



Haringey Council

Agenda item:

Audit Committee

On 23 April 2009

Report Title: **Internal Audit Progress Report – 2008/09 Quarter 4**

Report authorised by: **Chief Financial Officer**

Report of and Contact Officer: Anne Woods, Head of Audit and Risk Management

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Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: **Non-key decision**

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To inform the Audit Committee of the work undertaken during the fourth quarter by the Internal Audit Service in completing the annual audit plan and any responsive fraud investigation work. In addition, the work of the Council's personnel division in supporting disciplinary action taken across all departments by respective council managers.

2. State link(s) with Council Plan Priorities and actions and/or other Strategies:

2.1 Audit and Risk Management contribute to the Council priority to deliver excellent, customer focused, cost effective services by reviewing key services and making recommendations for improvement where appropriate. Follow up work is undertaken to ensure that managers implement agreed recommendations and improvements.

2.2 Internal audit forms a key element within the revised Use of Resources assessment and will continue to be part of the CAA from 2009 onwards. The reports to both managers and the Audit Committee on progress against the agreed audit plan and the implementation of audit recommendations ensure that the requirements of the CAA assessment are fulfilled.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Audit Committee is recommended to note the audit coverage and progress during the fourth quarter 2008/09.

3.2 That the Audit Committee notes the progress and responses received in respect of outstanding audit recommendations.

3.3 That the Audit Committee considers whether any further action is necessary to address outstanding priority 1 recommendations.

4. Reason for recommendation(s)

4.1 The Audit Committee is responsible for monitoring the completion of the annual internal audit plan and the implementation of agreed recommendations as part of its Terms of Reference. In order to facilitate this, progress reports are provided on a quarterly basis for review and consideration by the Audit Committee.

4.2 Where further action is required or recommended, this is highlighted in the covering report and associated appendices and included in the recommendations for the Audit Committee.

5. Other options considered

5.1 Not applicable

6. Summary

6.1 The internal audit service makes a significant contribution to ensuring the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control throughout the authority. This report looks at the work undertaken in the quarter ending 31st March 2009 and focuses on:

- Progress by Deloitte and Touche (internal auditors) on internal audit coverage relative to the approved internal audit plan, including the number of audit reports issued and finalised
- Progress in implementing outstanding internal audit recommendations with special attention given to priority 1 recommendations
- Details of investigative work undertaken relating to fraud and/or irregularities that fall outside the remit of the Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Team, including information in respect of disciplinary action taken.

6.2 The information has been compiled from information held within the Audit & Risk Management Unit and from records held by Deloitte and Touche and Human Resources.

7. Head of Legal Services Comments

7.1 The Head of Legal Services has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and advises that there are no specific legal issues which arise out of the report, or the proposed recommendations.

8. Chief Financial Officer Comments

8.1 The Chief Financial Officer notes that there are no direct financial implications arising from this report and also suggests that the targeted work outlined in paragraph 16.2 in ensuring that greater focus is placed on implementing Priority 1 recommendations should also reduce the potential for any negative financial outcomes arising.

9. Head of Procurement Comments

9.1 Not applicable

10. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments

10.1 This report deals with how risks to service delivery are managed across all areas of the council, which have an impact on various parts of the community. Improvements in managing risks and controls will therefore improve services the Council provides to all sections of the community.

11. Consultation

11.1 No external consultation was required or undertaken in the production of this report. Consultation is undertaken with respective service managers, Assistant Directors and Directors are consulted in the production of individual internal audit reports and follow up programmes and their comments included in the final report which is circulated in accordance with the agreed internal audit reporting protocol.

12. Service Financial Comments

12.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The work completed by Deloitte and Touche is part of the five year contract which was awarded following a competitive tendering exercise in compliance with EU regulations from 1 April 2007. The costs of this contract are contained and managed within the Audit and Risk Management revenue budget.

13. Use of appendices

13.1 Appendix A – Deloitte and Touche Progress report
Appendix B – In-house Team – investigations into financial irregularities
Appendix C – Council-wide disciplinary information

14. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

14.1 For access to the background papers or any further information please contact Anne Woods on 0208 489 5973.

15. Performance Management Information

15.1 Although there are no national or Best Value Performance Indicators, local performance targets have been agreed for Audit and Risk Management. These form part of Corporate Resources' reporting processes, but are detailed below for information. Table 1 below shows the targets for each area of audit activity monitored and gives a breakdown between the quarterly and cumulative performance.

Table 1

PI Ref.	Performance Indicator	4 th Quarter	Year to date	Target
A1	Audit work Completed vs. Planned programme	100%	95%	95%
A2	User satisfaction (1 = low, 5 = high)	5.00	3.88	3.75
A3	Time taken to complete investigations (2008/09 referrals)	17.6 weeks	14.5 weeks	12 weeks
A4	Priority 1 recommendations implemented at follow up (based on position as at 31/03/09)	99%	95%	95%

16. Internal Audit work – Deloitte and Touche contract

16.1 The activity of Deloitte and Touche for the fourth quarter of 2008/09 to date is detailed at Appendix A. In this quarter, a total of 22 projects have been finalised, including 13 school visits to assess compliance with the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS). All 13 schools achieved the required outcomes against FMSiS and will be receiving their certificate from the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

16.2 The programme of planned follow up audits is also reported at Appendix A. The work of internal audit and the new reporting requirements to both the Audit Committee and Cabinet, which receive details of all outstanding Priority 1 recommendations as part of the 2008/09 corporate performance reporting arrangements, have ensured that managers take greater responsibility for implementing recommendations. Details of the outstanding Priority 1 recommendations from 2004/05 to 2008/09 are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Year	Number of Priority 1 recommendations	Number of recommendations fully implemented or addressed at follow up	Implementation rate	Target
2008/09	12	10	83%	95%
2007/08	20	18	90%	95%
2006/07	39	38	97%	95%
2005/06	7	6	86%	95%
2004/05	1	0	0%	95%
Total	79	72	91%	95%

16.3 At the previous Audit Committee, further details of all outstanding recommendations reported when the follow up work was undertaken were provided. Since July 2007, work has been ongoing, in conjunction with the Chief Financial Officer, to ensure that Directors were aware of the required actions necessary and from 2008/09, the implementation of Priority 1 recommendations has been included in the PI reporting requirements for all departments.

16.4 Directors have been kept informed of progress at all stages and Internal Audit are satisfied that managers are taking appropriate action to address the issues raised in the original recommendations. Appendix A details the current position in relation to all outstanding recommendations.

17. In-house Team – Fraud investigation/Irregularities

17.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Internal Audit investigates all cases that fall outside the remit of the Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Team and the Information Security Policy. Appendix B details the individual cases that were completed by the In-house Team during 2008/09 and any which were brought forward from 2007/08.

17.2 Within the fourth quarter, 6 new cases were referred to Internal Audit for investigation, and 3 cases were completed during the quarter involving Council employees. The cases investigated during the fourth quarter covered allegations involving fraudulent right to buy and working whilst off sick. The three cases completed in quarter four took 17 weeks on average to complete. The increased timescales were as a result of one case being co-ordinated between another borough and the police. Internal Audit work closely with officers from personnel and the service involved to ensure that the investigation is completed as quickly as possible. During 2008/09 to date, the average length of time taken to investigate each case was 14.5 weeks.

17.3 The council has a dedicated email address and telephone number, which is advertised on the Council website, by which members of the public can report instances of suspected fraud or irregularity. The In-house Team manage and monitor these referrals. During quarter four, seven referrals in relation to new allegations were made via the council's email reporting facility. Of these, five related to housing benefit/council tax issues and were

referred to the Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Team for further review. Two referrals were in relation to housing issues and were referred to the Strategic Housing Service for further review. Follow up discussions with Strategic Housing Services to assess the information received conformed that no further audit action was required. No referrals were made via the telephone reporting facility.

17.4 The In-house Team also investigates claims of non-receipt of Council cheques. In 2008/09, there has only been one referral for investigation as reported in the previous quarter. The council has not lost any money, as the fraud was detected and the cheque was not cashed. This is a substantial reduction on previous years' figures. Improvements in procedures, including the introduction of 'positive pay' whereby the council's banking team receives information on cheques before they are cleared, and new cheque security measures have reduced the opportunity for attempted fraud in this area.

18. Council-wide disciplinary statistics

18.1 Appendix C details the number of disciplinary suspensions and/or action taken in the fourth quarter of 2008/09. The data is taken from SAP and the information has been provided by the Council's Human Resources business unit in line with council statistics reported elsewhere.

18.2 Improved processes, monitoring, management information and liaison between service departments and HR has been in place during 2008/09. These actions has enabled the Council to reduce the average number of days per suspension case by approximately 40%, from 104 days in the first quarter to 64 days in the fourth quarter.