

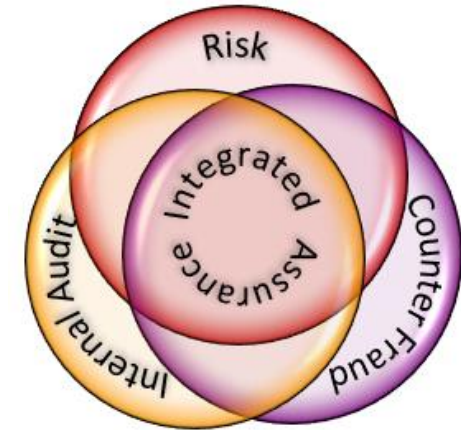


# Internal Audit Strategy and Charter 2024/25

## Plymouth City Council Audit & Governance Committee

July 2024

Official



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Audit Manager



Auditing for achievement

One of the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards is that the purpose, authority and responsibility of the internal audit activity are formally defined in an internal audit charter and strategy, consistent with the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics and the Standards.

[This Internal Audit Charter and Strategy is referred to Plymouth City Councils Audit and Governance July 2024 Committee for approval.](#)

## **MISSION**

The Mission of Devon Audit Partnership is to enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk based and objective assurance, advice and insight across its partners.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This document details the **Internal Audit Charter** and **Internal Audit Strategy** for Plymouth City Council as required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The Audit Charter formally describes the purpose, authority, and principal responsibilities of the Council's Internal Audit Service, which is provided by the [Devon Audit Partnership \(DAP\)](#), and the scope of Internal Audit work. This Charter complies with the mandatory requirements of the PSIAS. The accompanying Audit Strategy is designed to deliver the requirements outlined in the Charter.

## **DEFINITIONS**

Internal auditing is defined by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) 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 PSIAS set out the requirements of a ‘Board’ and of ‘Senior Management’. For the purposes of the internal audit activity within The Council the role of the Board within the Standards is taken by the Council’s Audit and Governance Committee and Senior Management is the Council’s Leadership Team. They also make reference to the role of “Chief Audit Executive”. For The Council this role is fulfilled by the Head of Devon Audit Partnership (HoDAP).

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## 1. Statutory Requirements and Purpose of Internal Audit

### Statutory Requirements

Internal Audit is a statutory service in the context of The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, which state:

*5.—(1) A relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance.*

In addition, the Local Government Act 1972, Section 151, requires every local authority to designate an officer responsible for the proper administration of its financial affairs. In The Council, the Director of Resources is the 'Section 151 Officer'. One way in which this duty is discharged is by maintaining an adequate and effective internal audit service.

### The Purpose and Aim of Internal Audit

The role of Internal Audit is to understand the key risks of the Council, to examine and evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of risk management and the entire control environment as operated throughout the organisation, and contribute to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources. In addition, the other objectives of the function are to:

- Support the Section 151 Officer to discharge their statutory duties
- Contribute to and support the Finance function in ensuring the provision of, and promoting the need for, sound financial systems
- Support the corporate efficiency and resource management processes by conducting value for money and efficiency studies and supporting the work of corporate working groups as appropriate
- Provide a quality fraud investigation service which safeguards public monies.

The existence of Internal Audit does not diminish the responsibility of management to establish systems of internal control to ensure that activities are conducted in a secure, efficient and well-ordered manner.

Internal Audit for the Council is provided by Devon Audit Partnership. We aim to provide a high quality, professional, effective and efficient Internal Audit Service to the Members and service areas of the Council, adding value whenever possible.

## 2. Professionalism, Ethics and Independence

### Being Professional

Devon Audit Partnership will adhere to the relevant codes and guidance. We adhere to the Institute of Internal Auditors' (IIA's) mandatory guidance including the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics, and the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. This mandatory guidance constitutes principles of the fundamental requirements for the professional practice of internal auditing within the public sector and for evaluating the effectiveness of Internal Audit's performance. The IIA's Practice Advisories, Practice Guides, and Position Papers will also be adhered to as applicable to guide operations. In addition, Internal Audit will adhere to The Council's relevant policies and procedures and the internal audit manual. Internal Auditors must apply the care and skill expected of a reasonably prudent and competent internal auditor. Due professional care does not, however, imply infallibility.

### Our Ethics

Internal auditors in UK public sector organisations must conform to the Code of Ethics as set out by IIA. This Code of Ethics promotes an ethical culture in the profession of internal auditing. If individual internal auditors have membership of another professional body, then he or she must also comply with the relevant requirements of that organisation.

The Code of Ethics extends beyond the definition of internal auditing to include two essential components:

- 1) Principles that are relevant to the profession and practice of internal auditing.
- 2) Rules of Conduct that describe behaviour norms expected of internal auditors.

The Code of Ethics provides guidance to internal auditors serving others and applies to both individuals and entities that provide internal auditing services. The Code of Ethics promotes an ethical, professional culture. It does not supersede or replace Codes of Ethics of employing organisations. Internal auditors must also have regard to the Committee on Standards of Public Life's Seven Principles of Public Life.

### Being Independent

Internal Audit should be independent of the activities that it audits. The status of Internal Audit should enable it to function effectively. The support of the Council is essential and recognition of the independence of Internal Audit is fundamental to its effectiveness.

The Head of Devon Audit Partnership should have direct access to and freedom to report in their own name and without fear or favour to, all officers and members and particularly to those charged with governance (the Governance Committee). In the event of the necessity arising, the facility also exists for Internal Audit to have direct access to the Chief Executive, the S.151 Officer and the Chair of the Governance Committee.

The Council should make arrangements for Internal Audit to have adequate budgetary resources to maintain organisational independence.

The Head of Devon Audit Partnership should have sufficient status to facilitate the effective discussion of audit strategies, audit plans, audit reports and action plans with senior management and members of the Council.

Auditors should be mindful of being independent, and must:

- Have an objective attitude of mind and be in a sufficiently independent position to be able to exercise judgment, express opinions and present recommendations with impartiality;
- Notwithstanding employment by the Partnership / Council, must be free from any conflict of interest arising from any professional or personal relationships or from any pecuniary or other interests in an activity or organisation which is subject to audit;
- Be free from undue influences which either restrict or modify the scope or conduct of their work or significantly affect judgment as to the content of the internal audit report; and
- Not allow their objectivity to be impaired by auditing an activity for which they have or have had responsibility.

### 3. Authority

Internal Audit, with strict accountability for confidentiality and safeguarding records and information, is authorised full, free, and unrestricted access to any and all of the organisation's records, physical properties, and personnel pertinent to carrying out any engagement. All employees are requested to assist Internal Audit in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. This is enforced in the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 section 5(2-3) that state that:

- Any officer or member of a relevant authority must, if required to do so for the purposes of the internal audit:
  - 2a make available such documents and records; and
  - 2b supply such information and explanations as are considered necessary by those conducting the internal audit.
- 3 in this regulation “documents and records” includes information recorded in an electronic form

In addition, Internal Audit, through the Head of Devon Audit Partnership (HoDAP), where deemed necessary, will have unrestricted access to:

- The Chief Executive
- Members
- Individual Directors and Heads of Service
- Section 151 Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- All authority employees
- All authority premises.

#### 4. Accountability

Devon Audit Partnership is a shared service established and managed via a Partnership Committee and Board with representation from each full partner. The Partnership operates as a separate entity from the client authorities and Internal Audit is therefore independent of the activities which it audits. This ensures unbiased judgements essential to proper conduct and the provision of impartial advice to management. DAP operates within a framework that allows:

- Unrestricted access to senior management and members.
- Reporting in its own name.
- Separation from line operations.

Every effort will be made to preserve objectivity by ensuring that all audit members of audit staff are free from any conflicts of interest and do not, ordinarily, undertake any non-audit duties.

The HoDAP fulfils the role of Chief Audit Executive at the Authority and will confirm to the Audit and Governance Committee, at least annually, the organisational independence of the internal audit activity. The Section 151 Officer will liaise with the HoDAP and is therefore responsible for monitoring performance and ensuring independence.

The HoDAP reports functionally to the Governance Committee on items such as:

- Approving the internal audit charter;
- Approving the risk based internal audit plan and resources;
- Receiving reports from the Head of Devon Audit Partnership on the section's performance against the plan and other matters;
- Approving the Head of Devon Audit Partnership's annual report'
- Approve the review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit.

The HoDAP has direct access to the Audit and Governance Committee, and has the opportunity to meet privately with Committee members if required.

## 5. Responsibility

The Chief Executive, Directors and other senior officers are responsible for ensuring internal control arrangements are sufficient to address the risks facing their services. The HoDAP will provide assurance to the Section 151 Officer regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's financial framework, helping meet obligations under the LGA 1972 Section 151.

The HoDAP will provide assurance to the Monitoring Officer in relation to the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems of governance within the Council helping them meet their obligations under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Council's Constitution. The HoDAP will also work with the Monitoring Officer to ensure the effective implementation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

Internal Audit responsibilities include:

- Examining and evaluating the soundness, adequacy and application of the Council's systems of internal control, risk management and corporate governance arrangements;
- Reviewing the reliability and integrity of financial and operating information and the means used to identify, measure, classify and report such information;
- Reviewing the systems established to ensure compliance with policies, plans, procedures and regulations which could have a significant impact on operations;
- Reviewing the means of safeguarding assets and, as appropriate, verifying the existence of such assets;
- Investigating alleged fraud and other irregularities referred to the service by management, or concerns of fraud or other irregularities arising from audits, where it is considered that an independent investigation cannot be carried out by management;
- Appraising the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are employed and the quality of performance in carrying out assigned duties including Value for Money Studies;
- Working in partnership with other bodies to secure robust internal controls that protect the Council's interests;
- Advising on internal control implications of new systems;
- Providing consulting and advisory services related to governance, risk management and control as appropriate for the organisation; and,
- Reporting significant risk exposures and control issues identified to Audit and Governance Committee and to senior management, including fraud risks, governance issues.



## 6. Management

The PSIAS describe the requirement for the management of the internal audit function. This sets out various criteria that the HoDAP (as Chief Audit Executive) must meet, and includes:

- Be appropriately qualified;
- Determine the priorities of, deliver and manage the Council's internal audit service through a risk based annual audit plan;
- Regularly liaise with the Council's external auditors to ensure that scarce audit resources are used effectively;
- Include in the plan the approach to using other sources of assurance if appropriate;
- Be accountable, report and build a relationship with the Council's Audit and Governance Committee and S.151 Officer; and
- Monitor and report upon the effectiveness of the service delivered and compliance with professional and ethical standards.

These criteria are brought together in an Audit Strategy which explains how the service will be delivered and reflect the resources and skills required.

The HoDAP is required to give an annual audit opinion on the governance, risk and control framework based on the audit work done.

The HoDAP should also have the opportunity for free and unfettered access to the Chief Executive and meet periodically with the Monitoring Officer and S.151 Officer to discuss issues that may impact on the Council's governance, risk and control framework and agree any action required.

## 7. Internal Audit Plan and Resources

At least annually, the HoDAP will submit to the Governance Committee a risk-based internal audit plan for review and approval. The HoDAP will:

- Develop the annual plan through discussions with senior management based on an understanding of the significant risks of the organisation;
- Submit the plan to the Audit and Governance Committee for review and agreement;
- Implement the agreed audit plan;
- Maintain a professional audit staff with sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to carry out the plan and carry out continuous review of the development and training needs;
- Maintain a programme of quality assurance and a culture of continuous improvement;

The internal audit plan will include timings as well as budget and resource requirements for the next fiscal year. The Head of internal audit will communicate the impact of resource limitations and significant interim changes to senior management and the Governance Committee.

Internal Audit resources must be appropriately targeted by assessing the risk, materiality and dependency of the Council's systems and processes. Any significant deviation from the approved Internal Audit plan will be communicated through the periodic activity reporting process.

A requirement of the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy is that the HoDAP be notified of all suspected or detected fraud, corruption or impropriety. All reported irregularities will be investigated in line with established strategies and policies. The audit plan will include sufficient resource to undertake proactive anti-fraud work. Internal audit activities will be conducted in accordance with Council strategic objectives and established policies / procedures.

Monitoring of internal audit's processes is carried out on a continuous basis by internal audit management. Council's members and management may rely on the professional expertise of the HoDAP to provide assurance. Periodically, independent review may be carried out: for example, through peer reviews; ensuring compliance with the PSIAS is an essential approach to such a review.

## 8. Internal Audit Reporting

The primary purpose of Internal Audit reporting is to provide to management an independent and objective opinion on governance, the control environment and risk exposure and to prompt management to implement agreed actions.

Internal Audit should have direct access and freedom to report in their own name and without fear or favour to, all officers and members, particularly to those charged with governance (the Audit and Governance Committee).

A written report will be prepared for every internal audit project and issued to the appropriate manager accountable for the activities under review. Reports will include an 'opinion' on the risk and adequacy of controls in the area that has been audited, which, together, will form the basis of the annual audit opinion on the overall control environment.

The aim of every Internal Audit report should be to:

- Give an opinion on the risk and controls of the area under review, building up to the annual opinion on the control environment; and
- Recommend and agree actions for change leading to improvement in governance, risk management, the control environment and performance.

The Manager will be asked to respond to the report within 30 days, although this period can be extended by agreement. The response must show what actions have been taken or are planned in relation to each risk or control weakness identified. If action is not to be taken, this must also be stated. The HoDAP is responsible for assessing whether the manager's response is adequate.

Where deemed necessary, the Internal Audit report will be subject to a follow-up, normally within six months of its issue, in order to ascertain whether the action stated by management in their response to the report has been implemented.

The HoDAP will:

- Submit periodic reports to the Governance Committee summarising key findings of reviews and the results of follow-ups undertaken;
- Submit an Annual Internal Audit Report to the Governance Committee, incorporating an opinion on the Council's control environment. This will also inform the Annual Governance Statement.

## 9. Relationship with the Audit & Governance Committee and Non Conformance to the Charter

The Council's Governance Committee will act as "the Board" as defined in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS),

The Specific Functions of the Governance Committee are set out in the Council's Constitution.

The HoDAP will assist the Committee in being effective and in meeting its obligations. To facilitate this, the HoDAP or suitable representative will:

- Attend meetings, and contribute to the agenda;
- Ensure that it receives, and understands, documents that describe how Internal Audit will fulfil its objectives (e.g. the Audit Strategy, annual work programmes, progress reports);
- report the outcomes of internal audit work, in sufficient detail to allow the committee to understand what assurance it can take from that work and/or what unresolved risks or issues it needs to address;
- establish if anything arising from the work of the committee requires consideration of changes to the audit plan, and vice versa;
- present an annual report on the effectiveness of the system of internal audit; and
- present an annual internal audit report including an overall opinion on the governance, risk and control framework

Any instances of non-conformance with the Internal Audit Definition, Code of Conduct or the Standards must be reported to the Governance Committee, and in significant cases consideration given to inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement.

The Head of Devon Audit Partnership will advise the Governance Committee on behalf of the Council on the content of the Charter and the need for any subsequent amendment. The Charter should be approved and regularly reviewed by the Governance Committee.

## 10. Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme

The PSIAS states that a quality assurance and improvement programme must be developed; the programme should be informed by both internal and external assessments.

An external assessment must be conducted at least once in five years by a suitably qualified, independent assessor. For DAP this was conducted at the end of 2021 by the Head of Southwest London Audit Partnership, and the Chief Internal Auditor of Orbis (a partnership organisation covering Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, and Surrey County Council).

The assessment result was that *“Based on the work carried out, it is our overall opinion that DAP generally conforms\* with the Standards and the Code of Ethics”*.

The report noted that *“As a result of our work, a small number of areas where partial conformance was identified. These were minor observations, none of which were significant enough to affect the overall opinion”*.

DAP is actively addressing these improvement areas which includes “Develop the use of data analytics; rotate staff across clients; consider how to support the development of audit committees; consider a range of cross partner audits and share best practice; review current arrangements for the delivery of IT audit to ensure maximum value; develop the role of Senior Auditors”.

\* **Generally Conforms** – This is the top rating and means that the internal audit service has a charter, policies and processes that are judged to be in conformance to the Standards

## 1. Audit Strategy – Purpose

The PSIAS require the HoDAP to produce an Audit Charter setting out audits purpose, authority and responsibility. We deliver this through our Audit Strategy which:

- Is a high-level statement of how the internal audit service will be delivered and developed in accordance with the Charter and how it links to the organisational objectives and priorities;
- Should be approved, but not directed, by the Governance Committee.
- Will communicate the contribution that Internal Audit makes to the organisation and should include:
  - Internal audit objectives and outcomes;
  - How the HoDAP will form and evidence their opinion on the governance, risk and control framework to support the Annual Governance Statement;
  - How Internal Audit's work will identify and address significant local and national issues and risks;
  - How the service will be provided, and
  - The resources and skills required to deliver the Strategy.

The Strategy should be kept up to date with the organisation and its changing priorities.

## 2. Annual Audit Opinion on the Governance, Risk and Control Framework

A key objective of Internal Audit is to communicate to management an independent and objective opinion on the governance, risk and control framework, and to prompt management to implement agreed actions.

Significant issues and risks will be brought to the attention of the S.151 Officer as and when they arise. Regular formal meetings will be held to discuss issues arising and other matters.

The HoDAP will report progress against the annual audit plan and any emerging issues and risks to the Governance Committee.

The HoDAP will also provide a written annual report to the Governance Committee, timed to support their recommendation to approve the Annual Governance Statement, to the Council.

The Head of Devon Audit Partnership's annual report to the Governance Committee will:

- Provide an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk and control framework;
- Disclose any qualifications to that opinion, together with the reasons for the qualification;
- Present a summary of the audit work from which the opinion is derived, including reliance placed on work by other assurance streams;
- Draw attention to any issues the HoDAP judges particularly relevant to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement;
- Compare audit work actually undertaken against the work that was planned and summarise the performance of the internal audit function against its performance measures and targets; and
- Comment on compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and communicate the results of the internal audit quality assurance programme.

### **3. Audit Planning & Delivery, including local and national risks**

The audit planning process includes the creation and ongoing revision of an “audit universe”. This seeks to identify all risks, systems and processes that may be subject to an internal audit review.

The audit universe will include a risk assessment scoring methodology that takes account of a number of factors including: the Council’s own risk score; value of financial transactions; level of change, impact on the public; political sensitivity; when last audited; and the impact of an audit. This will inform the basis of the resources allocated to each planned audit area.

The results from the audit universe will be used in creating an annual audit plan; such a plan will take account of emerging risks at both local and national level.

#### **Assignment Planning & Delivery**

Further planning and risk assessment is required at the commencement of each individual audit assignment to establish the scope of the audit and the level of testing required.

The primary objective of the audit is to provide management with an independent opinion on the risk and control framework through individual audits in the audit plan. Individual audits will be completed using our methodology in our Audit Manual to the standards set by PSIAS, to independently evaluate the effectiveness of internal controls. Our audit assignment report will communicate our opinion and include agreed management action, where required, to improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.



#### 4. Performance Management & Quality Assurance

The PSIAS state that the HoDAP should have in place an internal performance management and quality assurance framework; this framework must include:

- A comprehensive set of targets to measure performance. These should be regularly monitored and the progress against these targets reported appropriately.
- Seeking user feedback for each individual audit and periodically for the whole service.
- A periodic review of the service against the Strategy and the achievement of its aims and objectives. The results of this should inform the future Strategy and be reported to the DAP Committee.
- Internal quality reviews to be undertaken periodically to ensure compliance with the PSIAS and the Audit Manual (self-assessment).
- An action plan to implement improvements.

The PSIAS and the Internal Audit Manual state that internal audit performance, quality and effectiveness should be assessed for each individual audit; and for the Internal Audit Service as a whole. The HoDAP will closely monitor the performance of the team to ensure agreed targets are achieved. A series of performance indicators have been developed for this purpose (please see the following pages).

Customer feedback is also used to define and refine the audit approach. Devon Audit Partnership will seek feedback from auditees; senior leadership; and executive management. The results from our feedback will be reported to Senior Management and the Governance Committee in the half year and annual reports.

The HoDAP is expected to ensure that the performance and the effectiveness of the service improves over time, in terms of both the achievement of targets and the quality of the service provided to the user.

Performance Indicator		Full year target	Internal Audit Performance Monitoring Targets
Percentage of Audit Plan completed		90%	
Customer Satisfaction - % satisfied or very satisfied as per feedback forms		90%	
Draft reports produced with target number of days (currently 15 days from final debrief)		90%	
Task	Performance measure		Other indicators measured as part of the audit process that may be captured and reported to senior management.
Agreement of Annual audit plan	Agreed by Chief Executive, Leadership Team and Governance Committee prior to start of financial year		
Agreement of assignment brief	Assignment briefs are agreed with and provided to auditee at least two weeks before planned commencement date.		
Undertake audit fieldwork	Fieldwork commenced at agreed time		
Verbal debrief	Confirm this took place as expected; was a useful summary of the key issues; reflects the findings in the draft report.		
Draft report	Promptly issued within 15 days of finishing our fieldwork.  Report is "accurate" and recommendations are both workable and useful.		
Draft report meeting (if required)	This meeting was useful in understanding the audit issues		
Annual internal audit report	Prepared promptly and ready for senior management consideration each June.  Report accurately reflects the key issues identified during the year.		
Presentation of internal audit report to Management and Audit and Governance Committee.	Presentation / update is clear and concise.  Presenter was knowledgeable on the subject are and able to answer questions posed by management / members.		
Contact with the audit team outside of assignment work.	You were successfully able to contact the person you needed, or our staff directed you correctly to the appropriate person. Emails, letters, telephone calls are dealt with promptly and effectively.		
			DAP Overall Performance is reported to the DAP Committee three times per year.

## 5. Resources and skills

The PSIAS and the Audit Manual states that:

- Internal Audit must be appropriately staffed in terms of numbers, grades, qualifications and experience, having regard to its responsibilities and objectives, or have access to the appropriate resources;
- The Internal Audit service shall be managed by an appropriately qualified professional with wide experience of internal audit and of its management; and
- The Chief Audit Executive (Head of Devon Audit Partnership) should be of the calibre reflecting the responsibilities arising from the need to liaise with members, senior management and other professionals, and be suitably experienced.

DAP currently has c.45 staff who operate from any one of our three main locations (Plymouth, Torquay and Exeter), we also operate from offices at Torridge DC (Bideford), Mid Devon DC (Tiverton) and South Hams, West Devon Councils (Totnes). The Partnership employs specialists in areas such as Computer Audit, Contracts Audit and Counter Fraud Investigators as well as a mix of experienced, professionally qualified and non-qualified staff.

The Partnership draws on a range of skilled staff to meet the audit needs. Our current staff includes: -

- 2 x Chartered Accountants
- 13 x qualified IIA (CMIIA, PIIA, IIA Cert)
- 3 x qualified computer audit (QICA, CISA, ITIL)
- 2 x risk management (IRM)
- 9 x AAT (qualified and part qualified)
- 4 x ACFS / ACFT (accredited counter fraud specialists)
- 1 x ACFM (accredited counter fraud manager)
- 3 x ILM (Institute of Leadership & Management) level 5 or above
- 10 x Apprentices/Students/Studying (Finance, Data Analyst, IIA, Business Admin)

## **6. Staff Development and use of Ideagen**

### **Staff Skills and Development**

Devon Audit Partnership management assess the skills of staff to ensure the right people are available to undertake the work required.

Staff keep up to date with developments within internal audit by attending seminars, taking part in webinars and conferences, attending training events and keeping up to date on topics via websites and professional bodies. Learning from these events helps management to ensure they know what skills will be required of our team in the coming years, and to plan accordingly.

Devon Audit Partnership follows formal appraisal processes that identify how employees are developing and create training and development plans to address needs.

### **Internal Audit Software System**

Devon Audit Partnership uses Ideagen as an audit management system. This system allows Partnership management to effectively plan, deliver and report audit work in a consistent and efficient manner. The system provides a secure working platform and ensures confidentiality of data. The system promotes mobile working, allowing the team to work effectively at client locations or at remote locations should the need arise.