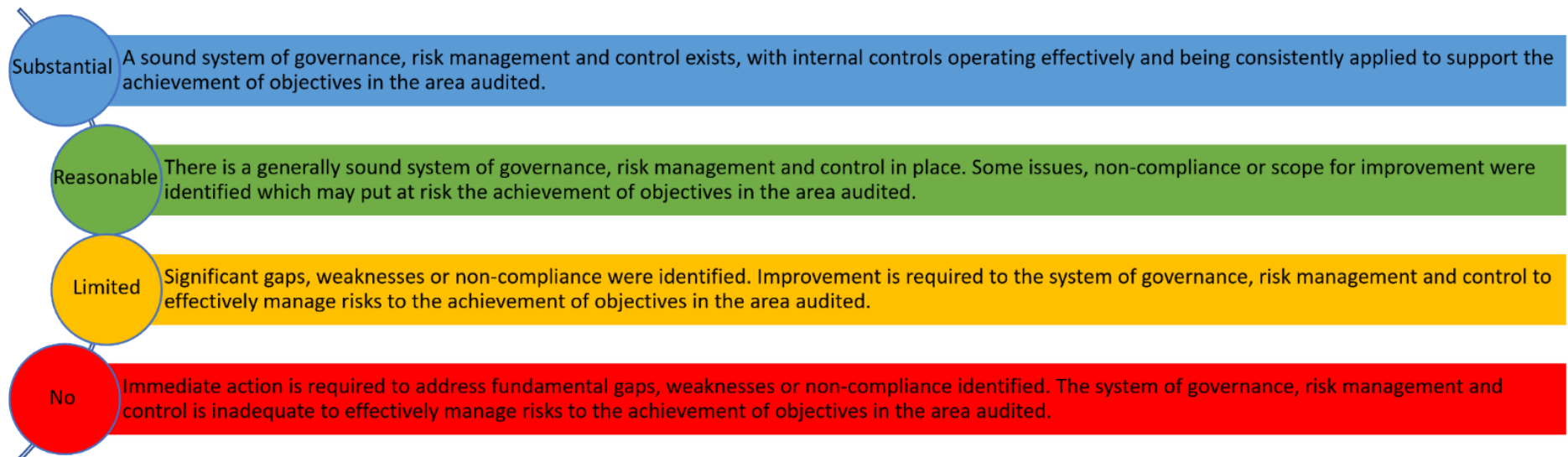
Working practices have been reviewed, modified and agreed with all partners following the impact and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result we have sought to optimise the use of virtual technologies to communicate with key contacts and in completion of our fieldwork. However, the need for site visits to complete elements of testing continues to be assessed and agreed on a case-by-case basis.

### 3. Internal Audit Coverage

The annual internal audit plan was prepared to take account of the characteristics and relative risks of Hampshire Pension Services' / Hampshire Pension Fund's activities and to support the preparation of the Council's Annual Governance Statement. Work has been planned and performed to obtain sufficient evidence to provide reasonable assurance that the internal control system is operating effectively.

The 2023-24 internal audit plan was considered by Hampshire Pension Fund Panel and Board in March 2023. It was informed by internal audit's own assessment of risk and materiality in addition to consultation with management to ensure it aligned to key risks facing the organisation.

Internal audit reviews culminate in an opinion on the assurance that can be placed on the effectiveness of the framework of risk management, control and governance designed to support the achievement of management objectives of the service area under review. The assurance opinions are categorised as follows:



## 4. Internal Audit Opinion

The Chief Internal Auditor is responsible for the delivery of an annual audit opinion and report which concludes on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of Hampshire Pension Services' / Hampshire Pension Fund's frameworks of governance, risk management and control.

In giving this opinion, assurance can never be absolute and therefore, only reasonable assurance can be provided that there are no major weaknesses in the processes reviewed. In assessing the level of assurance to be given, I have based my opinion on:

- written reports on all internal audit work completed during the course of the year (assurance & consultancy);
- results of any follow up exercises undertaken in respect of previous years' internal audit work;
- the results of work of other review bodies where appropriate;
- the extent of resources available to deliver the internal audit work;
- the quality and performance of the internal audit service and the extent of compliance with the Standards; and
- the proportion of the Pension Fund Panel and Board's audit need that has been covered within the period.

We enjoy an open and honest working relationship with Hampshire Pension Services / Hampshire Pension Fund. Our planning discussions and risk-based approach to internal audit ensure that the internal audit plan includes areas of significance raised by management to ensure that ongoing organisational improvements can be achieved. I feel that the maturity of this relationship and the effective use of internal audit has assisted in identifying and putting in place action to mitigate weaknesses impacting on organisational governance, risk and control over the 2023-24 financial year.

### Annual Internal Audit Opinion 2023-24

I am satisfied that sufficient assurance work has been carried out to allow me to form a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control environment.

In my opinion frameworks of governance, risk management and management control are **substantial** and audit testing has demonstrated controls to be working in practice.

Where weaknesses have been identified through internal audit review, we have worked with management to agree appropriate corrective actions and a timescale for improvement.

## 5. Overview

Internal Audit work found there to be sound control environments in place across all review areas which were found to be working effectively. We are pleased to report that no significant issues were identified arising from the work completed during 2023-24. The internal audit opinion assigned to each review completed is:-

**Pension Refunds – Substantial Assurance**

**Pension Fund Management, Investments and Accounting – Substantial Assurance**

**Pensions Payroll and Benefit Calculations - Substantial Assurance**

**UPM Application Review – Reasonable Assurance**

When audit reviews identify potential scope for enhancing the systems of governance, risk management and control, or identify non-compliance, appropriate, timebound actions are agreed to address the audit observations. We are pleased to report that all management actions are promptly implemented and there are no management actions that have passed their agreed implementation date and are now overdue.

## 6. Quality Assurance and Improvement

The Standards require the Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership to develop and maintain a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) to enable the internal audit service to be assessed against the Standards and the Local Government Application Note (LGAN) for conformance.

The QAIP must include provision for both internal and external assessments: internal assessments are both on-going and periodical and external assessment must be undertaken at least once every five years. In addition to evaluating compliance with the Standards, the QAIP also assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal audit activity, identifying areas for improvement.

An 'External Quality Assessment' of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership was undertaken by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) in September 2020.

In considering all sources of evidence the external assessment team concluded:

*'The mandatory elements of the IPPF include the Definition of Internal Auditing, Code of Ethics, Core Principles and International Standards. There are 64 fundamental principles to achieve with 118 points of recommended practice. We assess against the principles. It is our view that the Southern Internal Audit Partnership conforms to all 64 of these principles. We have also reviewed SIAP conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and Local Government Application Note (LGAN). We are pleased to report that SIAP conform with all relevant, associated elements.'*

## 7. Disclosure of Non-Conformance

In accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standard 1312 [External Assessments], I can confirm through endorsement from the Institute of Internal Auditors that:

**'the Southern Internal Audit Partnership conforms to the Definition of Internal Auditing; the Code of Ethics; and the Standards'.**

There are no disclosures of Non-Conformance to report.



## 8. Quality Control

Our aim is to provide a service that remains responsive to the needs of the Pension Fund Panel and Board and maintains consistently high standards. Complementing the QAIP this was achieved in 2023-24 through the following internal processes:

- On-going liaison with management to ascertain the risk management, control and governance arrangements, key to corporate success.
- A tailored audit approach using a defined methodology and assignment control documentation.
- Review and quality control of all internal audit work by professional qualified senior staff members.
- An internal quality assessment against the IPPF, PSIAS & LGAN.

## 9. Internal Audit Performance

The following performance indicators are maintained to monitor effective service delivery:

Performance Indicator	Target	Actual
Percentage of internal audit plan delivered (to draft report)	95%	100%
Positive customer survey response		
● Hampshire County Council	90%	99%
● SIAP – all Partners	90%	99%
Public Sector Internal Audit Standards	Compliant	Compliant

*Customer satisfaction is an assessment of responses to questionnaires issued to a wide range of stakeholders including members, senior officers and key contacts involved in the audit process (survey date April 2023).*

## 10. Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those staff with whom we have made contact in the year. Our relationship has been positive, and management were responsive to the comments we made both informally and through our formal reporting.

Antony Harvey  
Deputy Head of Southern Internal Audit Partnership

March 2024